

TASK GROUP ON ENHANCED NETWORKING OF CHURCHES

1. This report pursues a remit given to us at a consultation of local church leaders held on 12 November 2018. The purpose of the consultation was to discuss means of encouraging and strengthening independent local churches, mainly those of Brethren background but also others which share a similar approach to local church life. The key conclusions of the consultation were as follows:

There was broad consensus that the time was opportune (and not to be missed) to strengthen the network of, and networking between, independent evangelical churches which are practically related to Church Growth Trust, Counties, GLO, and Partnership and which those bodies seek to serve. That was likely to require, among other things,

- *more visible and representative leadership;*
- *setting out vision and creating a "standard" for churches (and church leaders) to rally to, identify with and want to belong to, with the aim of gathering, supporting and planting churches;*
- *clarification of ethos, distinctives, and identity, on the basis of the centrality of Christ and concern for the gospel and mission, and open-ness to those who share the ethos and objectives but not necessarily the background;*
- *closer, more seamless working between the bodies to provide resources for churches, enhance coherence of activity, avoid duplication between them, and aid presentation to others;*
- *provision of opportunities and structure for building relationships between churches; and*
- *better communication with the constituency by all available means to build trust and provide what they need.*

It would require a necessary modicum of resources to achieve these objectives. Any changed structures should be kept as lean as possible and there was some resistance to setting up an extra body.

2. The task group was formed to develop more detailed proposals to give effect to these conclusions, and it was asked to report as early as possible in January 2019. The task group comprises representatives of the four organisations which convened the consultation (Giles Arnold (Church Growth Trust), Martin Erwin (Counties), Stephen McQuoid (GLO) and Neil Summerton (Partnership)), together with four representatives of local churches (Phil Davies (Dunvant Christian Fellowship, Swansea), Clive Hughes (Belmont Chapel, Exeter), Martin Lee (Myton Church, Warwick), and Derek Malcolm (South Glasgow Church)). We concluded that it was best that the Group should not be chaired by a representative of a support organisation, and Martin Lee kindly agreed to assist in this capacity and we are grateful to him for his help in this respect as well as to the expertise which he has been able to contribute to the substance of our task.

The task group's task

3. We see our task as being to suggest how the points of broad consensus at the consultation on 12 November 2018 might be achieved, taking into account the consultation's suggestions as to features which might be entailed in such strengthening.

The context for proposals

4. We note that the connection of local churches and the related parachurch bodies are by no means starting completely from scratch in this task. As discussions between representatives of the parachurch bodies over the past decade, and the resulting website (www.churchsupportnetwork.uk), have demonstrated, the various bodies and their work represent a rich and abundant resource for the local churches which they seek to serve. This is especially so when certain collaborative activities, such as the Living the Passion conferences, Enable Training, First Serve, and (formerly) Church Planting Initiative, as well as various pieces of bilateral and trilateral co-operation between bodies on specific matters, are taken

into account. The fact is that the various bodies and initiatives (and some that have not been represented in the discussions of recent years) are, taken together, a remarkable resource for the churches that they seek to serve. (The key bodies and their activities are listed in appendix 1 [relevant listing from SMCQ's paper, 'Putting it all together'.])

5. And it is not only a question of quantity: there is much dynamism, originality and strong sense of divine calling evident in what the various bodies are doing. There is much that suggests that this connection of churches is far from lacking in true spiritual life. There is also a strong sense of concern for the health of the churches that they are particularly connected with, and a strong desire to see them flourish under God and in gospel success. As a result, both individuals and particular bodies are anxious to take urgent steps to help. In itself, this is good, and it is consistent with the tradition of this group of churches which allows many flowers to grow and which has as a result enabled much to be done for the kingdom of God – much more than would have been possible in a centrally-controlled environment. This freedom for initiative in response to divine call is something which should not be lost, but there are drawbacks when it comes to the action of the support agencies.

6. As has been noted frequently in the discussions of recent years, and was mentioned in the consultation of 12 November 2018, the activity described in the previous paragraph has a number of shortcomings:

i. The bodies themselves, and the work that they do, are often little known in the churches that they seek to serve; in this respect, there is a serious communication deficit. As a result, local churches often turn for help wherever they can get it and from whatever source they happen to know about, bypassing help that is specifically tailored to the needs of this particular stream of churches.

ii. The communication deficit is exacerbated by the sheer variety, and apparent or real incoherence, of initiatives; simple ignorance about who is doing what, and why, is understandable. As the consultation on 12 November 2018 noted, the variety and incoherence appear to the outsider to be an amorphous blob, rather than purposeful.

iii. There is the danger of simple isolation and competition on the part of individual bodies: that the need is urgent, and therefore we can and should meet it, that we are called to meet it, without regard to what others are seeking to do, and without considering whether the call might be to collaborate with others so as better to achieve what we are being called to.

7. Another significant question relates to the balance between the underlying character of the different activities of the various bodies. The churches and bodies are evangelical, committed to the biblical gospel and its furtherance. As such, quite rightly, we are concerned to be activist, and therefore to give priority to evangelism, mission at home and abroad, and social action at home and abroad. This is borne out if we look at the character of the service bodies across the board. The accent of the multiple bodies is, first, on cross-cultural mission and related activities, and, second, on evangelism and church-planting at home. There has been comparatively little emphasis on supporting the life and health of the local churches which in turn support these activities. This has been mainly confined to Partnership, and latterly to Church Growth Trust in its new guise since 2010. It is only necessary to consider the resources and expenditure available to the key bodies over the years to demonstrate where this balance of priorities has lain.

8. This is partly a question of ecclesiology: that we have been committed, partly for historical reasons, to a particularly strong understanding of the independence, and freedom from others, of the individual local church; and to the idea that the survival and flourishing of a particular local church is down to it and it alone and its own gifts and resources, and whether God wishes it to survive or not. So, we are inclined to see little role for supra-church ministries and leadership, and to think that action to strengthen local churches is only authentic, and truly spiritual and biblical, if it springs from individual churches in a local area at the grass-roots. In our view, all these points of principle need tweaking somewhat to achieve biblical balance. For

example, it can be equally biblical for leadership to come from outside the individual local church, as can be seen abundantly in the pages of the New Testament, was evident in earlier years in this connection of churches, and is often seen in practice today if only we think of the influence on our churches of particular global church leaders and writers from other groupings (why is this legitimate, but not from among our own?).

Criteria for proposals

9. The task which we have been set implies a shift in the balance towards doing more, and in a more coordinated way, to strengthen and encourage the life and work of local churches. Below we make specific proposals as to how that might be done. But we need first to emphasize certain criteria which underlie what follows.

i. Network, not denominational structure

10. We emphasize that in proposing enhanced action to strengthen and encourage the life and work of local churches what is required is not a denominational structure or body. The churches that we are concerned with would not want the latter. A denominational body entails binding requirements on members, a set of theological perspectives (usually expressed in a statement of faith and practices), a defined set of offices and structures, and obligatory payments to the centre. We believe that what we should be aiming for, to facilitate the action needed to help churches, is a stronger expression of networking between churches, an expression which is easy for churches to associate with, makes relatively few demands on churches, relies on voluntary commitment, and certainly not structural authority over churches, an expression of relationship which attracts commitment and does not demand it. The commitment to self-governing local churches will remain, and the aim will be to enable such self-governing churches to flourish, partly through encouraging the biblical interdependence of churches.

ii. Focused on church strengthening, support and networking (not competing with mission, evangelism, etc.)

11. This enhanced networking should focus on helping local churches, through strengthening and support, and helping them to help one another through networking. Some of this will be done bilaterally between the networking body and individual churches, and some multilaterally between churches with the networking body as a facilitator. The range of activities would include informal and formal advice to churches, advice on practical matters often arising out of increasing legislative and regulatory requirements, readily-accessible informal training, mentoring of leaders, publications, provision of information, and facilitation of multi-lateral networking between local churches. The overall aim would be the encouragement, strengthening, growth, and revitalisation of existing local churches and encouraging them in gospel mission. There would clearly need to be a close relationship with Church Growth Trust in view of their ministry of practical advice to churches on buildings and legal matters. But we do not foresee that matters of mission, evangelism, and church-planting and re-planting (as distinct from the revitalisation of existing churches—which can be needed across the full range of churches, irrespective of size) would fall directly within the remit of an enhanced networking body. The bodies at present responsible for them would remain in the lead on them. As the work of those bodies requires, however, close relationships and working with the same local churches that the enhanced activity would be seeking to strengthen, there will be a premium on close working, cooperation, avoidance of duplication between the various bodies, and respect for the mission of individual bodies.

12. This does *not*, however, imply that an enhanced networking body should simply be focused on strengthening existing churches, and still less on the preservation of an existing connection of churches for reasons of historical sentiment. The strengthening of existing churches is, of course, in itself a biblically-approved task, and the purpose of much of the New Testament letters. But central to biblically-based churches is the idea that they should be outward-looking and committed to the gospel, evangelism, church-planting, and mission in all its varied facets and forms. The goal of an enhanced networking body should be

to facilitate and see dynamic growth of churches, spiritually and numerically, and to help in inspiring them to power in gospel outreach and impact in their communities, as well as to support for gospel mission worldwide.

iii. *Relational*

13. The emphasis of the activity should be not so much on organisation and structure (though there will have to be an enhanced entity, as we discuss below). The priority should rather be on building relationships with and between local churches, as the regional coordinators of Partnership are already trying to do, though without at present full coverage of the UK. A measure of success will be how effective an enhanced entity has been in strengthening these relationships

iv. *Belonging, rather than formal membership*

14. In the same vein, the aim should be to encourage a sense of belonging and identification on the part of churches to and with this enhanced activity. The accent should be on committed partnership between churches and the enhanced entity, partnership between churches themselves, partnership with other support bodies, and partnership between those support bodies. Churches should not see the entity simply as a provider of services to them, though provision of services to churches will be a significant part of the mix. At present, Partnership has some 150 member-churches who make rather low annual minimum financial contributions in return for membership, though Partnership is trying to encourage member churches to see themselves not so much as receivers of benefits from being members, as partners in the activity and with each other. Whether an enhanced activity should have formal membership by churches is a matter that needs to be considered further. An alternative would be to invite churches to make voluntary donations rather than to levy membership fees. (See below — paragraph 23(d)—for a more extended discussion.)

v. *Regional and local*

15. While there is a role for action at the national level (defined increasingly these days with respect to the four constituent areas of the UK) and there is an obvious place for national conferences as rallying points for the movement of churches, experience shows that encouragement, and particularly networking of local churches, needs to be done at the regional and especially at the local level. So, an enhanced activity needs to have representation on the ground at the regional and local levels, and needs to find volunteer organizers with whom those representatives can work if there is going to be effective local networking.

vi. *Adequate resourcing*

16. If networking activity on the lines implied is going to be effective and successful, it has to be recognized that it requires adequate resource. It cannot be done, as it largely is at present, simply as in effect a voluntary adjunct to the responsibilities of people who are already overstretched by their work for existing bodies or churches if they are church leaders. Some of the steps which have been strongly pressed in discussion require dedicated personnel if they are implemented with speed, effectiveness and efficiency. This is not just a question of start-up action, but also of funding ongoing work to maintain effectiveness.

vii. *Purpose*

17. Whatever the steps that are taken, the object is not the maintenance of existing parachurch bodies and ministries, not the maintenance of an existing connection of local churches, except as means to the much greater end of ensuring that Christ is at the centre of what is done, and of seeing him glorified, mission furthered, and the gospel proclaimed. The strengthening of a particular connection of existing churches is not an end in itself, except insofar as those churches are helped to be biblical churches, being and doing what biblical churches should be and do. It follows that the purpose is not to maintain an existing sect, but to further the biblical gospel in and through communities of believers who are themselves an expression of that gospel. It also follows that the enterprise should be open to all who share the purpose and are committed to the ethos, irrespective of their background, whether within the historic connection of churches or not.

viii. *Ethos and values*

17. This leads on the question of the church ethos and values that the enhanced activity would seek to foster and encourage, in line with Scripture. Consistent with the discussion to date, any statement about the character of the Church and churches should not be in the nature of a test to determine whether a particular local church can or cannot participate in and benefit from the network, but rather as one of the aspects of a 'standard' or expression of identity which local churches may choose to rally to. There is a number of formulations that can be drawn on: Partnership has long had a statement of ethos and values, not as test of orthodoxy but as an expression which churches can identify with in associating with Partnership and one another. Church Planting Initiative (CPI) had a statement describing the sort of church which it aimed to facilitate. And the transfer of responsibility to church planting from CPI to Counties and GLO has resulted in further thought being given to the question of the character of church which it is aimed to plant. An enhanced networking activity would be helped to have a statement of ethos and values along these lines with which local churches can identify. This is a matter for further consideration at a later stage in developing an enhanced networking activity.

ix. *Statement of faith*

18. It will be wise, too, if the enhanced body has a statement of faith to which its trustees must remain committed, to ensure that it retains its biblical ethos and commitments in the long term. Consistent with the open-heartedness referred to under *Purpose* above, and because of its clarity and biblical carefulness, we recommend that the current basis of faith of the Evangelical Alliance be the statement of faith of the enhanced networking activity proposed.

x. *Visible and effective leadership*

19. Lastly, to emphasize its great importance in the challenge which faces this body of churches, we come to the need to establish a cultural environment in which biblical spiritual leadership can flourish. The consultation discussion on 12 November emphasized the importance of more visible and representative leadership, coupled with vision and the need for a 'standard' to which local churches and leaders could rally. This point has at least two significant dimensions in the context of this report:

a. The enhanced networking activity will itself need clear inspirational spiritual leadership if it is to flourish and to attract local churches to partner with it. It will need both national figureheads who develop the national profile of the enhanced body and regional leaders who can *relationally* promote the effectiveness of enhanced networking on the ground in local areas. In this context, we note the leadership which Stephen McQuoid, Martin Erwin, and Giles Arnold have brought to the work of GLO, Counties and Church Growth Trust respectively. An enhanced networking body will need something similar.

b. But an enhanced organisation or body with inspirational leadership is not enough in itself: there needs to be a wider context in which individuals of spiritual calling can exercise an inter-church ministry of leadership. It will be necessary to identify individuals who can exercise this ministry, and then to encourage them in that ministry.

These points present a significant challenge of cultural and biblical understanding for this connection of churches because its tradition of plural decision-making has often worked to hamper the spiritual gift of leadership, to hobble it lest too much leadership be exercised too effectively with implications for the role of others.

Proposals for an enhanced networking body

20. The question to which we now turn is *how best* to establish and encourage enhanced activity meeting these criteria. Here, there is a key question: would it be better to establish a new operation and shut down existing activities which would compete with it; or would it be better to build on existing activities which are

relevant, altering and developing them (if necessary radically) so as to enable them to fulfil the purposes which have been outlined in consultative discussions and in this report?

21. The *creation of a new body* does have some points in its favour:
 - a. it would manifestly be a new start, a break with past efforts which all could see was intended to be a major new effort on behalf of the local churches which it was intended to serve
 - b. it would be able to leave behind the weaknesses, real and perceived, of existing bodies and the way in which things have traditionally been done in terms of support of the churches in view
 - c. it would be easier to give the necessary profile to the new initiative
 - d. its strategy, policies and activities could be considered on a clean sheet
 - e. it might be possible to consider more radical options than would present themselves in building on an existing activity, such as, for example, amalgamating the activities of Counties, Church Growth Trust, and Partnership in a completely new body.

22. There are good reasons, however, to avoid having to create a new body if at all possible:
 - a. it has been a questionable habit of this connection of churches to allow new bodies and initiatives to proliferate without first asking whether an existing body or bodies could as well undertake the particular task; the result has been confusion and competition, and governance burden and overstretch in relation to a questionably-large group of bodies
 - b. there is a real risk of simply creating a new body in an already overpopulated field, thus adding to complexity and confusion, and reducing the effectiveness of the new body
 - c. there are bodies which have for many years been networking with and supporting churches, notably Partnership; if the aim is to strengthen networking, there is no room for two or more bodies competing for the attention of the same body of churches. If a new body were created or another existing body were to undertake it, Partnership would have to close and that risks losing all the links, member churches, and expertise in networking and supporting churches that Partnership has
 - d. the work needed to design and register a new body from scratch, and ensure smooth transition from existing bodies, is considerable.

23. *Building on existing work.* The challenges in relation to this choice are more in the area of perception than reality. In our opinion, and we believe that of others as well, the wiser approach is to build an enhanced networking activity on the very valuable base and experience which Partnership offers. This should ensure that Partnership's legacy passes over smoothly into the enhanced activity. But partly because of extra responsibilities that the enhanced activity would have, and partly to allay fears which result from negative perceptions of Partnership's work and personnel in the past, there would, in building on Partnership as a base, need to be some important changes and developments, including,
 - a. *Trusteeship would need to be revised and reconstructed* to make it more representative both of other key support bodies and of local churches. Partnership has already made a start on this: for some time, a key member of its board has also been a trustee of Church Growth Trust, and more recently Counties and GLO have each been asked to suggest individuals who can be elected as trustees of Partnership. This process would need to become more formalized, by identifying which bodies should be asked to suggest, or even nominate, trustees and for what term, though it must be recognized that under law and regulation, trustees must act, qua trustees, solely in the best interests of the body of which they are trustees – while they may perhaps consult with their nominating bodies, they cannot be mandated by them. We also assume that a body whose role is networking of local churches *should have on its board a preponderance of trustees who are representative of local churches*. In the process of revising the constitution of Partnership (see

para. 21 below), it would be necessary to decide how many trustees representing local churches there should be, how many nominated by other support bodies, and how many independent. Procedures will need to be devised for selecting the trustees of each class.

- b. While executive staff must act under the leadership and responsibility of the trustees, it is important that *the key executive staff of the enhanced networking body should be adequate in number and expertise for the task, should give profile to the body and its work, and, together with key trustees, give public leadership to the body under God* as emphasized in paragraph 19 above. It will be important to identify two or three people among the trustees and staff who have the gifts and spiritual reputation to give high-profile leadership to the body and its work, and therefore to the wider movement of churches. These individuals will need to be given the time and space to develop that ministry of leadership, which means that they must be underpinned by others who can provide the high-level administration and governance that will also be essential to building the reputation and ministry of the body.
- c. *The body needs to be defined by*, and act within and in pursuit of, *a statement of ethos and values* on the lines discussed in paragraph 17 above.
- d. *Member churches?* A key question, as already touched on, will be whether churches in particular should formally be invited to be members of the enhanced networking body. This has theological, practical, and financial dimensions:
 - i. theological because of the commitment of the movement to the independence of the local church, and belief by some that churches cannot and should not be members of anything other than the universal Church;
 - ii. practical because an enhanced body would need maximum commitment and identification from as many churches as possible, and formal membership may be an obstacle to that; and
 - iii. financial because the body's resources will need to come from somewhere, including the beneficiary churches.

Partnership has a formal membership of at present some 150+ churches; but it works closely with as many more, but who don't think that they should commit themselves to formal membership and who don't think that Partnership needs financial support from them. There may be wisdom here from practice in Australia and New Zealand. In Australia, the greater proportion of CCCAust's funding comes from key support agencies, and churches were told that they would be treated as members unless they actively said that they did not wish to be members (few opted out, in fact), but that member churches had only to consider whether they would make voluntary donations to CCCAust rather than pay compulsory membership fees. In New Zealand, funding of CCCNZ is largely from charitable foundations.

- e. The *resources available to the enhanced body would need to be significantly increased*, to enable it effectively to fulfil the expanded role which we envisage for it; this is so with respect to support for regional and local networking of churches, and bilateral support of individual churches, through what Partnership currently terms 'regional coordinators'. The existing coordinators need to be able to spend more time on what they are doing, and there are areas of England and Wales which are not supported by coordinators at all. Extra resource is also needed at the centre, to strengthen capacity to maintain a more effective website covering not only the work of the enhanced body, but also work across the movement as a whole, as a channel to steer website visitors towards the other support bodies which can potentially help them (see below, for more discussion of improved websites). It is not to be expected that key funders will do more than meet

a maximum of 50% of the funding requirements of the body. Movement in the directions proposed in this report mean that churches and individuals across the movement need to see under God the need to provide significant additional funds if the proposals in this report are to be implemented effectively. Detailed budgeting needs to be done, but, if the expenditure of similar bodies in other countries are any guide, a budget of £250,000 a year could easily be required, compared with the current expenditure of Partnership of around £80,000 a year.

f. *Thorough rebranding and new name.* The enhanced body should have a thorough rebranding, including an appropriate new name. (While there is much to be said biblically and practically for the term, 'partnership', to describe a networking body of the type envisaged, its association with the existing organisation, and the need for others to perceive that a step-change is being made, suggest that the continuation of the name is not desirable.)

24. *Legal vehicle.* The legal vehicle of Partnership is a charitable company limited by guarantee (CLG), registered by the Charity Commission of England and Wales. The matter will have to be reviewed, and it is not an excessively-demanding task to replace Partnership's existing CLG with a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (as distinct from creating a completely new body as discussed in paragraphs 21 and 22 above). If the existing CLG were kept, its objects clause in the memorandum of association is not likely to require amendment for the purposes of the enhanced body, and more generally the legal vehicle is in principle suitable for use by the enhanced body (it is not essential to substitute a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) as a CLG already provides all the significant benefits of the CIO, and the disadvantages of a CLG compared with a CIO are trivial). The recommendations in paragraph 23 will require some significant detailed changes to the memorandum and articles (mainly to the latter), but all are within the power of the company to decide without reference to the Charity Commission. It has been Partnership's position for more than a decade that it has been prepared to facilitate changes needed to ensure that a better body to serve the movement emerges, and the proposals made in this report are highly likely to have the support of the present Partnership board and company of legal members. Once the policy is agreed, appropriate changes to the Partnership memorandum and articles would need to be devised, but the Partnership board and company can be expected to facilitate their adoption at the appropriate moment.

25. *Main responsibilities.* We can turn now to noting, for the avoidance of doubt, the main responsibilities proposed for an enhanced networking body, and to four points on which further discussion is likely to be necessary. In summary, the main responsibilities which we see for the enhanced body are as follows:

1. *Encouraging networking* between local churches, and between key leaders of local churches (both full-time and bivocational). This requires both the deepening of existing networking activity in the main geographical areas in which Partnership has been working, and the extension of networking into areas where Partnership has not been operating so far, or where its activities have for the moment petered out. The purpose would be not only mutual learning, but mutual encouragement and inspiration of one another, and the opportunity to receive inspiration and leadership from the enhanced body itself. And the focus would be not only the strengthening of local churches in themselves, but encouraging them in gospel evangelism and mission, so as to be instruments in the expansion of the work of Christ.
2. *Supporting and encouraging individual local churches* in a number of ways, including:
 - a. *Informal bilateral contact* with local church leaders on a regular basis to discuss matters for praise, challenges, needs, and for prayer
 - b. *More formal strategic review and advice* to churches through health checks and more long-term consultancy to ensure effective implementation of proposals where agreed
 - c. *Assisting with searches for church staff*

- d. *Mentoring and coaching of key leaders*
- e. *Moderation in moments of local church crisis* (where invited by the church, of course)
- f. *Practical advice to local churches* on a range of detailed matters from finance and tax; through constitutional, trust and trusteeship matters; health and safety; safeguarding of children, vulnerable adults and, now, all associated with the charity; employment matters; and the impact of government legislation and regulation across the board. This will not always, perhaps not often, entail the enhanced body itself giving the advice: frequently, it will be a question of being a first point of contact, steering the local church to other bodies within our network, or, if necessary, to other evangelical bodies which are equipped to give specialist advice. Often, such advice or links would be made available electronically via the networking body's website.

Again, the underlying purpose would be not only to strengthen and revitalise them in themselves, but to encourage them in gospel evangelism and mission.

3. *Advising on and supporting revitalisation (as distinct from replanting) of individual local churches* (again by invitation)
4. *Informal, accessible, short-form training* for local church leaders and others active in our fellowships, often provided in individual local churches, or as an aspect of the networking of groups of local churches; frequently, this would be done in cooperation with other training providers within our circles.
5. *Research and guidance* to help churches to be aware of the wider cultural environment in which they are situated and also to be aware of the trends and future events, thus to be assisted in their work. Few local churches have the capacity to provide this, but it can come from the pooled expertise of a network.
6. *Publications.* The outcome of research and guidance needs to be made available, as well as providing material which alerts church leaders to matters which they ought to be thinking about and which is useful in training. Publications can be in print form or electronic, and they range from books, through articles and papers, to briefing notes and website contents. While much valuable material is available from a variety of evangelical sources, there is a continuing need for publications which address questions which arise within the tradition of this particular group of churches.
7. *Promotion.* There would be a need for the body to do more than Partnership has done to promote itself, its work, and services (see paragraph 27(viii) below).

26. *Matters for further discussion and decision.* Notwithstanding the development of an enhanced body charged with supporting and networking churches, it needs to be recognized that there are areas in which, even after a transitional period (see below), key bodies need to continue to cooperate and in which they would also need to cooperate with the enhanced body. Four particular areas to which we would draw attention, because of the need to articulate their relationship with the enhanced body, are:

- a. *Training.* If the enhanced body is to be able effectively to support, encourage, and assist in revitalising individual local churches, it should be recognized that part of its stock-in-trade must be *informal* training; there is also an important link between local networking of churches and training, because often the content of networking is in effect informal training on key and live issues which are confronting local churches. But Counties, GLO, and Church Growth Trust, all have interests in training the personnel of local churches; GLO has Tilsley College and its local Joshua courses; Counties has recently appointed a Training Officer. There are therefore ongoing matters which need

to be managed and coordinated, even if there is an enhanced networking body. The relationship of Enable Training to the enhanced body needs to be considered as well: it may be that Enable Training should see itself as reporting regularly to the enhanced body as well as to its current constituents, or, preferably in our view, that it should be seen as coming under the umbrella of the enhanced body or seen as more clearly related to Tilsley College as the preferred training body for this group of churches.

b. ***One-stop website.*** The beginnings of a website communicating about the various bodies supporting the work of local churches have developed under the auspices of Church Support Network (churchsupportnetwork.uk). This is now being revised to take account of changes which have taken place since 2015 when the current texts were agreed. Subsequent discussions in the Church Support Network group have suggested a number of ways in which the website could be developed so as to make it a more valuable tool underpinning the goals which were agreed at the local church consultation on 12 November 2018. There is question whether this website should remain under the auspices of Church Support Network since it aims to present information about all the various bodies represented in or connected with Church Support Network, or whether it should become the practical responsibility of the enhanced networking body. The case for the latter is that the enhanced networking body will have a day-to-day administrative existence. An effective website of the type envisaged needs constant editorial attention to ensure that it is live and up to date. This requires resources which are more likely to be available in the enhanced networking body than they are likely to be in and through Church Support Network, given its informal and skeleton character.

c. ***Living the Passion Conference.*** One of the key developments of the past 15 years has been the Living the Passion conferences. These were initially proposed by Partnership, as a rallying-point for the network of churches, but from the beginning they were organized as a cooperative venture between key support bodies. The conferences are effectively achieving the original objectives, and Living the Passion is now spreading its cloak over regional conferences with similar aims. The question is whether, because its importance as a rallying-point, it should be seen as operating under the umbrella of the enhanced networking body. If so, there is a question whether the organising committee needs to be representative of the current bodies or whether an appropriate committee, selected according to the skills that they could bring to the organisation of conferences, would be appointed by the enhanced body, with the other bodies still committing themselves to support Living the Passion.

d. ***Church Growth Trust (CGT).*** Partnership and CGT have similar missions to each other, in the sense that both are focused on helping local churches. To the extent that CGT's work is focused on church buildings, it is complementary to the work of Partnership, which has never sought to help churches in that area. But in recent years, CGT's work has expanded to include strategic advice to churches as that often arises naturally as the backdrop to rational discussion about buildings, and advice on aspects of church life which are connected with buildings but go into the day-to-day operations of churches (trust and trusteeship matters, health and safety, food hygiene, signage, etc). Partnership's members often turn to Partnership for advice on such matters as well. An enhanced networking activity will need at least to maintain the close links, and sometimes joint working, which CGT and Partnership have between them at present. The question of merger will need to be thought about eventually, in our view.

27. ***Geographical coverage of enhanced body.*** There is also an important question to be considered about the geographical ambit of the enhanced body. Partnership is a UK body and it has both individual members and member churches located in all four home countries, including 10 or so in Scotland; (it also has member churches outside the UK, though not in the Republic of Ireland). But, separate from Partnership, local networking of church leaders in particular has developed in Scotland (separately in South and West Scotland,

and East and North of Scotland), and in Ireland in the form of LEAD (drawing involvement on an all-Ireland basis).¹ In the light of this, the question is whether the local church networking groups in Scotland and Ireland would wish to see themselves as part of the enhanced body discussed in this report. This is principally a matter for those groups. Behind the matter lies questions of whether the link would be welcomed in Scotland and Ireland, and whether the enhanced body would be more effective as an England and Wales body, as a UK body, or even as an Atlantic Islands body. These seem to us to be matters for further consultation by appropriate means. However, our view is that the enhanced body should be a UK, if not Atlantic Islands, body², if possible.

Transition and timescale

29. **Consultation.** The report is to the group of local church leaders (mainly of larger churches) which commissioned us and there will be consultation with them about it. But there needs to be adequate consultation

a. with the wide range of local churches which, it is hoped, would benefit from what is proposed and with the key support bodies which would be affected. There are in February and March 2019 to be regional consultations which are being organised by Partnership across Great Britain. They are immediately for Partnership member churches, but invitations are going to other churches, and the meetings are open to anyone who wishes to attend. Partnership is intending to use these meetings in part to consult about the proposals in this report. The intention is that a summary report of what is said about our proposals will be produced for use by us and others.

b. with the support bodies which have an interest in our proposals, principally Counties, GLO, Church Growth Trust and Partnership, but also Church Support Network and other individual bodies. Particularly the bodies principally concerned will need enthusiastically to support the proposals, and would need to continue with deeper cooperation between themselves and with the enhanced body (see paragraph 33 below).

30. The report should be considered, we suggest, at a consultation in April or May with the local church leaders who were invited to the consultation on 12 November 2018 once a summary of the consultations referred to in paragraph 29(a) is available.

31. If, as a result of these consultations, it is agreed in principle that an enhanced networking body is desirable better to serve this body of churches, and that the preferable course is to build on and develop from what Partnership has already achieved, a process of change needs to be undertaken as urgently as possible.

32. The *key implementation steps* would be:

- i. Decide on the revised structure of the Partnership board of trustees, and begin the process of moving towards appointments both of representatives of local churches and of key support bodies
- ii. Prepare changes to the memorandum and articles of Partnership (UK) Ltd which are consistent with, and would facilitate and give effect to, the proposals agreed as result of further consultation on this report and proposals
- iii. Decide on a new name and branding for the revised body, and agree both these and any further detailed changes to the memorandum and articles that follow from the name change; notify Companies House and the Charity Commission, as necessary

¹ In the 1990s, Partnership did not attempt to operate in Scotland, where there was a separate body known as Interface which merged with Partnership in about 2000 at the suggestion of the Interface committee.

² In this context, we note that the trustees of Stewards Company Ltd are drawn from the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

- iv. Agree revised mission, ethos and values statement(s) and agree the adoption of Evangelical Alliance's statement of faith (the memorandum and articles of Partnership (UK) Ltd already include it)
- v. Identify key personnel at board and staff level to carry forward the changed and expanded role proposed
- vi. Identify subjects and geographical areas in which either Partnership's existing work needs to be radically developed or which will in effect be new in comparison with what Partnership has been doing; produce and implement plans, with timetables, for the development of these areas
- vii. Consider the budgetary and funding implications of (ii) - (vii) above so as to ensure that the enhanced body is adequately resourced for its enlarged mission, bearing in mind that ultimately mission has to be tailored to the resource cloth.
- viii. At the appropriate moment, undertake a major marketing and promotion effort to launch the revised body among the constituency it is intended to serve. This would be likely to include the production of new magazine for the body, the aim of which would be, in contrast to both *Perspectives* and Partnership's monthly emailing, the promotion of the body and communication about its work. This would be an ongoing requirement.

33. **Communication and transparency.** In the consultation phase, in further detailed planning, and in the implementation phases, there would need to be intensive and effective communication and publicity about the proposals, and explanation of them, each item of communication being geared to the particular audience.

34. **Timescale.** The volume of detailed work entailed in the steps suggested in paragraph 32 should not be underestimated. While this is being done, there is scope for continued and deepened cooperation between the key bodies, including with Partnership. But there are reasons why the implementation period should be neither delayed nor prolonged. If the changes discussed in the consultation on 12 November 2018 and detailed in this report are worthwhile and necessary, they ought to be implemented as soon as may be. Unnecessary delay should also be avoided for the sake of Partnership: while our proposals would build on Partnership as a going-concern, they would involve many changes and the translation of Partnership into a different body with a different name. A lengthy period before they begin to be implemented would be bound to be a period of marking time, sapping initiative in Partnership in a way which would be highly undesirable. It is important that in the transitional period, Partnership should be able to conduct itself in a positive way which takes account of the intended direction of travel, so that the new arrangements can be introduced with sustained and growing momentum. If the transitional period is too long, and does not begin promptly, momentum will very likely be lost. It is important that the legacy of Partnership's work to date should be passed on to the enhanced body, rather than that it should run down in a long transitional period. Our hope would be that the revised body could be launched in the autumn of 2019.

35. **Continuing cooperation of key support bodies.** We emphasize that the enhanced role proposed for a networking body does not envisage the supersession of bodies such as Counties and GLO, or the transfer of their work to the enhanced body. They need vigorously to seek to expand what they are doing in their different spheres. Deepened cooperation and improved coordination between these bodies, including with the enhanced networking body, needs to continue vigorously. Duplication of effort between the various bodies needs to be avoided. They need to take care that new initiatives do not duplicate what others are already doing, or are not what another of the bodies should properly be doing. All need to remember the adage that to identify a need does not necessarily constitute a call to meet that need. Given the continued existence of a number of weighty support bodies cooperating together, an element of self-denying ordinance, prior consultation, and a policy of 'no-surprises', are going to be necessary if trust and mutual affirmation between them are not to be impaired. Vigorous effort to deepen co-operation and joint working needs to continue, though in the longer term, as we have noted, Counties, Church Growth Trust and the enhanced body that we propose will need to consider whether and at what point more structural integration is desirable in the interests of a more effective service to the churches.

Conclusion

36. The purpose of this report has been to set out how the consensus reached at the consultation on 12 November 2018 might be pursued practically. We believe that the plans which we have outlined—and we recognize that a considerable amount of filling out of detail still needs to be done—are very much in the interests of the 1,000 or so congregations which remain in the movement in the UK and, we do not doubt, the considerable number of congregations which would be attracted to a Christo-centric, gospel-driven, open-hearted network of churches on the lines discussed in November. They would also be in the interests of the churches which the movement has given birth to under the good hand of God in very many different countries in the world. There is, and will continue to be, a significant challenge to the various support bodies which serve these churches as to whether they can adapt their work, structures, and number of structures, in order that they can best help the churches in their gospel mission.

28 January 2019