

TASK GROUP ON ENHANCED NETWORKING OF CHURCHES

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The report follows up the conclusions of a consultation of local church leaders on 12 November that the time was opportune to strengthen networking between independent evangelical churches broadly related to Church Growth Trust, Counties, GLO Europe, and Partnership. The report suggests how the points of consensus on 12 November might be achieved.

The group noted the various existing support bodies already to do much for the churches with which they are connected, and taken together their activities are a rich resource for the churches: better communication with the churches and better collaboration between the bodies will achieve much. But the bodies have tended to be activity focussed, and there tends to be a gap with respect to underpinning the health of local churches themselves.

Criteria

Drawing partly on the discussion on 12 November, the group identified a number of key criteria which any enhanced networking should meet:

1. The aim should be a network, not a denominational structure
2. The focus should be strengthening, supporting and networking local churches, not as an end in itself, but to glorify Christ through gospel and mission
3. The accent should be on relationship, not structure and organisation
4. A sense of belonging is far more important than formal membership of any enhanced body
5. The networking needs to be regional and local if it is to be successful and effective
6. It is essential that it should be adequately resourced if it is to be effective
7. The purpose is not maintenance, but ensuring that Christ is at the centre of all that is done, and seeing him glorified, mission furthered, the gospel proclaimed, and the Church grown
8. There should be a statement of faith, and a clear understanding of the ethos and values of the church life around which it is intended to gather, but these should not function as a narrow test for participation, but rather as an affirmation of identity which churches want to rally to
9. The culture of enhanced networking should allow biblical spiritual leadership to flourish within the enhanced networking body itself, within local churches, and among local churches. This is an essential feature of what is proposed.

Role of proposed enhanced networking body

The group recommends the development of an enhanced networking body, which will be a radical step forward from anything that exists at present among the body of local churches for which it is intended. The main responsibilities would be, in summary:

- a. Encouraging networking between local churches and key leaders of local churches. The aim is not simply mutual learning, but mutual encouragement and inspiration.
- b. Supporting and encouraging individual local churches through
 - i. Informal bilateral contact between the enhanced networking body and local church leaders
 - ii. Formal strategic review and advice where they want it
 - iii. Assisting in the search for church staff
 - iv. Mentoring and coaching of key leaders
 - v. Help in moments of church crisis
 - vi. Practical advice on a wide range of details matters which local churches have to cope with.
- c. Advising on and supporting church revitalisation
- d. Informal, accessible, short-form training for church leaders and others active in church life
- e. Research and guidance on the wider context in which churches operate

- f. Publications to stimulate leaders and others
- g. Promotion of and information about the range of support available to churches.

Important matters for further consideration include whether, for the future, the Living the Passion conferences and Enable Training would be in effect branches of the enhanced networking body.

Creating the enhanced body

The group considers the pros and cons of forming a completely new body to take responsibility for this enhanced networking, or building on an existing body. They conclude that the better course is to build on Partnership and the work that it has been doing. But extensive change will be needed:

- i. The board should be radically revised and reconstructed, to include representatives of local churches (in a majority) and representatives of Partnership's key partner bodies (Counties, GLO, and Church Growth Trust)
- ii. The key executive staff should be adequate in number and expertise, and able with key trustees to give public leadership to the enhanced body under God
- iii. It should have revised statement of ethos and values, in addition to the present statement of faith (that of the Evangelical Alliance)
- iv. While there would be identified membership by churches, fees and donations by them would be voluntary rather than compulsory
- v. The resources available to the enhanced body would need to be significantly increased, probably to the order of £250,000 a year
- vi. There would need to be a thorough rebranding and a new name (replacing that of Partnership).

Whether legal constitution of the body would be adapted from that of Partnership (at present a charitable company limited by guarantee) or a replacement CIO is a technical matter to be decided later, and does not affect the underlying policy and approach proposed by the Task Group.

Relationship with Counties, GLO, and Church Growth Trust, and ever deeper collaboration

A critical question is the relationship of Counties, GLO, and Church Growth to the radically-developed networking body. The possibility of mergers in due course of some or all with the networking body should be kept open and under review. But meanwhile it is essential that there should continue to be closer collaboration between the four bodies wherever that would be more effective for the churches and the gospel. This requires a mentality of cooperation and collaboration rather than competition or lone-working rather than taking the trouble of discussion in advance between the four bodies.

Timetable

As to timetable, there should be urgent consultation with local churches, the relevant support bodies, and individuals, before discussion by the local church leaders consultation in late April or May. The aim should be to complete the detailed planning work so as to permit the rebranded body to be launched in autumn 2019.