

“Life and Work” February 2005 – reprinted with permission

GROWING TOGETHER

Lynne McNeil hears about the launch of a new organisation for evangelicals in the Kirk.

THE history of Presbyterianism in Scotland is awash with details of splits and schisms.

In recent years there has been a growing concern that a gulf between liberals and traditionalists poses a potential threat to the broadness of the Church of Scotland.

A new organisation, however, promises to work to end that threat.

Relaunched in Edinburgh later this month (Feb), Forward Together has taken the name of an informal grouping within the Kirk with the aim of creating a body for those with evangelical sympathies

Leading figures who have joined the steering group of the new body include Ann Allen (former convener of the Board of Social Responsibility); the Rev Bill Wallace (minister of Pulteneytown and Thrumster and a former convener of the Board of Social Responsibility and the Board of Ministry); Professor Andrew McGowan (Principal of Highland Theological College) the Rev Norry Maciver (minister of Newhills, Aberdeen) and Dr Bob Fyall, director of Rutherford House in Edinburgh.

Spokesman, the Rev Gordon Kennedy, minister of Portpatrick and Stranraer St Ninian's, who chairs the steering group, explained the organisation was a group for those who adhere to the principles of evangelical faith.

“An evangelical is a *Christian* who holds to the historical, orthodox Christian faith, and the ancient creeds of the Church and the Reformation confessions of faith

“The purpose of Forward Together is to serve the Church of Scotland by continuing to present this evangelical perspective on matters of faith and life within the Church of Scotland. The Church of Scotland has always understood herself to be evangelical and reformed in doctrine. However, in these days, there is a great need for this evangelical expression of our Christian faith to be articulated within the life of our Church.

“Forward Together also aims to create a real unity among evangelicals within the Church of Scotland that we may speak with one voice the great things of the gospel to the church and the people of Scotland. Forward Together is committed to being and remaining part of the Church of Scotland and encouraging all evangelical ministers, elders and members to take their full part in the life and work of the Church

Any member, elder or minister within the Kirk is eligible for membership which carries an annual fee of £25 (£10 concession)

“The steering group hope that through Forward Together members of the group will be able to discuss contemporary issues of debate within the life of the Church of Scotland and through publications present the fruit of these discussions to

the wider Church with a view to participating in future life and growth of the Church of Scotland,” said Gordon.

He explained it was difficult to gauge the likely level of support for the group within the Kirk but said it was hoped to attract “a significant number of members” along with a number who may not sign up for formal membership, but who would be generally supportive of the “historic orthodox Christianity” offered by the organisation.

He was emphatic that the role of Forward Together is not to cause division within the Church of Scotland.

“The sad history of the Church in Scotland is a history of division and schism. In his book *Outside Verdict* Harry Reid wrote that ‘...the possibility (of schism) cannot be dismissed.’ It is recognising that this is a very real concern that has in part led to the reformation of Forward Together having as one of our aims to avoid and prevent any such schism within our Church

“Evangelicals have voiced the complaint that their distinctive concerns are not taken seriously or are simply ignored by ‘The Church’. It is time for the evangelical community within the Church of Scotland to confess that part of the reason is our non-involvement in the life of the Church of Scotland beyond our congregations and parishes.”

According to Gordon, part of the group's work will involve encouraging members to engage fully in the courts, boards and committees of the church.

“If evangelicals want an evangelical voice to be heard in the church, we must speak. Our hope is that as evangelicals engage with the wider work of the Church of Scotland, so fear of an evangelical schism will fade and disappear.

Following the formal launch this month, an annual general meeting will take place during the General Assembly in May, along with a public lunchtime event.

Summarising the Forward Together ethos, Gordon added: “We are Christians looking forward with hope and confidence to a future in which God will continue to build his church among us. It is our great desire to journey into this future together: together with other evangelicals, together with our brothers and sisters in the Church of Scotland, for we are committed to being and remaining part of the Church of Scotland, articulating our desire for unity among evangelicals and unity and peace within the Church of Scotland.”

Further information on the work of Forward Together is available from Secretary, the Rev Ian Watson at The Manse, 2 Lanark Road, Kirkmuirhill, ML11 9RB, or by email at kirkmuirhillchurch@tiscali.co.uk co. uk, or from the website www.forwardtogether.org.uk