



forward together

An organisation for evangelicals in the Church of Scotland. Editor: Ian M Watson Issue No.1 May 2005

A Warm Welcome From Our Chairman, Gordon Kennedy

On behalf of the Forward Together Steering Group welcome to our first newsletter. I hope that we will be able to send these out regularly to keep you all informed of what Forward Together is doing. The aims and objectives we have set ourselves commit us to faithful service within the Church of Scotland and also to working for the reforming of this church into which God has called us. You can read these aims and objectives on the back page; and when you do I'm sure you will see a programme of work that cannot be achieved by just twelve people. It has been a pleasure over working with our first Steering Group and I want to thank them all for the hours of work they have already given to Forward Together.

However, we want to do more. You want us to do more. You, the members of Forward Together, are just as much Forward Together as the Steering Group. This is the "together" part of our name. Twelve people cannot engage with all the work of the Church of Scotland in her General Assembly, Presbyteries and congregations; cannot engage with the press and other media in

Scotland in a way that will respond to the many opportunities to communicate our hope in the gospel to our nation. We need to work together.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Firstly, you can let us know of your concerns. Where are the areas of concern in our church, in our nation that you long to see someone offering a biblical perspective? Let us know, because we might have missed something you've noticed. I can't promise that we will act on everything you ask us to, but we will consider all your concerns and do what we can.

Secondly, when you are asked to help – as you will be – please say yes. It is easy to be busy, it is harder to make time in our schedules to read, research and write, to contribute to discussion groups on the web site, to come to meetings. We could all plead busy-ness, but then nothing will get done. Forward Together is not a group for someone else to do something for you; it is a group in which you must play your part, a group that will offer you a chance to have your say and contribute to the important issues of the day. Yes, I suppose we could do this on our own,

but I believe we will do it better together.

WHAT CAN WE ACHIEVE TOGETHER?

God isn't finished with the Church of Scotland yet. There are more people who need to hear the gospel in our land and there is work for us to do for his glory. I believe that God will use Forward Together to do great things in Scotland and to reform his church for his purposes.

"God isn't finished with the Church of Scotland yet."

Will you join me in praying that God will open doors of service for Forward Together? Will you join me in praying for courage and boldness together with a clarity of speech so that when Forward Together contributes to the life of our church we will honour God and make clear his good news to all? We will not on this earth achieve a perfect church, but under God and by his grace we can work together for the renewal of our church in faithfulness to God and his word through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Human Sexuality

by Norry Maciver, Founder of Forward Together

The issue of Human Sexuality in recent years has never been far from the front pages. This is particularly true in relation to the matter of Christian belief and practice. In recent months, the worldwide Anglican Communion, has been the focus of media attention because of its diversity of practice in its ordination policy and in its departure from what has been the unquestioned, accepted Christian position for two thousand years. That position still dominates the policy of some 95% of the world Christian fellowship. Up until recently, only the Episcopal denominations in the United States of America and Canada have broken ranks with the Anglican Communion worldwide and, in so doing, have caused intense pain in that fellowship. Now the Bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church, which is in fellowship with the Anglican Church worldwide, on the

interesting basis that they have never ruled against it, have stated that there is no theological bar to the ordination of a practising homosexual person. This is causing considerable grief to many in that denomination who want to hold the historic orthodox public ecclesiastical position.

"This is not a discussion about sexual orientation but about sexual practice."

Let us be clear at the outset about two central issues. First of all, this is not a discussion about sexual orientation but about sexual practice. Secondly, the position of the Church of Scotland as affirmed by different General Assemblies is absolutely unequivocal and completely uncomplicated on the issue of

sexuality. It is 'chastity outwith marriage and fidelity within it', affirmed through the Board of Social Responsibility's Report to the General Assembly of 1983 which report was "received and commended as a guide". The issue in the wider context of 'family life' was further discussed in 1992 through the reports of both the Panel on Doctrine and the Board of Social Responsibility and the Church's position was left unaltered. Again in 1994, through the report of the Board of Social Responsibility, the matter was debated with no changes in the Church's agreed position. This, of course, accords with and is rooted in the historic biblical position and would be the position of the vast majority of contemporary Christians worldwide. That being the case, the Church's current position becomes the only context in which all

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Bulgarian Bullseye! Cultural Engagement for the Gospel

by Alistair Donald, our Vice-Chairman

Most readers will no doubt agree that our country is changing rapidly. Although the Christian Gospel was one of the prime influences shaping the culture of Scotland, its impact on today's "movers and shakers" is surely minimal.

True, a biblical perspective on public affairs is presented to MSPs and the Executive by CARE and the Evangelical Alliance. We might not be holding our collective breath about the extent to which this is heeded, but at least the viewpoint is being communicated. But there are many others besides politicians who make up the "movers and shakers" of 21st century Scotland – artists, poets, scientists, economists, journalists, philosophers. It would no doubt be news to them that a biblical world-view has something to say in all these areas. The secular mindset has a stranglehold, and the only thing that most would agree on concerning Christianity is that it belongs firmly in a box marked "Scotland's past".

Cracks in the secular edifice do appear, but are generally only known within individual fields and not outwith them. Thus while philosophers will know that theism is once again intellectually credible after decades of being written off, how many scientists and writers (or indeed readers of this newsletter) know about this? How will the journalist or the painter get to hear that recent cosmological discoveries point to a universe that is "tailor-made" – to use an expression that even an avowed agnostic felt compelled to use by the sheer weight of evidence that was staring him in the face! What is needed is a proper channel of communication between what has become a Christian ghetto and the wider cultural world. But how to do this?

A pointer for us comes from an unlikely source – BULGARIA! After that country emerged from its disastrous years of communism, a group of Christians determined that a biblical perspective on a wide range of culturally-relevant matters should and could be communicated to the nation's elite. So they founded an "e-zine", a quarterly internet magazine covering the various fields mentioned above. It involves a lot of hard work to ensure that each issue is of a very high quality and is interesting, thought-provoking and stimulating. It's a credit to their effort that the e-zine is actually read and recognised by non-Christians as having something to say.

If in Bulgaria, why not in Scotland? Is there someone reading this who would be prepared to get the ball rolling?

Religious Observance Observed

In late February the Scottish Executive published a Circular on the Provision of Religious Observance in Scottish Schools. The Education Committee of the General Assembly have been active in the consultation process leading to the publication of this Circular. Forward Together is pleased to note that many of the Committee's recommendations have been included in the Circular.

Welcoming the publication of this Circular we would make the following comments:

- The definition of religious observance is so broad that it seems to include non-religious celebrations. The celebration of 'the shared values of the school community' is an important element in the life of the school but need not be a religious celebration. Of course such celebrations could be part of an assembly which also had a religious observance component. But equally an assembly for the purpose of religious observance need not celebrate these shared values. It may have been more helpful to limit the definition of religious observance to explicitly religious activities and then recognise the place of non-religious celebrations within the life of the school.
- We are delighted to note the 'recognition of Scotland's Christian heritage' and that from this 'schools

are encouraged to use the rich resources of this tradition'. We hope this will be reflected in invitations to chaplains and others within the Christian community to lead times of religious observance with an explicitly Christian focus in our schools.

- We agree with the recognition that the quality of religious observance taking place in the school is of greater importance than simply the frequency. The suggestion of at least six opportunities for religious observance in schools taken together with the comment that many Primary schools will wish to continue with a weekly practice of religious observance is welcome.

The Circular recognises that Scotland is a land of mixed faiths and those who claim to have no faith. In seeking to recognise 'pupils and staff from faiths other than Christianity or with no faith commitment' the danger is that religious observance becomes some form of inter-faith observance or in an attempt to include everyone becomes so bland as to be meaningless. When the Circular states "It is of central importance that all pupils and staff can participate with integrity in forms of religious observance without compromise to their personal faith stances" this must also be held to be true for those leading acts of religious observance. For us, the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus Christ must be central to any act of religious observance conducted or participated in.

Are you thinking what we're thinking?

One of the reasons I felt compelled to help reconstitute Forward Together was the conviction that surely I was not alone in my view that the evangelical voice in the Church was being sidelined and that this had to be rectified. Praise God! This feeling was not wrong. As we were going into print, membership of Forward Together topped the 200 mark. We now have a membership of 205. This includes 86 active ministers, 35 retired ministers, 54 elders, and 25 "others".

We have 1 MSP and 2 members from an overseas charge.

Given that we only launched in February this is exciting and gratifying. The larger our membership the greater our authority when we speak to the press or in the courts of the Church. One note of caution – we must not become "top heavy" with ministers. We exist for all the members of the Kirk. Please encourage those whom you know who agree with our Aims and Basis of Faith to join us.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Date: 26th May 2005

Time: 7pm

**Venue: The Royal Overseas Club, 100 Princes St.,
Edinburgh**

Make Poverty History

The title speaks for itself – **MAKE POVERTY HISTORY** is a bold and exciting new initiative to tackle the grinding poverty that still holds 2.8 billion people in its grip. Tearfund, together with other Christian agencies and Churches, want as many people as possible to get involved. Your individual voice can become part of a great compassionate cry that goes up to our national and international leaders, a call for action and change.

"We believe that global poverty is not an accident – it's driven by injustice at national and world level, so governments need to be challenged."

More than 100 charities, church organisations and campaigning groups are lending their support to persuade the UK government to act for the benefit of poor people during 2005.

CHALLENGE

Why is Tearfund involved? Firstly, because the Bible makes it clear that God hates injustice, and secondly, because if we speak out we can help change the minds of decision makers. The Jubilee 2000 anti-debt campaign persuaded world leaders to release more money to tackle poverty than Tearfund could ever dream of raising.

We don't believe that poor people are helpless victims. But they do need opportunities to lift themselves out of

poverty, to improve life for themselves and their children. We believe that global poverty is not an accident – it's driven by injustice at national and world level, so governments need to be challenged.

2005 isn't about amazing people doing extraordinary things, but about each of us playing our small part. To quote Helen Keller, the famous campaigner on blindness, 'The world is moved along not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.'

AIMS

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY has the potential to be the biggest-ever movement to challenge world poverty.

Its aims are simple:

- ❖ Trade justice
- ❖ Drop the debt
- ❖ More and better aid

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY's plans include sending more than a million postcards to the Prime Minister and asking people everywhere to wear a white wristband as a potent symbol of their solidarity with those trapped in poverty. (Postcards can be ordered from TearFund.)

A SPECIAL YEAR

2005 offers the people of the United Kingdom unprecedented opportunities to influence global decision makers. The UK government is hosting the G8

summit at Gleneagles, a gathering of the leaders of the 'Group of Eight' most powerful countries, and is taking over the presidency of the European Union.

"The world is moved along not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker."

This means that the UK is in a key position to influence other rich governments and the financial institutions they control. Reforms in trade, aid and debt would release resources for developing countries to tackle vital issues such as HIV/AIDS and lack of access to safe water, sanitation, healthcare and education. Success would mean a real improvement for the millions who live in poverty across the world.

*Forward Together is proud to be supporting this **MAKE POVERTY HISTORY** campaign and will continue to support the needs of the poorest peoples in the world in the coming years. Peter Chirnside of Tear Fund will be speaking on this theme at our General Assembly meeting on **Thursday 26th May at 1.10 p.m. in the Quaker Meeting House, Edinburgh, please come along to this meeting.***

For more information visit:

www.tearfund.org/2005
www.makepovertyhistory.org

Human Sexuality, *continued*

practising sexual relationships must be considered. And therefore, it is the context for any debate on both heterosexual and homosexual practice.

To focus only on homosexual practice is both unfairly to target same sex relationships and be laid open to the charge of homophobia. The latter is a charge that the Church of Scotland rightly rejects, because when issues of sexual behaviour have been fully discussed, the human rights and the pastoral needs of those of a genuine same-sex orientation have been consistently affirmed and supported in all the aforementioned reports to the General Assembly.

Of course, there are cases in the Christian church, as in wider society, when homosexuals have been victimised and alienated. When that has been the case the

church needs to repent but it also must clearly hold to its unequivocal position. To be involved in a sexually active relationship outwith marriage, whether heterosexual or homosexual, is contrary to the clear position of the Church of Scotland and the historically consistent biblical position of the world church.

That said, and it cannot be denied, the matter of ordination of those living in such relationships is self-evident. Leaders within any church with such clarity on sexuality cannot be living in relationships that defy the accepted and affirmed standards of the church.

It has been argued that there are now significant minorities within the Church of Scotland who would disagree with the church's position. So be it. In a broad church we may seldom claim 100% support for any position. Nevertheless the clear and

consistent mainstream Christian position to which we are committed is celibacy outwith the marital relationship. It is further, on occasions, argued that sexual orientation has its roots in a person's genetic make-up. On such a claim, at the very least, the scientific jury is still out.

However the issue is not one of orientation but of practice and this applies both to heterosexual and homosexual practice beyond the committed loving relationship of heterosexual marriage. On this, the Church of Scotland is absolutely clear.

"the position of the Church of Scotland ...is absolutely unequivocal and completely uncomplicated"

FROM THE EDITOR

This first edition of our newsletter is being published in order to coincide with the 2005 General Assembly. We want to maximise awareness of our group within our Church at large. Every Commissioner will receive a copy. And we are sending every member two copies – one to keep and one to give away. For more copies just contact me.

For the sake of non-members we have printed our Basis of Faith and our Aims in the adjoining column. If you agree with these we would be delighted to accept you as a member.

During the Assembly some of our members will be compiling reports on each day's proceedings. These will then be

collated and published in the next newsletter which should be with you by the end of June. Future editions will contain articles about issues currently facing church and society today. For example, euthanasia, co-habitation, sexuality.

We also plan to comment on internal Church debates, such as the new Council of Assembly and the restructuring of central committees.

If you have been thinking through a particular issue and have written a paper or presented a talk we'd be interested to hear from you. We want Forward Together to be a place where ideas can be shared and discussed.

Meet the Office Bearers

Just so you know who you are dealing with...

Gordon Kennedy (Chairman) is presently minister at Portpatrick linked with Stranraer. St Ninians having served previously in the parish of New Cumnock. Gordon was brought up in Glasgow and studied Civil Engineering at Strathclyde University and Divinity at Glasgow University. Gordon is married to Fiona and they have two children, John and Andrew.

Alistair Donald (Vice-chairman) has a doctorate in environmental science, and worked as an advisor on pollution control before entering the ministry. He is married to Nicky and they have three sons. Now minister of Maud & Savocho linked with New Deer in the Presbytery of Buchan, Alistair's interests include the relation between science and faith, especially the importance of design in the natural world. He is currently Convener of National Mission's "Why Believe?" committee and has been appointed to the new Mission and Discipleship Council.

Ian Watson (Secretary) is minister at Kirkmuirhill, in Lanark Presbytery. He is married to Kim and they have two children, Jordan and Amy. Ian originally trained as a solicitor, but the Lord gently wooed him into the ministry much to his surprise. Ian has just completed 4 years on Practice and Procedure and is presently a member of the Judicial Commission. Most of his leisure time is spent with the family though he does own a set of golf clubs.

Isobel Berks (Administration) is a member of Kirkmuirhill Parish Church. She is married to Ray, an elder, and acts as church Prayer Secretary. Currently she works part-time for the Nurses Christian Fellowship. She has two grown-up children and one grandson.

Andrew Philip (Web-master), like Charles Kennedy, has recently become a father for the first time. He lives in Dunfermline with his wife, Elizabeth, where he is minister of St. Leonard's Church. Andrew designed and oversees our web-page, and supervises the Smartgroup, an interactive forum for discussion.

If you would like to join Forward Together or would like more information you can do so through:

- 1. our web-site at www.forwardtogether.org.uk**
- 2. contacting Ian Watson at The Manse, 2 Lanark Road, Kirkmuirhill, ML11 9RB (tel. 01555 892409)**

BASIS OF FAITH

The Basis of Faith of Forward Together shall be the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith declared in the ecumenical creeds and the confessions of the Reformed churches, especially as summarized by the Reformation watchwords: Christ alone, grace alone, Scripture alone, faith alone, God's glory alone. In particular we affirm:

1. faith in the triune God – eternally Father, Son and Holy Spirit;
2. faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord through whose incarnation, earthly ministry, death, resurrection and ascension forgiveness and new life in the Holy spirit are freely offered to all on repentance and faith;
3. belief in the gospel of the sovereign grace and love of God, uniquely revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which are God-breathed and entirely trustworthy in all that they teach, and the Church's supreme rule of faith and life;
4. confidence in the personal and visible return of Christ in glory to reign.

AIMS

The aims of Forward Together shall be:

1. to honour the name of our Lord Jesus Christ by obeying his commission to reach the people of Scotland and the whole world with the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour, and to do so sensitively, practically and persuasively.
2. to support and encourage all evangelicals in the Church of Scotland in their witness to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour,
3. to promote effective unity among evangelicals in the Church of Scotland;
4. to present a biblical perspective on the life and work of the Church of Scotland, in order to maintain the Church's evangelical heritage, especially on contemporary issues of debate.