

Letter from David Banting to Reform members at St Peter's, Harold Wood, regarding the merger with Church Society and FWS

By David Banting

I hope you have received all the news and sufficient details of the proposed merger between Reform, Church Society and Fellowship of Word & Spirit. Amongst other things, St Peter's last two Vicars have been deeply involved with all three and are involved in most of the relationships or networks among the various leaders.

I have been a member of Church Society for many years myself, but we are now invited to become members of Church Society before March 12 to enable us to play a part in the crucial AGM in May which will bring all this into effect. I enclose the Church Society leaflet with all the details for you to act on this, if you will. Yes, there is now a subscription, but you will notice it is specially reduced this year for Reform members coming across.

On the Email communication from the Reform Administrator (dated 26.2.18), which I guess you have seen, do listen to the short video from Rod Thomas. He explains the changes and the needs that have precipitated this merger. The main issue for Reform is whether its distinctives and cutting edge will be lost. Well, Church Society possibly feel the same! Rod Thomas is due to be the President and Mark Burkill the Chairman. Half the Council are to be local incumbents, and all the Council will be required to sign up to the Reform Covenant. There have been two main developments in recent years: the emergence of the Bishop of Maidstone (Rod Thomas) and of the Anglican Mission in England (AMiE) and their Bishop, Andy Lines. This means that two of Reform's key concerns and campaigns (the conservative evangelical integrity over Women Bishops, and the recognition and due oversight of ministers and churches that find themselves outside the structures of the CofE) have a new focus of support and leadership. Conservative evangelicals now have a tsunami of an issue to face in issues of gender and human sexuality, and we believe that we need every combination and strength we can muster. Frankly, this is such a colossal challenge that we need each other. I believe for other reasons it is long overdue (evangelical fragmentation is not edifying) and will also be as significant a challenge to the liberal majority as we can mount.

The main concern appears to be whether we are being seen, or will be seen, as getting into bed with the CofE too much. The phrase 'the evangelisation of England through the CofE' has focused the concern – it appears to cut adrift from those who take the fight outside the CofE or who are driven out, like many who look to AMiE. I remind myself and others (and you will see it in a recent article I have had published on the Silver Jubilee of Reform) that Reform always added '.... and to that end the reform of the CofE', according to our Covenant. That has in part led to AMiE! We are alert to the need to keep those within the CofE and those outside together in all this. Reform has always recognised a twin-track approach.

So, please, may I urge you to join Church Society and help this merger happen and work? The various paperwork and leaflets enclosed will, I hope, be helpful.

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