

Faithworks Awards

Monday 8th June, Members Dining Room

Thank you to Steve, and Alun for hosting us here today. I'm delighted to be here with them and with other parliamentary colleagues. Because this event provides great examples of a truth I believe in: that faith is a great starting point for serving your community; a great motivator for people to act in selfless, creative ways for the good of others. And we need more of it.

The nominees we are hearing about this afternoon brilliantly underline that belief – in their energy, creativity and commitment, church families serving their neighbours and communities.

It sometimes appears that people are only interested in serving themselves. Everybody here is demonstrating another way.

These are inspiring individuals and projects. Tom Wright, the Bishop of Durham, wrote a book last year called "*Surprised by Hope*". He said this:

"People who believe in the resurrection, in God making a whole new world in which everything will be set right at

last, are unstoppably motivated to work for that new world in the present.”

It is certainly the case that we are seeing today – as we have often seen in the history of Britain and of other countries – a rich profusion of initiatives to tackle social challenges which have as their starting point, as their motivation, faith in and worship of Christ. This is an important social movement, one whose significance has not yet been fully understood, but which I think is one of the most hopeful developments of our time.

And it is the beauty and profound truth of Christian service, that, as we serve others, we find true meaning and purpose and are blessed ourselves.

A New Movement

This new movement which Faithworks exemplifies holds out the real possibility of social transformation. It is a new social movement of faith based activism, and I would describe it like this:

- First, it is a grassroots movement. It doesn't have a centre or a cathedral – it isn't made up of celebrities, other than Steve –

but it is making itself felt across the country. It is largely about ordinary acts and hidden lives.

- Second, it is locally focused. It is rooted in a committed mutual community – a church – which is socially and culturally mixed, able to enlist people to move across the boundaries of their comfort zone.
- Third, it is rooted in worship. It does not consist of activists who happen to have had some background in Christianity. Rather it has right at its centre the person of Jesus Christ, and the activity of worship. That conveys to it vitality, energy and commitment.
- Fourth, it is interested in changing individuals. It plugs away, it doesn't abandon failures even if it looks foolish. It has a profound vision of what it means to be human, in faith that the ultimate destination of human history is in God's hands and that at that time, what is so plainly wrong today will be put right.

From individuals to society

And I think we can go further. When Gordon Brown appointed me as a Vice-Chair of the Labour Party for faith I think he did so for two reasons.

First it was a recognition of the important contribution that faith groups, like the projects we are celebrating here this afternoon, are already making in public life. He wanted to acknowledge that. Gordon hosted a reception at 10 Downing Street before Christmas to express thanks to those that had participated in Hope 2008.

But secondly he also wanted to encourage our faith contribution to do more and more. Because in Government, we see partnership with this movement as an opportunity to advance shared goals.

Christian concerns – for the vulnerable, for social justice, for family life – are also Government concerns.

So we are committed to:

- listening to faith communities and especially to the lessons you have learned as you serve others;
- seeking your help in shaping Government policy;
- working with you on shared goals.

So please bring what you have learned in this new social movement, and use your knowledge to help influence Government.

There is potential in each of these projects to transform individual lives and communities – there is potential through Government for transformation on a bigger scale. And you can help us do that. I want to encourage your greater involvement in policy development and in political debate. I want faith based activism increasingly to influence the renewal of our politics.

Around the G20 summit in April, faith groups have set out ideas for the kind of society we want to emerge from the current economic crisis. Some of them are on the official G20 website hosted by the Foreign Office, in a specific faith section.

The constitutional debates following the crisis of MPs expenses is another area where we need the views and the values of Christians to be expressed too. We need that for renewal truly to happen.

Conclusion

So I welcome the work that we are celebrating today, and I hope it will go further.

For your influence to grow in the communities where you are working. But also for your influence to grow as a movement of social activists, transforming and renewing our nation as you are transforming and renewing individual lives.

Congratulations to everyone being honoured by being invited to take part today. I know you have done so much to have got here. Have a well deserved, wonderful afternoon. And I look forward to even greater things to come.

Thank you.