

Singing the Faith Reference Group

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Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Decision
Draft Resolutions	107/1. The Council receives the report. 107/2. The Council appoints the membership of the Singing the Faith Reference Group as set out in section 4.4.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To update the Methodist Council on the work of the Singing the Faith Reference Group since its last report MC/12/89 and to seek agreement on the changes to the membership of the group
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A summary of the group's activities since October 2012 • A proposed name for a new chairperson • A proposed name for a new representative of the Faith and Order Committee • Any proposed changes to its Terms of Reference
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	www.singingthefaitplus.org.uk MC/11/102; MC/12/60; MC/12/89
Consultations	Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee

Summary of Impact

Standing Orders	None
Faith and Order	A new member of the Faith and Order network is appointed to the Singing the Faith Reference Group
Financial	None
Personnel	Two members of the Connexional Team are leaving; the Publishing and Fundraising Team Leader and the Marketing Coordinator are likely to be replaced by new appointees to the posts of Director of Publishing and Communications and Marketing Officer (in the Engagement Team).
Legal including impact on other jurisdictions	None
Wider Connexional	None
External (eg ecumenical)	None

Singing the Faith Reference Group

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Singing the Faith Reference Group (the Group) was established by the Methodist Council in October 2011 (MC/11/102). It reported to the Council in March 2012 (MC/12/60) and again in October 2012 (MC/12/89), at which time the membership of the Group was changed slightly and revised Terms of Reference were agreed.
- 1.2 This paper is to update the Council on the Group's activities since its last report and to seek the Council's approval of changes to its chair and membership.

2.0 Summary of the Group's activities

2.1 Terms of Reference for the Group (MC/12/89):

Objectives:

- i. To work with the Connexional Team in order to provide continuing support for *Singing the Faith*
 - To assist in answering queries about the printed collection
 - To advise on further exploitation of and possible editions of *Singing the Faith* including an organ edition and Braille versions
 - To advise on reprints and corrections
 - To advise on legal and copyright issues as appropriate
- ii. To develop and expand the *Singing the Faith Plus* website
 - To support the STF+ Editor and oversee their work
 - To advise the Editor on all hymn, song and music submissions
 - To provide advice on Faith and Order issues raised by new material
 - To review and assess proposals for new *Singing the Faith Plus* website content, for example short music files
- iii. To promote the use of *Singing the Faith* throughout the connexion
 - To review proposals for training events
 - To contribute to marketing plans and other promotional activity
 - To contribute to the regular e-newsletter
- iv. To oversee budget expenditure on *Singing the Faith Plus*

2.2 The group has continued to meet the objectives shown above, as detailed below.

2.3 Section i: there have been fewer queries about the printed collection of hymn books since the first editions were launched four years ago; Organ, Braille, Presentation and E-book editions have all been successfully launched since 2012; sales of all editions continue to hold up well with volumes in year 4 slightly exceeding volume sales in year 3. There are now more than 150,000 copies of the various editions of *Singing the Faith* in circulation. The work required to decide corrections for reprints has diminished as the majority of errors have now been found and corrected; copyright information continues to change, but the publishers, Hymns Ancient and Modern, take care of these updates. There are occasionally queries about infringement of the copyright vested in the collection, particularly from websites overseas, but these are usually quickly resolved.

- 2.4 Section ii: the Group has continued to support the STF+ Editor, Laurence Wareing, in his work on the *Singing the Faith Plus* website at www.singingthefaitplus.org.uk, agreeing new content and articles and, particularly, approving new hymns and songs submitted for inclusion on the site, advising on Faith and Order issues as necessary.
- 2.5 Section iii: the Group ran a very successful Creative Day, hosted by Coventry Central Hall in January 2013; this resulted in many ideas for new content for the website. The Group has also supported the Marketing Officer's ideas and plans for marketing initiatives, including a special price offer running up to the end of December 2012, a special offer bundle of the Words edition with the Methodist Prayer Handbook in 2014 and a dedicated prayer card. The Group has not subsequently organised any training days, but several smaller training events have been run by the Revd Paul Wood and the Revd Ian Worsfold. The Group has overseen the *Singing the Faith* piano accompaniment CDs project and is pleased to report that the first production run of 1,000 sets has now sold out and a second production run has just been delivered; the Group is grateful to Coventry Central Hall for underwriting the initial costs of the venture, which is now a profit-making exercise. A subset of the Group reviews and approves drafts of the regular *Singing the Faith* e-newsletter which is compiled by the Editor; it receives very positive feedback and enjoys one of the highest 'open' rates of e-newsletters issued by the Connexional Team.
- 2.6 Section iv: budget expenditure on *Singing the Faith Plus* is straightforward; most is allocated to the fees for the Editor, managed by the Publishing and Fundraising Team Leader, who also approves occasional expenses. The Group has not met in person since the Creative Day in 2013 so meeting expenses have been minimal. The Editor and the Marketing Officer have provided regular written reports and updates to the Group.

3.0 **Website *Singing the Faith Plus***

3.1 Content

- Site growth to date (see 3.2) has been based on:
 - building identifiable resources (lectionary / guitar chords / articles and information that support worship directly, eg for special Sundays)
 - refreshing featured content regularly
 - regular e-news and other publicity** .
- Site growth and support of *Singing the Faith* has been aided by the re-launch of the StF Facebook page (August 2014) and introduction of the Lectionary/StF+ link feature on the Methodist app (2013) and by the production and distribution of a short DVD with guidance on using the site (2014).
- The most used feature of the website is the suggestions of hymns to accompany the Sunday lectionary readings; a team of volunteers has now completed a full three-year cycle of suggestions for the main service 'related' lectionary; since June 2015, the team has begun adding suggestions for the 'continuous' lectionary.
- It became clear that praise bands and other instrumentalists wanted guitar chords in a format not available in the Music edition of *Singing the Faith*; to date 150 new chord sheets have been made available on the website.
- An online companion to *Singing the Faith* ('Hymnopedia') is being built up with the intention of providing further information (mainly about texts) and unique ideas for use for each hymn in the book; to date, 164 hymns have further information and ideas for use, and a further 67 posts have brief comments or links to other articles.
- In total, 86 new hymns have been published on the site, each one submitted to, and scrutinised by, a small sub-group.
- In June 2015, a process began of redesigning key pages for easier navigation.

- The website aims to help leaders of worship and those who use *Singing the Faith* for personal reflection or small group discussion make the most of its content: for example with articles grouped under 'Exploring Themes', and one-off guides such as 'Understanding hymn metre'.
- Other features include introductions to hymn writers (with an emphasis on interviews with contemporary writers) and a popular series of 'hymns and films' articles.
- The site has also benefited since December 2014 from some sponsorship from Methodist Insurance.

3.2 Statistics

- After the main website, *Singing the Faith Plus* is the most visited of the Methodist Church's websites.
- In the three years 16 September 2012 – 16 September 2015, there were over a million page views.
- Comparing the period 16 August – 16 September 2015 with the same period in 2012:
 - 166% increase in individual users
 - 133% increase in number of sessions ('hits') from 4,672 to 10,889
 - 786% increase in individuals accessing the site from a mobile or tablet.

**Peak viewing is often associated with the distribution of our e-news, of which 20 editions have been emailed (on average once every two months) since October 2012 to a mailing list now standing at 3,939. As well as highlighting new content on the website, the e-news supports the development and marketing of new *Singing the Faith* resources, including the piano accompaniment CDs, and the Organ, Braille, Presentation and E-book editions.

3.3 Future developments

- Further page redesign relating to new hymns will take place in autumn 2015.
- An increase in the number of guitar chord sheets and Hymnopedia notes is planned.
- StF+ is the 'go to' website for enquiries relating to copyright and the Electronic Words Edition of *Singing the Faith*: we plan to consolidate and clarify the response we are able to give in these areas.

4.0 Proposed changes to the Group

- 4.1 Chair: the Group has been very ably chaired by the Revd Paul Wood since its inception in 2011, but since then, Paul has joined the Connexional Team as the Ministries Development Coordinator so it is no longer appropriate for him to chair this Group. It is proposed that the role be taken on by the Revd Ian Worsfold, who has indicated his willingness to be involved. His former membership of the Music Resources Group will bring welcome continuity.
- 4.2 Faith and Order: the Revd Adrian Burdon has served on the Group since 2011 but in the light of his stepping down from his responsibilities as the Convenor of the Faith and Order Worship and Liturgy Subcommittee, it is timely that he be replaced on this Group. It is proposed that the Revd Mark Rowland join the Group. Mark has been a member of the Faith and Order Worship and Liturgy Subcommittee for several years, and has now taken over the role of Convenor.
- 4.3 Connexional Team staff: following the restructuring within the Mission and Advocacy Cluster of the Connexional Team, Suzanne Johnson, Marketing Coordinator, left the Team on 8 September 2015, and Sarah Bennison, Publishing and Fundraising Team Leader, is leaving on 31 December 2015. It is proposed that they are replaced by new appointees to the roles of

Marketing Officer (in the Engagement Team) and Director of Publishing and Communications when these posts are recruited.

4.4 The proposed revised membership of the Group is therefore as follows:

The Revd Ian Worsfold	Chair, previous member of MRG
The Revd Mark Rowland	Faith and Order
Anna Howe	A circuit youth worker
The Revd Andrew Murphy	A circuit minister and hymn writer
Rob Newton	ArtServe board member and musician
The Revd Paul Wood	Connexional Team, previous chair of the group
Laurence Wareing	Freelance, Singing the Faith Plus Editor
David Webster	Connexional Team, web expertise
Steve Pearce	Connexional Team, World Church Relationships Team
<i>Name pending recruitment</i>	Connexional Team, Director of Publishing and Communications
<i>Name pending recruitment</i>	Connexional Team, Marketing Officer

***RESOLUTIONS

107/1. The Council receives the report of the Singing the Faith Reference Group.

107/2. The Council appoints the membership of the Singing the Faith Reference Group as set out in section 4.4.