

Women's Network in the Methodist Church

Basic Information

Contact Name and Details	Gillian Pengelly Gillian.pengelly@ntlworld.com
Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Information/Discussion
Draft Resolution	To reflect on report, offer feedback and recommend the report to the Conference.
Alternative Options to Consider, if Any	N/A

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	Information on current position of Women's Network following Team Focus.
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current position of Women's Network The proposed changes to "Methodist Women in Britain" as a continuing and active network within the Methodist Church operating independent of oversight from the Connexional Team.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	<p>April 2008: Council Paper MC/08/31: Report to the Council concerning the future of Women's Network</p> <p>July 2008: Conference Paper 37 (Team Focus Report) and Paper 38 (Methodist Council Report)</p>
Consultations	Connexional Women's Network Committee, The World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women (WFMUCW) - British Unit, Women's Network committees in Districts and Circuits, individual supporters of Women's Network and WFMUCW.

Summary of Impact

Standing Orders	SO 350 will need to be changed to reflect the new situation.
Faith and Order	N/A
Financial	Women's Network is in the transition to organising its own affairs, and from September 2010 there will be no Connexional Team officer with the responsibility of providing support.
Personnel	Women's Network have already appointed their own administrator, line managed by the President of Women's Network.
Legal	N/A
Wider Connexional	Women's Network is active throughout the Connexion, and the changes reported here will have a wide impact.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	N/A
Risk	While much has been done to enable women throughout the Connexion to understand the changes which Team Focus brought about, there are many who still struggle with these, or express concerns about how it will work out in the long term. The Connexional Committee has worked very hard to consult and inform the Network, but there is a risk that some women will be demoralised if the Network cannot communicate its vision and establish its new ways of working quickly enough.

Report from Women's Network in the Methodist Church to Methodist Council

Introduction

1. Women's Network is a movement for women within the Methodist Church. Following Team Focus and the decisions of the Methodist Council and Methodist Conference in 2008, it has significantly moved forward in organising its own affairs and preparing to work without relying on a Connexional Team officer to provide support.
2. The expectation among Women's Network supporters was that the movement would continue to follow its mission statement to encourage, enable and equip women to participate fully in the life of the Church and in society, supporting the Church to become truly the whole people of God. In order to make a difference to the life of the Church, Women's Network will:
 - 2.1. encourage, by prayer, meditation and study, the strengthening of relationships, the sharing of experiences, and the building up of one another in faith;
 - 2.2. enable growth by the challenge of vision and stewardship, by enriching commitment, by receiving the insights of others, and by offering information and resources;
 - 2.3. equip women for mission, by deepening understanding, by recognising and linking gifts and needs;
 - 2.4. operate in a manner that is flexible, vibrant, transparent, creative and participative.

The Present Situation

3. Women's Network has for 22 years been a source of nurture for many women who have offered for leadership within the Methodist Church. The movement has also encouraged women to take practical steps to understand and confront issues affecting women across the world.
4. The annual Easter Offering Dedication Service is written by the Past President and often highlights women's issues and offers insights. It is also a very comprehensive worship resource, offering creativity visually and through music, drama, dance and stories. The Easter Offering is widely distributed and the substantial financial support to the World Mission Fund (approx £400,000 a year) is a testimony to the commitment of supporters of Women's Network. Currently this amount is matched by undesignated giving to the World Mission Fund through Women's Network.
5. In recent years, Women's Network has highlighted issues such as Domestic Violence and Trafficking. These issues have been taken up both nationally and locally and the movement has gained credibility with other denominations and also with politicians.
6. Women's Network has empowered women to take on issues and find solutions on many fronts. There are hundreds of projects undertaken in Districts, Circuits and local churches every year offering practical support and finance in the fields of education, training, health and human rights. Many of these projects are not officially recognised, but they are all undertaken in the name of Women's Network in the Methodist Church.

Planning for Change – working together

7. The Women's Network Connexional Committee has looked at ways in which the movement could organise its own affairs without relying on a Connexional Team officer to provide support, while at the same time continue to be effective and proactive within the Church.
8. The Connexional Committee considered closer working with World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women (WFMUCW). All three British Unit Officers were invited to join the Connexional Committee (previously, only the British Unit President had been invited). WFMUCW invited the President designate to join the President and Connexional Secretary of Women's Network on the British Unit Executive. This gave greater understanding about the aims and objectives of both movements and it became clear that Women's Network had much in common with WFMUCW.
9. Both organisations jointly participated in consultation days during 2009 and their Officers were visibly supportive of each other both at the Women's Network Swanwick Conference in April and the WFMUCW Joint Areas European Conference in Glasgow in May. To take this closer working further, a joint Conference event was held in Wolverhampton.
10. All of these events were well supported and the opportunity was taken to discuss the future of Women's Network and closer working with WFMUCW. As a result a joint residential conference is planned for Swanwick in April 2010 where the theme will be "Moving and Travelling On".
11. The Officers of both organisations have consulted and prepared a paper on new ways of working which incorporates the aims and objectives of both Women's Network and WFMUCW.
12. The paper was presented to district officers and supporters who attended the consultation days in June 2009 in Manchester and London. The Connexional Committee worked on feedback to the initial proposals in September 2009 and a second paper has been widely circulated. Districts and Circuits have been asked to comment by January 2010. Feedback received to date is positive and a decision on the new ways of working will be made by the Women's Network Connexional Committee this month.
13. One of the suggestions from within the constituency is that if the organisations unite the new movement should have a new name, and "**Methodist Women in Britain**" is the most popular choice.
14. A main feature of a united movement would be that the movement will be owned, directed, supported and nurtured by Methodist women in the Districts, with District representatives forming a Methodist Women in Britain Forum.

Planning for Change – finance

15. During this period of consultation and working closer with WFMUCW, the Women's Network Project Officer and President have been in the process of seeking grants through the Methodist Church Connexional Grants Committee to fund the transitional costs of a) a part-time Administrator and b) start up costs for the new structure. Currently a grant has been awarded for the administrator for 3 years and she started work in November.

16. Finance has been one of the main concerns within the constituency. Reports from Districts advise that women want to maintain the current high-level of support for the World Mission Fund while at the same time funding administrative costs for the movement.

Planning for Change – communication

17. We issued our Autumn Newsletter via the last Connexional Link Mailing and to District and Circuit Officers and supporters. We are currently working on a further Link Mailing insert on discipleship. Our newly appointed Administrator keeps Connexional Committee up to date with national issues and Area Representatives give regular updates from their Areas. She is the process of updating all our District and Circuit contacts and our web site. Following each Connexional Meeting a briefing paper is issued to all Districts.

Conclusion

18. Although there is still much to do, we are confident about the future. We know we need to be prudent about administrative costs, and carefully plan events on a self funding basis. But we are ready to take on the challenges of organising our own affairs, so that we continue to encourage, enable and equip women to participate fully in the life of the Church and in society, supporting the Church to become truly the whole people of God.