

## Singing the Faith Reference Group

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<b>Resolutions</b>	58/1. The Council receives the report. 58/2. The Council appoints the Singing the Faith Reference Group as set out in paragraph 4.1. 58/3. The Council adopts the revised terms of reference for the Singing the Faith Reference Group, as set out in paragraph 2.1.

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and Aims</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To update the Methodist Council on the work of the Singing the Faith Reference Group since its last report MC/15/107.</li> <li>2. To seek agreement on the changes to the membership of the group</li> <li>3. To seek agreement on amended Terms of Reference</li> </ol>
<b>Main Points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A summary of the group's activities since October 2015</li> <li>• Highlighting the migration of the website to the main Methodist Church website</li> <li>• Noting the revised membership and update to the Terms of Reference</li> </ul>
<b>Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)</b>	Previous Website: <a href="http://www.singingthefaithplus.org.uk">www.singingthefaithplus.org.uk</a> ; New Website: <a href="http://www.methodist.org.uk/stfplus">www.methodist.org.uk/stfplus</a> Previous Council Reports: MC/11/102; MC/12/60; MC/12/89; MC/15/107
<b>Consultations</b>	Within the Group and with the Liturgical Sub-Group of Faith and Order Committee

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	Likely: Freelance editorial fees and Reference Group expenses already budgeted. Additional financial commitments may need to be sought as the website and supporting materials develop, e.g. revised e-pub editions, PowerPoint edition.
<b>Personnel</b>	Confirmed: Note personnel changes within the Connexional Team (Report: 4.2)
<b>Wider Connexional</b>	Confirmed: Migration of site to <a href="http://www.methodist.org.uk/stfplus">www.methodist.org.uk/stfplus</a>
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	Confirmed: Migration of site to <a href="http://www.methodist.org.uk/stfplus">www.methodist.org.uk/stfplus</a>

## Singing the Faith Reference Group

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Brief background of the Group: the Singing the Faith Reference Group (the Group) was established by the approval of the Methodist Council in October 2011 (MC/11/102). It reported to the Council in March 2012 (MC/12/60), again in October 2012 (MC/12/89), and most recently in October 2015 (MC/15/107), at which time changes to the membership of the Group were proposed and agreed.
- 1.2 Purpose of this paper: this paper is to update the Council on the Group's activities since its last report in 2015, to seek the Council's approval of changes to its membership and to the Terms of Reference.

### 2.0 Summary of the Group's activities:

- 2.1 A reminder of the Terms of Reference for the Group (MC/12/89) including proposed changes as indicated:

#### 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<sup>1</sup>
  - To advise on reprints and<sup>2</sup> 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 his or her 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 **especially where content might support other activities, eg WL&P<sup>3</sup>**
- 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, as detailed below.

- 2.3 *Section i:* While requests have slowed down in the intervening years, there are still occasional copyright queries regarding those items in StF which are not noted as covered by either CCLI or One License (formally Calmus), as well as queries regarding PowerPoint and printed materials. We continue to explore other possible editions, particularly as technology develops.

- 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, formerly at [www.singingthefaitplus.org.uk](http://www.singingthefaitplus.org.uk) and now incorporated into the main Methodist website at [www.methodist.org.uk/stfplus](http://www.methodist.org.uk/stfplus). This represents a major piece of work, resulting in a relaunch, and a new refreshed website opening up new possibilities of development. A further development has been the addition of 30 second midi file clips allowing site

<sup>1</sup> These editions have been achieved.

<sup>2</sup> Corrections are still being suggested, reprints are now unlikely.

<sup>3</sup> The short music files are in operation. The additional change reflects current conversation within the group.

users to listen to a flavour of each item in StF. The addition of a 'forward' and 'back' navigation option makes this much easier to use. The group has been available to advise on 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:* Members of the group have responded to local invitations to lead workshops and Local Preacher/Worship leader study days on using StF. 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 Director of Engagement, who also approves occasional expenses. The group has developed a routine of meeting annually, with additional meetings only as required, so meeting expenses have been minimal. The Editor and the Marketing Executive have provided regular written reports and updates to the group.

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

#### **3.1 Overview**

Ongoing engagement with the Singing the Faith Plus website continues to be encouraging. The site has grown year on year since its inception in April 2011, and annual page views have doubled in frequency since our 2015 report to the Council. This degree of success impacted the ability of the existing website infrastructure to meet demand and informed the Reference Group's decision to redevelop the site and migrate it to a new platform.

Singing the Faith Plus now sits within the main Methodist website, allowing smoother integration with other Methodist resources while still maintaining its unique brand and identity. The Reference Group, in consultation with relevant partners in the Connexional Team, has overseen the expansion of StF as a hub for all online worship materials, so offering a focused one-stop-shop for those planning and developing local worship.

The redevelopment offered an opportunity for a genuine re-launch of a resource that has significantly enhanced the impact made by *Singing the Faith* on the worship life of the Methodist Church since 2011.

#### **3.2 Content**

Prior to the site redevelopment in autumn 2019:

- a. Site growth was based on:
  - i. Building identifiable resources (lectionary / guitar chords / articles and information) that supports worship directly, e.g. for special Sundays.
  - ii. Refreshing featured content regularly.
  - iii. Regular e-news and other publicity.
- b. A significant new resource has been the addition of 30 sec. audio clips for each hymn in *Singing the Faith*.
- c. Important new content has been added at the request of the Connexional Team:
  - i. Climate and Creation (building on the 2009 *Hope in God's Future* report); ii. worship resources to support reflection on the 2019 Conference report, *God in Love Unites Us. We envisage StF+ continuing to respond to the priorities of the Methodist Conference and Our Calling*.
- d. Remembrance Sunday resources have been especially well used since 2014, notably in 2018 with its focus on the Centenary of the Armistice.
- e. The most used feature of the website remains the Lectionary hymn suggestions facility; a team of volunteers offers suggestions for both 'related' and 'continuous' lectionary options.

- f. Over one hundred new hymns have been published on the site, each one submitted to, and scrutinised by, a small sub-group, which includes a member of the Faith and Order Committee. Detailed feedback is provided to all contributors, whether submissions are published or not.

### 3.3 Statistics

- a. After the main website, *Singing the Faith Plus* has been the most visited of the Methodist Church's websites.
- b. In the four years 1 September 2015 – 1 October 2019, there were 2.4 million **page views**. This compares with just over one million page views in the previous three years: almost double the number of views/year.
- c. In the year 2018-19 the **number of site users** increased by 27% to 127,036 *cf.* 180,000 active members of a local Methodist church in Britain.<sup>4</sup>
- d. Resources related to liturgical seasons and events continue to attract special attention e.g. Holy Week 2019 (3.4k users).
- e. The great majority of site users are based in the UK or the US, with other significant cohorts in Australia and Canada. However, we have seen a recent growth in use in Nigeria, India and South Africa.
- f. It is worth noting the increase of access to the site from **mobile phones and tablets**. Though desktops/laptop use remains the largest method for reaching StF+, during September 2019 there was a 148% increase in the use of mobiles and tablets compared with the same period in 2015, against a 49% increase in desktop use.

### 3.4 Website redevelopment

The redevelopment of *Singing the Faith Plus* was a response to its own success, which brought both positive and challenging consequences. Over eight years, the website has been proactive in encouraging widespread use and exploration of the 2011 hymnbook. More broadly, it has supported the overarching aims of *Our Calling*; in particular, helping local congregations to increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love through creative and informed worship.

However, by April 2019, the website was also showing increasing signs of old age. Its search facility was drawing increased criticism, despite attempts to improve it. Some plugins were no longer functioning, and pieces of code had become incompatible with other changes on the server. Technical difficulties became especially pronounced in the summer of 2018, resulting in slow running speed, an inability to edit content, and some users unable to access the site at all.

A decision was made to rebuild the site. The Reference Group considered the pros and cons of two options:

- a. Creating a new, independent StF+ website on a fresh CMS platform – the same platform that has been used for the redesigned Methodist website.
- b. Integrating StF+ into the Methodist website as a defined and branded sub-section.

The decision was made to pursue an "integrated" option, on the grounds that this would:

- a. Reinforce the positive experience of the Methodist website and increase overall footfall.
- b. Tie up content more smoothly – for example, seamless connection with other Methodist worship/reflection resources eg Word in Time; Prayer Wall.
- c. Strengthen the Methodist site's Google rankings.

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<sup>4</sup> Methodism in Numbers – Statistics at a Glance, July 2018 <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/statistics-for-mission/overview/>

- d. Highlight the Methodist gift (charism) of hymnody to the wider Christian community, offering a fresh opportunity to provide some positive content on music in worship, which is frequently requested.
- e. Offer an economy of maintenance.

At the same time, this move provided the opportunity to build a focused, more integrated online hub for worship, refreshing what is available on the Methodist website as a whole and drawing attention to particular resources that have become underused despite their continuing value. Building on Singing the Faith Plus’s excellent track record, we believe the new hub will lend even greater online support to the worship imperative made explicit in *Our Calling*.

### 3.5 Future developments

- a. Electronic editions of *Singing the Faith*: in line with the greater use of mobiles and tablets (3.2.f. above), attention needs to be given to how our hymns and other worship resources are made available most usefully.
- b. New hymns: a reassessment of existing new hymns on StF+ is required, with consideration given to their future use.
- c. Fresh content priorities:
  - i. Guitar chords, utilizing small group of volunteers.
  - ii. ‘Ideas for use’ to accompany hymn information.

### 4.0 Membership of the Group

The changes are indicated in the table below, including changes to personnel in the Connexional Team. Due to previous resignations there is currently an imbalance in the group in gender and ethnic diversity, which the Council may wish us to address.

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

The Revd Ian Worsfold	Chair, previous member of the Music Resources Group	
<del>The Revd Mark Rowland</del>	<del>Faith and Order</del>	Resigned – new F&O Rep being sought
Anna Howe	A circuit youth worker	
<del>The Revd Andrew Murphy</del>	<del>A circuit minister and hymn writer</del>	Resigned
Rob Newton	ArtServe board member and musician	
The Revd Paul Wood	Connexional Team, previous Group chair	
Laurence Wareing	Freelance, Singing the Faith Plus Editor	
David Webster	Connexional Team, web expertise	
Steve Pearce	<del>Connexional Team, World Church Relationships Team</del>	Resigned
Andy Jackson	<del>Connexional Team, Director of Publishing and Communications</del>	Left Connexional Team
Jo Hibbard	Connexional Team, Director of Engagement	New appointment
Viv Wickham	Connexional Team, Marketing Executive	Left Connexional Team
<i>Name pending recruitment</i>	Connexional Team, Marketing Executive	

**\*\*\*RESOLUTIONS**

**58/1. The Council receives the report.**

**58/2. The Council appoints the Singing the Faith Reference Group as set out in paragraph 4.1.**

**58/3. The Council adopts the revised terms of reference for the Singing the Faith Reference Group, as set out in paragraph 2.1.**