

BACKGROUND TO NEW SONG NETWORK

If you know little about New Song Network (NSN) it would be helpful to read this before the Application paper.

HOW NEW SONG NETWORK BEGAN

In 2009 a Sunday evening worship centred around singing, coffee and fellowship was arranged at Bold Street Methodist Mission by the minister, and circuit Fresh Expressions Missioner, Rev Jackie Bellfield. (See Appendix for more about Fresh Expressions). This was anticipated to be a stepping stone to having worship in a Costa café. It was expected that perhaps 25 people would turn up. When 65 turned up there had to be a speedy move to a bigger room. At this monthly gathering numbers rapidly increased to become what is New Song Café (NSC). Numbers have continued to increase to the extent that in December 2013 NSC moved from the hall to the larger sanctuary at Bold Street Mission. As of December 2013 the average attendance is 140 with a maximum of 170.

Alongside the growth of NSC other areas of work developed which have formed the Network. Discipleship is a monthly meeting with discussions about issues of faith. New Song Breakfast (NSB) began in 2011 meeting monthly and in its first year used the 4 areas of "Our Calling" as the themes for its worship. On Mothering Sunday, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day free refreshments are served at Warrington crematorium and one of the cemeteries – Hot Drinks Ministry: a service appreciated not just by those laying tributes to their loved ones at those places but also the council's Bereavement Services. Other work in the community is carried out by the Community Action Team. Bible study sessions and Advent and Lent groups have been held in a local café and house groups are becoming established; there has been a fellowship day away and a weekend away. In addition there are social activities: a walking group, quizzes, meals out. Building relationships is key along with strong small groups. NSN is doing the things that a church does but differently.

The following quote from Henri Nouwen could have been written with New Song Network in mind:

'But I wonder more and more if the first thing shouldn't be to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to listen to their stories and tell your own, and to let them know with words, handshakes, and hugs that you do not simply like them, but truly love them'.

CONCEPT OF NETWORK

The steady growth of café has engendered a growing and thriving community connected through the varying activities offered under the banner of New Song. The variety of activities offered brought together a core of individuals who either found at New Song a church community they could be part of for the first time or those no longer attending any other church who found New Song to be what they were searching for. Individuals attending Café had confidence to bring their family, friends and work colleagues and the community began to grow. The "network" of activities allowed individuals to be part of this community - dipping their feet in whilst making friends and drawing alongside others. Some people attend one or two activities whilst others attend almost everything and together a diverse community has been created. So much so that 100 people booked for the New Song weekend away in February 2014.

New Song Network has shown itself capable of being a major player in the organising of and involvement in large scale events such as the Connexional "Connected Worship" conference of November 2012; alongside the Rev Stephen Kingsnorth with a service at the Halliwell Jones stadium which attracted 1400 people to welcome the Samoan rugby league team who were staying in Warrington in October 2013; as the band for the Methodist Homes service with Pam Rhodes in November 2013.

New Song Network has used the learning from the 2000 Methodist Church conference and "Our Calling" to bring structure and coordinate thinking to work towards a clear plan for the future from the emergent energy that Café generated. Not only has "Our Calling" been referenced through worship but it is the blue

print by which the Network is growing. It also provides the framework against which the leadership team challenges itself to pursue new areas of activity and prioritise areas for sustaining growth.

Referring to church life, traditionally the Nicene Creed refers to : One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church; Our Calling refers to the four areas of Worship, Learning and Caring, Service and Evangelism. Fresh Expressions talks in terms of :

- an [UP dimension](#) in connectedness to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit - a Holy church;
- an [IN dimension](#) in fellowship and community - a Christian community that is at one;
- an [OUT dimension](#) in mission, broadly defined - an Apostolic church;
- an [OF dimension](#) – being part of the whole body of Christ, round the world and in history - a Catholic church.

Reflecting on the four areas in whatever way they are presented is not enough at New Song. Having an activity under each heading is not enough at New Song. It is important that whatever is done is done with passion, there is an aspiration, that the talents that every individual brings are valued and that a community is built where all feel welcome and are welcome. At New Song it is insufficient to say "we do that", but more importantly to say "How can we become better in that area" and then do it.

Having said all of this about the Warrington context of New Song Network, what has been done in Warrington can be replicated elsewhere: New Song London and Tamworth were explored and New Song Prescott has been created with a monthly café service. "New Song Network" may become a connecting point for other new song café events too.

APPENDIX 1

If you wish to understand more about Fresh Expressions see: <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk>

'Stories' will enable you to search for NSN and the examples given below.

'Guide' is an excellent introduction to Fresh Expressions.

Below are some examples of Fresh Expressions which have become, or are in the process of becoming, a church. However it must be realised that no two Fresh Expressions are the same as each other and they all have different experiences, challenges, strengths and weaknesses.

Mind the Gap, Gateshead

This Fresh Expression started in 2001 and became a church in 2009. Small numbers with mainly cell group working.

The Welcome, Knutsford

After 15 years as a Fresh Expressions The Welcome became a church in September 2012. There are 16 members (July 2013) and the two most recent additions are dual members – one from Knutsford Methodist Church and the other is an Anglican.

Church @ Community, Nottingham

Started in 2010 and is currently looking at becoming a church. They have a strong relationship with their circuit and are able to ask questions such as: 'What will our financial commitment be as we have one of the biggest congregations in the Circuit? This is a Fresh Expression, how is the Circuit going to support this?'

23 January 2014