

Paper M1

Resourcing worship research

General Secretariat

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Richard Church richard.church@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	A worship reference group be set up: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• to respond to requests from churches• to curate existing resources• to maintain a regular worship mailing with updates, news, and links to good worship practice

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The paper introduces research findings and suggests a way of meeting the needs revealed in them.
Main points	As resolution.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council, March 2018, Paper M1.
Consultation has taken place with...	Faith and order; Synod Moderators; Walking the Way steering group; CYDOs; URC Music; URC Spirituality; TDOs.

Summary of impact

Financial	Meeting costs around 1,000 pounds per year.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

Resourcing worship

1. We set out to ask about worship in the United Reformed Church and the potential need to support individuals charged with preparing and leading worship. Our basic research question was whether the URC as a whole, and in particular parts, needs specific worship support, and more particularly how people are learning about and being supported to lead worship in the absence of a central URC group since the loss of the doctrine, prayer and worship committee.
2. Because worship is the one thing in which every member of the URC engages, no matter the style or setting, it seemed right to reach every strand of interest in the URC. A small group representing Walking the Way, Stepwise, discipleship, and faith and order, with reference to the URC General Secretariat, formed a list of interested parties, set out in tables on following pages. This helped us identify

groups and individuals to contact and it gave us, in the way of research polls, a thorough cross-section of the opinion of the whole church.

Sample size

- The data sampling results are shown in the appendix. Here we report on the reach of the research. The responses numbered 84 representing over 300 individuals. As each focus group/committee had a good size membership for discussion, and most SOARs were done by groups of people, we can cautiously estimate that over 336 individuals contributed to the research, with 76% of the stakeholder groups participating. Though we can't say that the research touched even 1% of the membership, we can say that over three quarters of the identified interested parties in worship were reached.

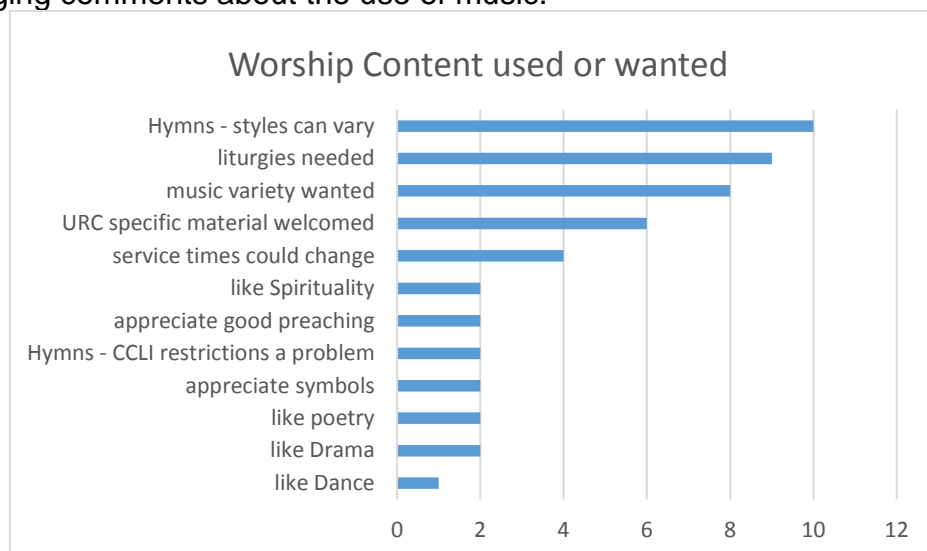
Methodology

- To determine whether there was a need to resource worship leaders, we decided to gain information from individuals, URC journals, and URC social media, using a range of methods to allow us to ask only a few questions from those who feel burdened, and ask more nuanced questions of both existing information and individuals. Finally, we agreed to conduct the analysis by one or two people to summarise the findings and to conduct a small learning exchange from different interest groups to see the summaries and to consider in what direction the URC might be encouraged to be led.

Findings

- The themes mentioned in the chart below arose from statements where people talked about what they already used, had appreciated, and had found frustrating.

Putting the two themes of hymn style and music together, we can see wide ranging comments about the use of music.



“Music has tended to be very traditional with very few more modern worship hymns/songs known or included”. and “standard of music is usually fairly low, with weak or non-existent choirs and music groups. If a traditional hymnbook is in use, it is normally Rejoice and Sing, but various editions of Mission Praise and Songs of Fellowship are often used.”

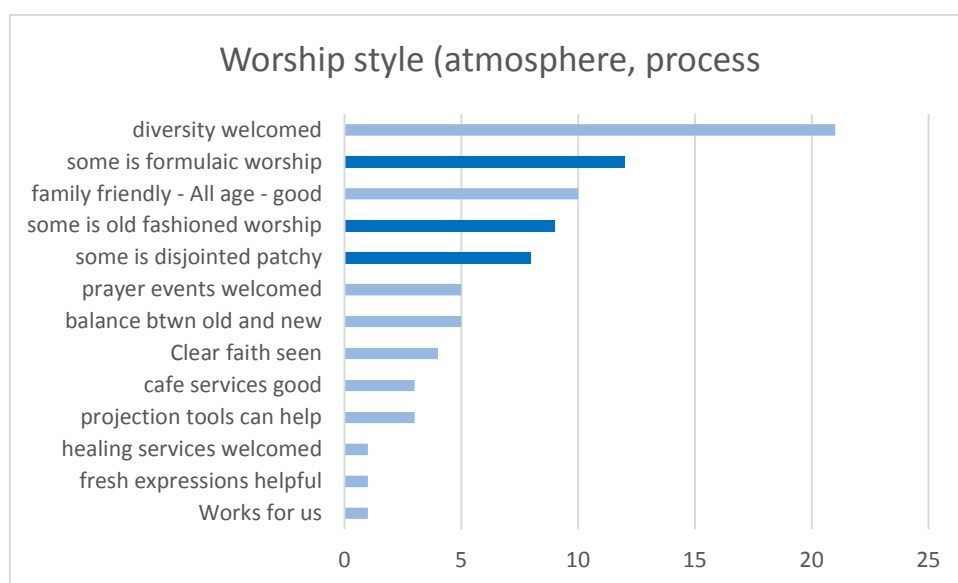
Suggestions were for words and music that are more suitable in 21st century i.e. “which touched the soul and ring accord.” People like to “sing new words to familiar tunes, like to sing hymns outside of Rejoice and Sing, and we sing with joy and enjoyment” and there is an appeal for no more “hymn sandwich” order of services, freer imaginative weekly services especially mid-week. One noted, “some modern hymns we learn by singing them – sometimes we sing them once and then not again which is a pity”

Specific liturgy needed was:

- More material for leading worship with teens
- Prayers that are meaningful today
- It would be good to have more resources ready tailored for projection – film clips, reflections accompanied by pictures. Finding these can be very time consuming
- Morning Prayer resources, similar to the one used by the C of E, suggestions for more Contemplative Worship, some resources for children), art resources for young people and adults
- I would find some good, adaptable prayers useful, as I find myself increasingly struggling to write any that say anything new, especially when it comes to the Intercessory prayers.

The desire for more diversity was the biggest comment about style. Added to the negative comments that worship could be formulaic, old fashioned, and disjointed, there was a very clear need expressed for new approaches to worship. Some liked a balance between old and new, and a few mentioned specific service types. Café style and Messy worship were noted many times either as good, or as an aspiration.

There was encouragement to churches to be more relaxed and flexible in approach and less reliant on feeding all worshippers through one Sunday morning service. Appeals were made for worship on varying days of the week, to allow worship to move to include everyday things, and not always be held in a set aside space. Many comments hoped to change the worship environment, to make it warm, comfortable, inspiring and flexible.



One group of churches made a commitment to have more diversity of substance and style [e.g. healing; themed; cafe services], more participation and involvement by the congregation, to develop the use of music, re-instate the Worship Group, and to offer more opportunities to meet in prayer

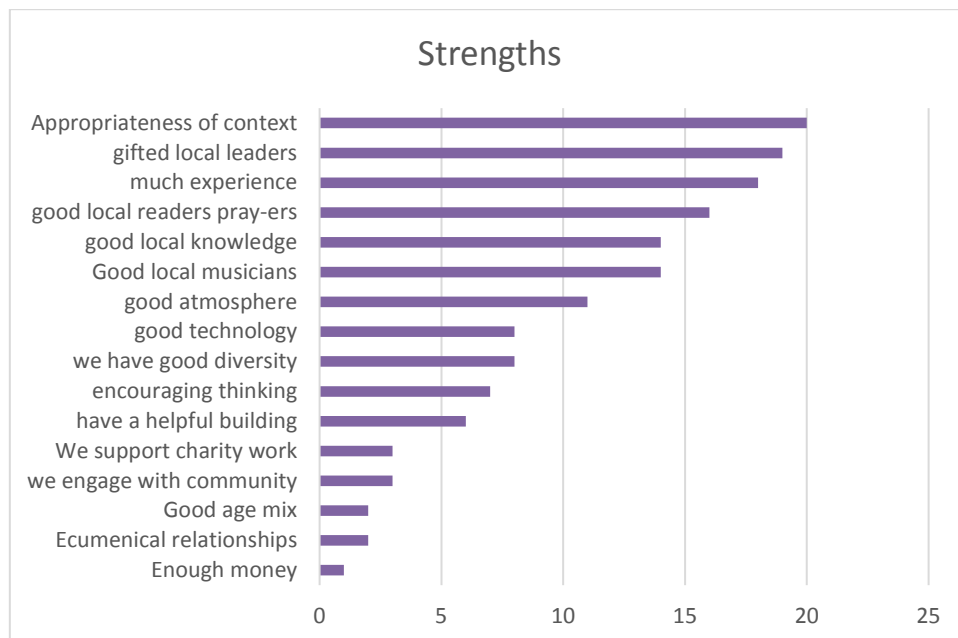
One group appealed for a greater sense of whole worship e.g. Confession and absolution, thanksgiving and intercession, not just 'praise'

An interviewee noted that, "In a minority of places, worship uses predominantly 20th century songs and musical styles (with a few embracing the 21st century!), a more informal style of leadership, only one Bible reading rather than two, and more interaction with the congregation. These services are often longer than in more traditional churches and sometimes involve teenagers and children. In some churches, particularly where there is a significant BME dimension to the congregation, people join and leave as the service progresses."

For those who are concerned about worship leader variety, this is notable; "Different styles [are] appreciated. We have some visiting preachers, as well as our own minister, which give variety and a different dimension."

A SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Resources) process was used and the following tables chart responses:

A significant number of people felt that the worship they experienced, or led, was appropriate to context and had gifted people to help shape and deliver it. There was good atmosphere, some (!) good technology and encouragement. One congregation noted that there was enough money to do worship well.



People talked much about authentic worship, full of praise and faith affirmations, about appropriate music to situation and members. A number wrote of good inclusion of the local community.

Opportunities

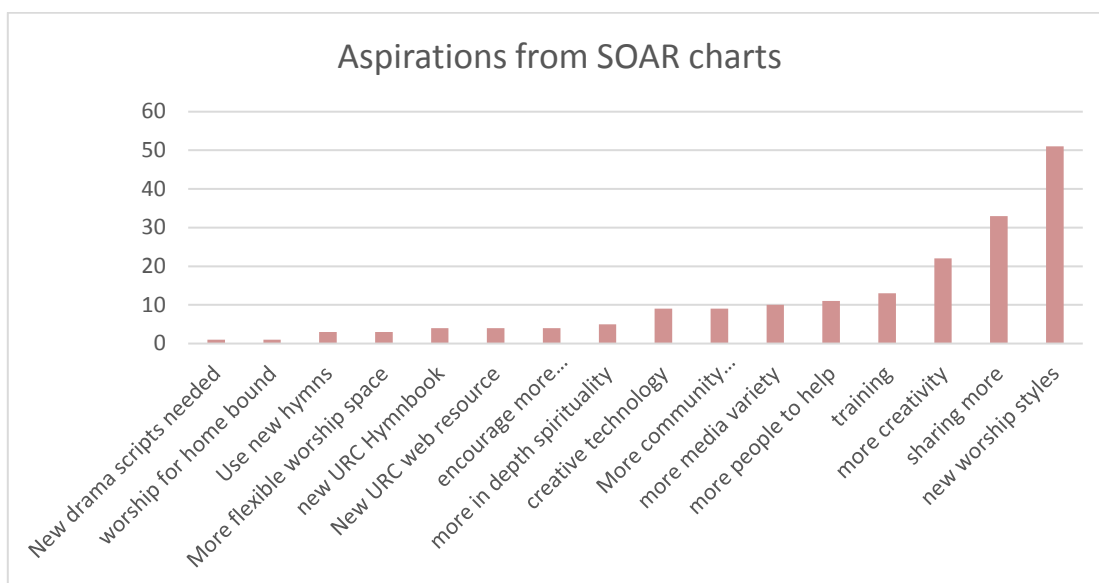
It has to be said that not many people noted opportunities which already existed to enhance or change worship. Five respondents say that worship is taken outside of churches, though that rises to seven with the addition of taking churches to homes.



Aspirations

Without doubt, leaders and congregational members want new worship styles, more sharing between leader and congregation, and more creativity. A worship leader noted, "People often ask me if I think the church will die out, I always reply 'no', but that I think it will (and has to) change." There were appeals for flexibility, worship carried out in fresh,

different ways, training, more involvement with the community, and more creative technology.



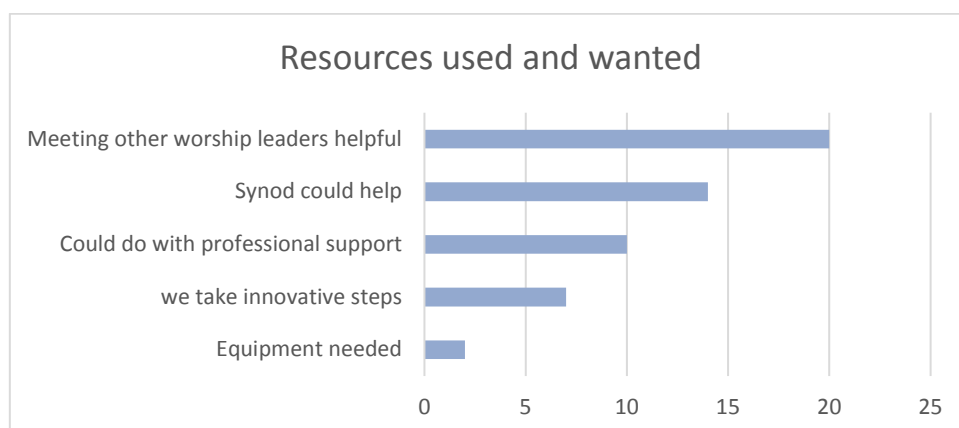
There were a significant number of comments about having silent, reflective moments during worship. Some wanted more interactive services with more time given to the

congregation, where sermons can include questions and answers. There were noted aspirations for messy church, café church, breakfast church, early morning services for young families, fellowship worship over lunch or tea/coffee, faith breakfasts, Bible lunches, and flexibility in worship is held to accommodate a variety of lifestyles.

There was an appeal to revise worship theology to be more Reformed, with “more about the WORD of God, not just entertainment and stories.”

A few wished for a wider array of liturgical resources with various visual and dramatic presentations.

Resources



Gathering worship leaders together was a significant opinion. Some either attend or want regular synod worship meetings to share good practice and “chew the fat on the lectionaries”, with many noting that being able to share experiences with other worship leaders is always helpful.

There were suggestions to encourage and fund in-service training for preachers, drawing on quality scholars and other resources ecumenically, not reinventing wheels denominationally.

All this data was presented at the learning exchange day. The main themes were clear: a desire for more diversity in times of public worship; creative approaches to be adopted,

with the opportunity to meet others engaged in worship preparation particularly valued for the dissemination of new materials and fresh approaches. However, participants in the learning exchange day also asked how these developments might be fostered within the Church.

Conclusions

In the light of the helpful results from the research it seemed that the most practical way to carry forward the work was to form a small but representative worship reference group of six to eight people. The purpose of the group would be to: curate and advocate quality worship resources, linking with Walking the Way and eventually, with Stepwise Faith Filled Worship. Three objectives were identified:

- a) Curate and disseminate good worship practice, including bespoke liturgies for specific occasions as diverse as mayoral inductions, crematoria remembrance services, and even messy church baptisms!
- b) Support worship preparation, by gathering worship leaders in every synod who could support worship development within synods
- c) Maintain a regular worship mailing with updates, news, and links to good worship practice, resources and examples.

Such a group would be accountable to the faith and order committee. By this means, the church can create a body which would exercise a proactive concern for the development of collective worship throughout the denomination.

To assist it in its work, it is envisaged that the group would meet physically at least twice a year and at other times by video conferencing. It will keep Mission Council/General Assembly informed of developments by reporting regularly through the faith and order committee.

Appendix: data collection methods

Data streams (type of data collected)

Data Stream	Description
Data Mining	Interrogating existing data held by respondent group, commissioners or other stakeholders which is considered relevant to research questions (<i>not</i> desk research which is research outside the research set): Specifically: REFORM articles/letters re worship

	<p>URC Ministers Facebook pages for worship topics</p> <p>Anonymised letters from secretariat re worship</p> <p>Other data as realized</p>
Focus Groups	<p>Structure and unstructured conversations with participants invited according to their worship interest and experience</p>
Interviews	<p>Structured or unstructured conversations with identified dialogue partners (identified after stakeholder analysis and any respondent stratification)</p> <p>Specifically:</p> <p>GA Moderators who have visited many churches</p> <p>Lay preaching assessors who visit churches to mark students</p> <p>Others as identified</p>
Peer to Peer	<p>Formal recorded conversations between those who plan and lead worship</p> <p>(identified after stakeholder analysis and any respondent stratification)</p> <p>Could use the Appreciative Inquiry SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, resources) to support conversation and to capture ideas</p>
Survey Monkey (perhaps)	<p>Questionnaire platform (identified after stakeholder analysis and any respondent stratification)</p> <p>It could be that the questionnaire is <i>never circulated</i></p>

Data collection outcomes

For every piece of research, information about the topic already exists in some form from the people who are already connected to the research purpose. Data mining looks at what is held inside the world of the particular research focus. It is quite different from desk research, which is research outside of world of the research focus. So, for our worship research, we planned to look at URC conversations about worship, not to look at the wider world of what worship ought to be or could be. Specifically, we planned to look at *Reform* for articles and letters about worship, to scour (with due confidentiality), the URC Ministers Facebook pages for worship topics, to see any letters to the secretariat about worship, and to look at any other information people felt like sharing.

As it was, we didn't have the capacity to fully analyse *Reform*, and there weren't any letters to the secretariat. We decided to withdraw the Facebook browsing, as it is not the page's purpose or rule. Other information shared with us was email content when the sender attached a SOAR (method stream three), and documents from churches.

Resulting contact:

Data Streams	Data collected	active conversation	No data received	no contact was able to be made	Data collection point after data cut-off	No capacity
Data Mining						
REFORM articles						1
URC Minister's Facebook pages (by member)						
Letters to secretariat about worship			1			
Other data as realised	1					
Total existing data types searched	1					

Focus Groups

We planned to have structured and unstructured conversations with participants invited according to their worship interest and experience, in a classic focus group style. To gain maximum contact with minimum added time for individuals, we decided to attend meetings which were already organised in order to ask three key questions of each group:

Tell me about worship you have experienced in your travels in the URC.

1. If you could change one thing, what would it be?
2. What would you put in place to make that happen?

We either attended meetings, or asked members of meetings to discuss the three questions and to give us feedback. We were delighted to have made contact with 16 of the 21 interested groups we identified. Though ministry students and Resource Centres for Learning couldn't contribute formally, there is evidence from other groups that representatives of these interest areas contributed opinion.

Data Streams	Data collected	active conversation	No data received	no contact was able to be made	Data collection point after data cut-off
Focus Group Activity					
3 questions and distribution of SOARs					
Lay Preachers Commission Consultation	1				
Ministers	1				
Elders	1	1			
BAME congregations	1				
members of congregations	1				
Musicians				1	
Faith and Order	1				
Walking the Way steering group	1				
URC Communications (Prayer Handbook)		1			
Moderators	1				
EM1 Students					1
RCLs					1
Roots publications team			1		
TDOs	1				
Mission Enablers (MEN)	1				
Youth Executive	1				
Children and Youth Committee	1				
CYDOs Team	1				
Silence and Retreats	1				
Joint Discipleship meeting					1
<i>Total stakeholders identified</i>	21				
Total stakeholder types reached	14	2	1	1	3
<i>percentage of stakeholders reached</i>	76%				

Interviews

Structured or unstructured conversations were planned with General Assembly

Data Streams	Data collected	active conversation	No data received	no contact was able to be made	Data collection point after data cut-off
Interviews					
GA Moderators who visited churches	4				
Lay Preaching assessors	6				
others			1		
Total interviews	10				

Moderators who have visited many churches, with Lay preaching assessors who visit churches to mark students.

Peer to Peer

Formal recorded conversations between those who plan and lead worship, using the Appreciative Inquiry SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, resources) tool. We planned peer to peer methods, knowing that conversations often bring out much more information than individual feedback, and that by encouraging conversation to answer the SOAR had the potential to encourage conversation about worship in general

To gain maximum coverage of the geography of the URC, those who visited meetings for focus group activity either took the SOAR charts to the meeting, or asked people to contact Church House. We planned on distributing two per group member, so that members could take them back to their home church and share the SOARs with others. In Appreciative Inquiry practice, SOARs are filled in when a facilitator explains them in a flow from previous appreciative work. Using SOARs in a way which disconnected them from the Appreciative Inquiry purposes was risky, and a few respondents found them confusing. However, they were an overwhelming success in giving us rich information about worship variety and need. It was clear that in some cases, SOARs were filled in by an individual on behalf of a church group, others were filled in by individuals within a group, and others were filled in by single worship leaders.

Data Streams	Data collected	active conversation	No data received	no contact was able to be made	Data collection point after data cut-off
Peer to Peer (SOAR charts done by groups)					
Students			1		
worship leaders	32				
members	14				
leaders and members combined	17				
Total SOARs	63				