



a forum for people grappling with faith and church issues

values being real
supports faith stage transition
respects and validates the journeys of others
allows questions and doubts
lets God defend God

bumper issue N° fifty#50

Looking back looking forward



We invite you to toast with us the 50th edition of the Spirited Exchanges newsletter. To mark both this occasion and the possibility that it is the final edition we are making it a bumper one. (see articles in future in the balance).

In this issue we take a broader look at the Spirited Exchanges effect. We look at its beginning, at the hiatus that it currently finds itself in, at the larger picture of Spirited Exchanges in the wider Christian context and we highlight resources that may be helpful for the future. As in this issue we bring closure to this season of Spirited Exchanges, we would like to offer the opportunity for you to do so also – we would put together a further issue of your reflections and responses. If you would like to respond out of this, or any other aspect, of Spirited Exchanges that you have experienced over the years please email Donia@central.org.nz by the end of March.

Also, please note: the Spirited Exchanges website (www.spiritedexchanges.org.nz) and the newsletter list will be used to communicate any further developments and information about Spirited Exchanges in the future. We are undertaking a review process and the results of that will be posted on the website in due course.

Looking back:

the story of Spirited Exchanges

In the eight years Spirited Exchanges has been going, it has grown from one small group based in Wellington to a significant network of people and other initiatives, a UK network and pockets of interest from other parts of the world. It seems appropriate that in this issue we tell the story of Spirited Exchanges, especially for those who don't know it.

The beginning of Spirited Exchanges, early in 1999, emerged out of a combination of my personal experience of faith stage transition, leaving a church, and publicity around the findings from research done by Alan Jamieson (who subsequently wrote *'A Churchless Faith'* out of that research) into why people leave churches. He and I both had a concern to provide some form of response to the thousands of people who were leaving the church. We had each had our preconceptions about the faith journey and leavers challenged in different ways. Our new insights gave us the desire to name and validate the issues that leavers were facing and to provide support and resources for people in this space.

For me it was in the midst of mid-life transition and major life events happening that I began to experience increasing doubts, questions and inner turmoil around my faith. I felt I no longer fitted in the faith community I had been a part of for 19 years, and that my faith as it was at that point, no longer held the same energy nor understandings that it had - I felt as though I was dying inside.

At that point I read an article by Alan about faith stage transition. This article named for me what I was experiencing and gave me hope that there was a way forward. It also alerted me to the fact that there was someone who was thinking about these issues. Up until this point I had felt very alone with regards to my experiences of church and Christian faith. I'd felt that somehow my questions around church

and faith were my problem, more than that, I felt that I was the problem, as though somehow it was my fault that I didn't fit, that I was dying on the inside, and that I was dissatisfied, disconnected, and longing for more.

I was feeling a growing disparity between my faith experiences and church perspectives that felt constrictive and confining. I increasingly felt like a sardine in a can - a sardine being squeezed and forced into a pre-determined size and shape. There was no room to stretch and breath, no room to have different perspectives, or in fact to be myself in relation to God.

That article gave me permission to process what was happening to me and explore my faith in different directions giving rise to leaving the church I was in. After some time I decided to 'test the waters' at Wellington Central Baptist, the church that Alan Jamieson arrived at a couple of weeks later as a minister.



A year later, when his thesis was made public, he was thinking about how to make a response to people leaving churches based on what he had learnt from his research, and I was looking for a job and new direction for myself. It was out of Alan's hope and my passion that Spirited Exchanges began.

It started up initially as an open-ended discussion forum for people in Wellington. *'Spirited'* described the kind of discussion we hoped it would be as people shared their thinking and experiences with one another; as well as acknowledging that the Holy Spirit was a very integral part of what was going on. And *'Exchanges'* to indicate that this was an interactive and conversational exchange of opinions and discussion rather than only one person speaking from the front telling us how it should be. We wanted to encourage people to take responsibility for developing their own faith.

Very quickly we came to see there were two distinct age groups of people, those in mid life

and 20-30 year olds. At the end of the first year we began a second group specifically for 20-30 year olds and named it Deep Stuff. The same things challenging the faith and church attendance of mid-lifers were also challenging those in their mid to late twenties largely because of post modern ideology. In conjunction with the people who came we continually learnt more about their faith 'space' and so were able to fine tune what we were offering to meet their needs.

At the same time as continuing groups we developed other initiatives and Spirited Exchanges became the umbrella name for a variety of responses that have been developed to offer support, help resource and accompany those on their faith journey outside of the church. These included:

- safe and open-ended discussion forums;
- a newsletter containing people's stories, articles, poetry, book reviews and information that stimulates thinking and understanding in this area, as well as opportunity for readers to respond. Initially published bi-monthly it then went to ten issues per year.
- resources in the area of faith development, how to run groups, where to find other helpful material, books, etc;
- a website which makes the newsletters, other resources and information available on line.
- listening within the group and one to one - face to face, by phone, email or texting.
- training for potential facilitators of groups;
- seminars and workshops to help build understanding in wider Christian circles of what occurs for people in faith transition.

What began as something of an experiment became an established and proven resource for people in faith stage transition. So what are the changes occurring now that mean that groups don't seem sustainable (see a further 5 mins of your time please).



jenny

Spirited Exchanges - A bridge

Many times people have asked Jenny and I whether Spirited Exchanges is a church. Our answer was always 'No. Spirited Exchanges supports people through a faith/church transition. It is not a church and has never tried to do or offer many of the primary 'elements' of church.'

When pushed further we would say 'Spirited Exchanges offers resources, support and connection with like minded others for people who sense their faith is changing and their relationship with church is being renegotiated.'

In other words, Spirited Exchanges (SE) is a bridge on a much bigger journey. A bridge that helps people to make their way from one phase/zone of Christian faith to another. It never set out to determine an individual's destination, but normalized and supported people through an often very difficult and disorienting transformation of faith.

Something of a pattern emerged. People initially approached SE with scepticism and caution. They wanted to work out what the agenda of the group was and whether it was simply set up to try to get people back to church. Once reassured that SE groups were open spaces where faith and life, doubt and critique, anger and disillusionment, heresy and hope could be bluntly and freely expressed, then people tended to relax. For a time, often about a year, individuals would use the space to pull apart, critically assess and tentatively begin to rebuild their own faith. The rich context of honest discussion, shared stories and brutal critique both encouraged and helped sharpen each individuals processing. But, as people formed and increasingly felt at home in their new self-owned faith, their need and energy for the SE groups, resources and supports diminished. Often around eighteen months to two years after first making contact they would move on to the next phase of their own faith/life journey.

Now looking back over the SE journey it is increasingly clear that not only was SE an important bridge for individuals, it has been a bridge for the wider Christian community too. The existence of SE has, in small ways, helped to bring greater understanding of faith transitions, acceptance that Christian faith is a journey which often involves radical faith change, and made many reassess their perception of 'church leavers'. Of course, SE has only been one voice among others that have led to these changes in the broader perceptions of the Christian community here in NZ and internationally. Numerous books (of which our own have played a part), research projects, seminars and individual stories have added their voices as well.

In this SE has been like many other pioneer movements in modern church life who highlight a blind-spot, become a flag ship and then dwindle as the wider Christian community take on and appropriate the new emphasis in their own structures and life. The 'alternative worship' movement and the now fashionable 'emerging church' movement are also examples. They are prophetic to the wider Christian community. They break through a glass ceiling and open up new perspectives. But once their voice is heard and the ceiling is broken their job is done.

Perhaps SE is the Christian Communities equivalent to punk rock?

"Perhaps the best comparison that can be made is to punk in the late 1970s. Punk was never going to be the future of music. Its savage energy was unsustainable and as a movement it was always destined to sell out, to assimilate,

and to self-destruct. Many commentators now look back and see 'pure' punk really existed for only about eight months in 1976/7. Yet, its effect on the cultural landscape has been enormous. It is not just the huge *number* of bands, artists and other creatives who refer to punk as an influence that is staggering, but the massively wide scope of those that do too. Bands from U2 to The Smiths to Happy Mondays to The Prodigy to Massive Attack to Beastie Boys to graphic artists from Peter Saville to The Designers Republic have all expressed punk as part of their inspiration. How could a music so essentially raw and fierce spawn all of this? The answer seems to be that punk gave people permission. It drove through and trashed the ivory towers of the music business, dismantling all the perceived wisdom

about musicianship, marketing profit, contracts and boundaries."¹

SE gave people permission and it said the unthinkable. Ten years ago it was almost revolutionary today it is almost passé. SE has been part of this shift in the Christian Community and beyond, both here in NZ and beyond – a bridge!

alan



The Bridge

*There are times in life
when we are called to be bridges,
not a great monument spanning a distance
and carrying loads of heavy traffic,
but a simple bridge to help one person from here
to there over some difficulty
such as pain, grief, fear, loneliness,
a bridge which opens the way
for ongoing journey*

*When I become a bridge for another,
I bring upon myself a blessing,
for I escape from the small prison of self
and exist for a wider world,
breaking out to be a larger being
who can enter another's pain
and rejoice in another's triumph.*

*I know of only one greater blessing
in this life, and that is, to allow someone else
to be a bridge for me.*

Joy Cowley

¹ Kester Brewin. The Complex Christ: Signs of emergence in the urban church; SPCK 2004. p70-71

future in the balance

5 minutes of your time please.... feedback on festival.

In the December / January issue of the newsletter I floated the idea of a micro Greenbelt type festival for those in the Spirited Exchanges 'space'. Thank you to those who got back to me. In mid-January I needed to make a decision on that by confirming the venue.

As I considered the few responses from people and the people resources I had to make it work I had the picture of myself driving along the highway behind a large sheep truck. It seemed as if I had been driving behind it for some time and finally I saw a clear stretch of road ahead to be able to pass it. I pulled into the opposite lane and started to pass the truck only to find that my car didn't have the power to complete the manoeuvre before the next oncoming car came into view. The decision became clear it was either pull back until I could safely pass the truck or risk a collision. Wrong timing.



It was a great idea and seemed like the next response for Spirited Exchanges to make and there are a few people out there who have a similar dream. It is one of those things that may happen in the future, but not this year.

jenny

a further 5 minutes of your time please.....

We are wondering if there has been some sort of further sociological shift in society and among the group of leavers that Spirited Exchanges exists for. It seems that the need for SE is not as acute as it once was and that has led to the unsustainability of Spirited Exchanges in its present form. It seems, and we

could well be wrong, that there is less energy amongst people to engage with the forums Spirited Exchanges provides. Groups seem more difficult to facilitate, dialogue in the newsletter does not seem to be a forum people are comfortable to use any longer and the website interaction is patchy.

If you felt able to comment on this, we would be keen to hear from you. Email jenny@central.org.nz or donia@central.org.nz We are planning as well, to carry out a small piece of research to help us gauge more about this shift, the results of which will be pasted on the website in due course. **jenny & donia**



Out for half a century
(the newsletter and
jenny)

In the world of cricket a half century is lauded as a good innings and cause for some degree of applause and toasting. The Spirited Exchanges newsletter hits its 50th run with this bumper issue – half a century and now out. I'm sorry to say that this looks like being the finale.

The first issue of the newsletter was produced in February 2000. Since then there has been considerable growth in quality, frequency and the quantity of people who receive it both by email and snail mail. It is emailed to people in more than 12 countries and copies turn up in the most unexpected places.

Why is it the final issue?

Because I (jenny) am retiring from my role with Spirited Exchanges after an innings of eight years. For a number of reasons it is time for me to move on. I do so with very mixed feelings. Spirited Exchanges has been a great position for me. When I took on this role it felt like it was the perfect fit, hand in glove and I have loved so much that it has brought. Needless to

say there are aspects that have been hard, and it has often been a lonely and misunderstood role.

I feel very privileged to have been privy to the faith stage transition process of many people and inspired by your insights and depth of soul searching. Many of you have become friends who I value – thank you. I have gained and learnt from you and you have fed into my own faith.
jenny

Jenny's email (jenny@central.org.nz) will still be functional for a few months.

my thanks....

Many of you have contributed to this publication with your personal stories. Thank you for taking the time to write them and for your vulnerability and raw honesty. I realise the personal cost in doing that. They have enabled others on a similar journey to gain insights and help for their own journeys and they have assisted the wider church to better understand and respond to those who leave or are on this journey. Your stories have helped hugely in bringing learning and greater acceptance of this uncertain faith space.

Thank you to our regular poetry contributors – Robbie Titchener and Andrew Wheatley who so have ably captured the 'essence'. And to those who have written articles and other resources that have given many, greater understanding, validation and hope. I want to make special mention of Alan Jamieson, a regular contributor, whose original research into why people leave churches and his conclusions have helped and given hope to thousands of people around the world. Without his work, inspiration and desire to make a response, Spirited Exchanges would not have happened. Thank you Alan. To Peter McKenzie-Bridle, Andrew Savage, Adrienne Thompson and Craig Braun who have been willing and thought provoking respondents to pleas for articles and book reviews at different times – thank you. And thanks Donia Macartney-Coxson for the last 16

months doing most of the editing and formatting of the newsletter and indeed for upping the ante in its quality.

I would also like to take the opportunity to say thank you to Wellington Central Baptist Church who have encompassed this venture in the face of controversy and given premises for Spirited Exchanges to operate these last 8 years. And the Boulcott Fund (administered by Central) and Dove Trust who have financially underwritten it all of that time. Without your support this could not have happened.
jenny

a little bit from donia

As you'll have read Jenny McIntosh is leaving Spirited Exchanges (SE) - I'll really miss not hanging out with a good friend once a week and discussing spirituality, faith & over coffee. For SE too it is a big loss because Jenny kinda has been SE – her passion for, and understanding of, the SE space is second to none and I hugely respect, admire and aspire to her desire and willingness to inhabit the edges and hard places of faith and to companion people on the journey.

It is an interesting time - Jenny's departure, the 50th issue of the newsletter, the energy around SE ebbing. What next? We don't know this phase of the journey is over. As we've mentioned we're going to do a little research to explore the shift in the apparent relevance of SE and I'll stay on one day a week for the next few months or so, among other things to collate a responses issue of the newsletter (see intro 1st page). My THANKS to everyone who has contributed to the newsletter, responded to my email requests, helped with formatting issues, provided coffee and cake, it has all been much appreciated.
donia



Looking forward



Some possible resources for the journey when church no longer does it for us.

• books & poems

be they books about faith stage transition, spirituality, novels or biographies.... Here's a list of books reviewed in previous newsletters.

Issue 2: Guard the Chaos: Finding meaning in change – Hannah Ward & Jennifer Wild

Issue 2: Living in the Margins: Intentional communities and the art of interpretation – Terry A Veiling.

Issue 3: The Prodigal Project: Journey into the emerging church.

Issues 4 & 50: When the Heart Waits – Sue Monk Kidd.

Issue 5: Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West – Mike Riddell.

Issue 6: A Churchless Faith – Alan Jamieson.

Issue 6: The Starbridge Novels – Susan Howatch.

Issue 8: SQ: Spiritual Intelligence, the ultimate intelligence – Donah Zohar & Ian Marshall.

Issue 9: The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Journey to Wholeness – Ernst Kurtz & Katherine Ketcham.

Issue 10: The Sparrow, & The Children of God – Mary Doria Russel.

Issue 11: Soul Survivor: How my faith survived church – Philip Yancey.

Issue 12: Soul Survivor: A spiritual quest through 40 days in the wilderness – Paul Hawker.

Issue 14: Secret Affairs of the Soul. Ordinary people's extraordinary experiences of the sacred – Paul Hawker.

Issue 16: Why bother with Church? – Simon Jones.

Issue 17: After Religion: Generation X and the Search for Meaning – Gordon Lynch

Issue 18: Parables and Poems – Simon Brown.

Issue 19: The Scared Journey: Spiritual wisdom for times of transition – Mike Riddell.

Issue 19: Lying Awake – Mark Saltzmann.

Issue 20: Finding Hope Again: Journeying through sorrow and beyond – Peter Millar.

Issue 22: Soul Making: the desert way of spirituality – Alan Jones.

Issue 23: Faith and Feminism: An introduction to Christian feminist theology – Nicola Slee.

Issue 24: The Heartbreaker – Susan Howatch.

Issue 28: Chance to dance.... Risking a spiritually mature life – W. Robert McClelland.

Issue 29: Called Again: in and beyond the deserts of faith – Alan Jamieson.

Issue 30: Prosaac: Profound revelations of Sunday afternoon cycling church – Steven Muir.

Issue 31: The Complex Christ: signs of emergence in the urban Church – Kester Brown.

Issue 33: A Generous Orthodoxy – Brian D. McLaren.

Issue 35: The Way of the Dreamcatcher: Spirit lessons with Robert Lax: Poet, Peacemaker, Sage – S.T. Georgiou.

Issue 37: Losing my Religion? Moving on from evangelical faith – Gordon Lynch.

Issue 40: Memories of Bliss: God, Sex and Us – Jo Ind.

Issue 43: The Spiral Staircase – Karen Armstrong.

Issue 44: Five Years On: Continuing faith journeys of those who have left the church – Alan Jamieson, Jenny McIntosh, Adrienne Thompson.

Issue 45: Faith Evolving: A patchwork journey – Trish McBride.

Issue 46: Our World in Transition: making sense of a changing world – Diamuid O'Murchu.

Issue 48: Leaving Church: a memoir of faith – Barbara Brown Taylor.

Issue 49: Wrestling with God: The story of my life – Lloyd Geering.

Issue 50: This Blinding Absence of Light – Tahar Ben Jelloun.

Issue 50: Let Your Life Speak – Parker Palmer

Faith development resource book put together by Jenny McIntosh and Alan Jamieson costing \$15 pp. Email Donia@central.org.nz for details.

We are also thinking about compiling a booklet of previous SE newsletters. Interested? Please email Donia (donia@central.org.nz)

• exploring/understanding yourself

For instance: the enneagram is a personality profiling tool which helps us to better understand self, others and God. It is a study of the 9 basic types of people and explains why we behave the way we do, what are our unconscious motivations and gives us ways towards growth and health.

'God is truth – the enneagram invites us into the truth of who we are – in our limitations and our greatness. It invites me to be and this me is dynamic and continually evolving; it is the hardest journey we will make, the spiritual journey/human journey. There is no split between sacred and secular – all life is holy and has the potential to deepen us and reveal truth. If I simply live my life then this is holiness. The enneagram helps me do this.'

In Wellington Emmaus (www.emmaus.org.nz) is holding a workshop in April. In Auckland The Mercy Spirituality Centre has a course in June and July, and also has introductory workshops on the Myers Briggs personality type indicator. (www.mercycentreauckland.org.nz).

- **engaging with more traditional or orthodox forms of worship.**

For instance: going to mass, exploring liturgy, discovering symbols, cantering prayer.

- **spiritual direction**

Spiritual directors companion you on your faith journey. Both Emmaus (as above), The Mercy Spirituality Centre (as above) and Spiritual Growth Ministries (www.sgm.org.nz) can provide information on spiritual direction.

- **internet**

emerging church sites and blogs. For instance:

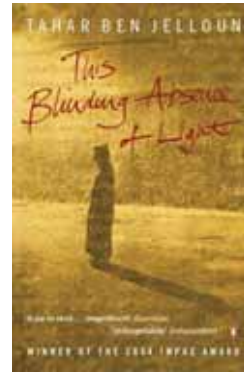
- www.spiritedexchanges.org.nz
(other sites can be found here by clicking resources and links)
- www.spiritedexchanges.org.uk
- Prodigal Kiwi
@ <http://prodigal.typepad.com/>
- we've sourced a couple of articles by Ian Lawton from the sermons at www.christ-community.net/ !!

- **connecting with the world**

be that climbing mountains, sitting by the ocean, joining a community group, getting involved in environmental work.....

The above are just examples there are as many ways to connect with the journey as there are people - film, theatre, art, music.....

book reviews



This Blinding Absence of Light

Tahar Ben Jelloun

On July 10th 1991 about 1000 Moroccan soldiers were put into trucks and taken to the king's palace where they were ordered to find and kill the king. Many were killed, although the king survived and the deemed responsible were imprisoned. After 2 years 58 of the prisoners were taken to a specially prepared underground prison. The cells were 10ft by 5ft with ceilings low enough that they could not stand upright, had a small hole in the floor as a toilet, and a covered air vent so that no light to get in. They were given just enough food and water was provided to keep them hovering on the edge of life. 20 years later there were 28 survivors.

This novel by Tahar Ben Jelloun is based on the testimony of one of those survivors. He was imprisoned in the more severe cell block from which 4/23 emerged alive.

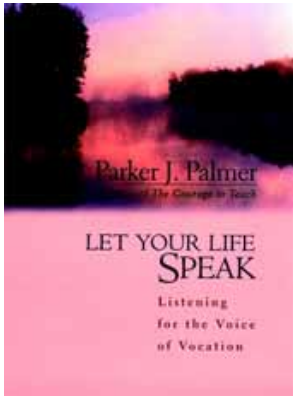
It is an incredible novel, it does not dwell on the horror, although it is there, but neither is it heroic. I found it beautiful and thought-provoking. A story of one man's spiritual journey in the harshest of circumstances. I highly recommend it.

'It is a complete apprenticeship to shed the habits of life..... to give up being as you were before'

and about his release:

'It was October 29 1991. I had just been born. My birth was another ordeal. I looked like a little old man..... I was a newborn of a rare kind. I had just come into the world and was already fully grown.'

donia



Let Your Life Speak

Parker Palmer

Parker J Palmer is a writer, teacher and activist in areas of education, community, leadership, spirituality and social change. This book is a collection of his essays that invite us to find our way, our sense of calling in life by learning to listen to our lives, to our souls as our teacher and that way we will find meaning and purpose, vocation and selfhood. He has learnt this truth himself and comments that the soul speaks only under quiet, inviting and trustworthy conditions.

He tells stories and shares insights from his own experiences of life, which includes a decade living in a Quaker commune, beginning vocation as a priest and then pulling out, getting sacked from a job and a defining period of depression. His raw honesty is refreshing. A friend who has read this book and also suffers from depression commented to me that Palmer knows that space, he is not just speaking theoretically. She goes on to say *"In the midst of my depression when it felt like I had become deaf to my feelings and to the world I was introduced to Parker Palmer's book Let Your Life Speak. In my darkness and aloneness it was such a relief to come across someone who seemed to have entered my world. While depression is very individual, for me Parker Palmer was able to give words to how reality was for me."*

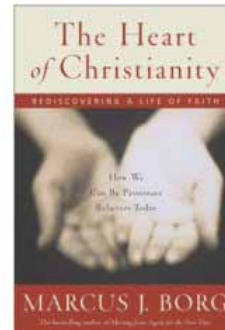
In his writing on depression both those who suffer from it and those who journey with them will find help. You read stories of how important such things as touch become and how words that speak "how things are" resonates longer and deeper for a depressed person than a number of other attempts at connection. To

see that others have felt as I have and have journeyed through has become a flickering on the darkness of the path I am journeying.

Not only had I found someone alongside me but I also found someone who opened me to the strangely inviting finger of learning to live with mystery and to explore the possibility that "the way to God is down."

Palmer learnt that everything in the world has a nature, including the human self and if we are seeking our vocation without understanding the material we are working with, we do so to our own peril and dissonance. He says: "Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic selfhood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be. As we do so we will also find out path of authentic service in the world."

This is an excellent little book which gives us a lot of food for thought and a pathway to living authentically into all of who we are. **jenny**



The Heart Of Christianity

Marcus J Borg

Borg states that he is both convinced and passionate that Christianity makes sense. He then proceeds to explore many of the questions and topics (in the words of the title – the heart of Christianity) that people who are transitioning faith stages are grappling with. He does this in relation to the post modern cultural milieu that we find ourselves in. He compares two paradigms - an earlier paradigm and its vision of the Christian tradition and life and an emerging paradigm and its vision.

He tries to help the two paradigms learn from each other and calls on both to be more open to the riches of the other. The new paradigm is about loving God and loving what God loves

rather than it being about a specific set of beliefs that one must adhere to in order to be Christian.

The big themes that Borg explores are: faith, the Bible, God, Jesus, sin and salvation, the concept of being born again, the kingdom of God and what we practice as Christians. He proposes new understandings that he has come to in his own reading and experience and challenges both disaffected Christians who have left the church and those who hold strongly to a conservative mindset by broadening our views of both. He lifts us above the things that might distract us from the essential message of Christianity. In the end we can continue to debate over the minutiae or just get on with it and embrace relationship with God that leads to personal transformation. We are invited to see faith as a radical trust in the faithfulness of God, rather than a belief in certain assertions.

One interviewer describes the book as managing to be accessible and intelligent, passionate and compassionate all at the same time. It is a book I will go back to again and again as I continue to form and reform my own ideas on these topics.

jenny

film review



An inconvenient truth

As I'm sure you are aware this is a documentary based on Al Gore's 'travelling global warming show.' Whatever you might think of his presentation, and I was pleasantly surprised, climate change is real and a recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on

Climate Change (IPCC) notes with over 90% certainty that recent temperature increases are driven by human activity. This film portrays the consequences of climate change with startling clarity showing pictures of our changing earth; I was shocked and humbled. It also challenges us to make a difference – presenting our power as individuals to effect change. I have become increasingly aware of

wanting to 'leave a small footprint' on the earth and this film encouraged that journey to continue. I do not want to treat the earth and everything in her with disrespect for I live in relationship with her - my being, my spirituality is intricately entwined with the universe. To quote a native American elder 'we call the earth our mother; they call it real estate. They see it as resources; we see it as life.' And the Australian aboriginals say that when they fell a tree they weep with it. These things speak to me of spirituality, wholeness, realness – our responsibility to ourselves, our world and the environment.

donia

*Have we failed again?
Oppressed under the weight of our own
'correctness'
Where is this life in all its fullness
We hear about so much?
We remind ourselves –
We write and speak about his life and freedom
Perhaps like a mirage in the desert:
Tantalizingly close yet never realised
Looking so real yet without substance*

*Jesus calls us to remove our uniforms of rules
and conformity
And to dive naked into the pool of liberty
Bask and splash, soak and drink
There's plenty there for all!*

Andrew Wheatley

images for reflection...



water fountain in a cemetery



Any other business!

Donations

To all of you who have made donations to spirited exchanges towards the cost of the newsletter etc THANK YOU. As this is potentially our last newsletter if anyone has made a recent donation and would like it refunded please let us know and we will be happy to reimburse you. Otherwise we'll put it towards ongoing SE costs.

Books from the SE library

If you have books belonging to the library – could you please get them back to us. The library continues to be used by Spirited Exchanges groups. Please post them to Spirited Exchanges, PO Box 11551, Wellington or drop them off at Central Baptist Church, Boulcott St, Wellington.

Dinners 4-7

A new style of group that is easy to form and sustain. Gather others around you who might be interested and meet over a meal how ever often you decide to explore issues of faith and its outworkings in life. The idea of 7 is that it is not a nice neat and tidy number and if one or two are away it can still take place without it feeling too decimated. You put your own parameters around it. The guidelines we have used for groups have been:

- we are not trying to produce one answer that everyone must adhere to. There is freedom for differing views and opinions.
- each person is free to share her/his own view even if that is different to others or 'heretical' from some people's perspective.
- we ask for respect and space for each person who comes and for their opinions.
- we cannot 'fix it' for people who come.
- because this is a discussion we ask that each person speaks relatively briefly.
- we have no neat 'tie-up' at the end.
- we let God defend God.

Dinners need to be formed so they work for you – there is no right model, only what works and brings you life. Enjoy.

Current SE groups

There are 3 on-going groups -

- **Wellington:** A student spirited exchanges group meets fortnightly on Thursday evening (during term time) around a meal beginning at 630pm. For further details please contact Peter McKenzie-Bridle peter@spiritedexchanges.org.nz
- **Christchurch:** For further information please contact Elizabeth Taylor candet@paradise.net.nz
- **Whangarei:** For further information please contact Jan Stewart alan.stewart@xtra.co.nz