



**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**

## **Responses**

**This newsletter is composed of a collection of responses both to the final bumper issue #50 and of some international voices who responded to an email by Alan Jamieson asking for comments about Spirited Exchanges that could be passed on to the AGM of Wellington Central Baptist.**

**A time for change, the next stage of the journey.....**



Spirited Exchanges – the groups, the newsletter and the ministry of Jenny McIntosh – have been remarkably influential. Although the numbers who attended the groups have never been large, there have been an amazing number of people, mostly with an evangelical or charismatic background, who have been touched by the ministry – often by having a copy of the newsletter given to them, which seems to have enabled them to acknowledge and begin to deal with their faith and church issues. I have been absolutely astounded at how many people read the issue in which my article was found; I have had a huge number of responses to it. Central Baptist can have little idea of the positive impact of healing and resolving of hurts that this one unorthodox form of church ministry has had; perhaps few people will ever openly thank you for it, so I am glad to say that to my knowledge it has ministered healing to many people, and for that you deserve a blessing in return.

**Dr Peter Lineham**

Associate Professor of History, Head of School  
School of Social and Cultural Studies, Massey University

Thought I'd flick an email back after reading the latest and sadly possibly the last newsletter. I have over the years enjoyed getting them and reading them often have used them as 'browsers' for when I'm doing some thinking and reflecting, picking up an issue and having a read. I've enjoyed the contents and have visited the Wellington group a number of times over the years. I do know that there are a lot of Christians out there not currently attending any 'church' and are going through some sort of faith journey and question stage of 'if this is church for me in this day and age do I fit'?

I'm keen to be involved in the dinners idea as what I really loved about coming to the spirited exchanges nights was the discussions with other Christians who seem to be on the same wave length as me (not to be ungracious to others) and found the permission of being involved great for my own acceptance of where I've been journeying. There is definitely a place for spirited exchanges in some form as I know that it has encouraged me and given me hope. I've also built up my energies again (again its that flicker of hope that this time might be different/I might feel different) to try to go to a city church (not necessarily for the contents) but realise that being involved in community with others is important and relating to others keeps me more outward rather than inward. Many thanks.

**SJ**

It was with a touch of sadness that I read the Bumper 50th issue of Spirited Exchanges. However, I also understand the reasons and appreciate that initiatives of this kind often have a season and then it is sensible to stop rather than 'push a cart up a hill'

I just want to say a **big personal thanks to Spirited Exchanges** – Jenny, Alan and anyone else involved in getting it out.

My spiritual journey is much the same as many within the Spirited Exchanges network – brought up in a conservative evangelical church in NZ in the 1960's, encountered loads of deep questions and doubts in my middle years and instead of giving up, I embraced a broader approach to faith which was comfortable with paradox and questions. My faith is now less "buttoned up" but my honesty and integrity are intact.

The certainties of my childhood faith were bred in the bone and unpicking them was lonely and painful at times and I was often misunderstood. However, Alan's books, your writings and Spirited Exchanges told me that **I WAS NOT ALONE!** This was so, so comforting at the time and for this I say a big thank you!

**BN**

As a Church Consultant I travel around the world helping churches grow their effectiveness in their emerging realities cultures and communities. I have a real heart for local communities and particularly for those that take the call from God to be open to fresh expressions of faith and the search for an authentic relationship with God. I also have a love of NZ (not bad for an Aussie cousin) and particularly the pioneer spirit that so characterises the attempts to give it a go. In Australia, USA, Canada, England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany and Holland, South Africa and even Korea people have told me of the influence that Spirited Exchanges and A Churchless Faith have had on their thinking and practices of being Church. In this global reality and cyber communication network Wellington Central Baptist and particularly the ministry under Spirited Exchanges has encouraged the People of God to know that there is a church who took the chance to listen and had the compassion to support and care for people, who felt they could not fit into traditional expressions of church. So from all those communities and churches, individuals and searchers - thank you!

**Fuzz Kitt**

Director / Consultant - Mission and Youth Ministry

Hi!

I find more and more people who are building faith outside the church, and who are interested in discourse, and connection, and worship but not in any institutional sense.



I love the bridge idea, but also am worried by it - many of us have crossed the bridge happily, but find no church there, and don't miss it.

I remember when we used to have 'inclusive language' liturgies as feminists - an attempt to find a way of expressing ourselves that was more authentic. They died out too. Some said that was because there were more churches that were inclusive of feminist ideas and thinking, and certainly some people went off to such places - not that they are hotbeds of inclusivity really, just places a bit better than others. The rest of us left altogether and journey on alone, making connections with other similar pilgrims.

Last week I organised an event at our local cemetery in Waipu, to remember those who have died there - among them my partner Ngaire. We celebrated Matariki, Maori New Year, and we wove together a karanga, bagpipes, prayer, and remembering particular people. It was well attended, not by too many church people, but by a community keen to connect. I am sure it will become an annual event. That's the kind of thing that now ignites my spirit flame.

**Rosemary**

The work of Spirited Exchanges, Wellington Central Baptist, and Alan Jamieson, together have provided a leading edge in terms of ministry to those disillusioned with the prevailing expressions of church. With statisticians Barrett and Todd (of World Christian Encyclopaedia fame) claiming that there are more than 110 million post-church believers worldwide, this is clearly an issue. Thanks a ton for doing the hard work and pioneering this vital ministry. You have changed the way the Western Christian world thinks about the issues of church leavers.

**Alan Hirsch**

Founder Forge Mission Training Network

Author of The Forgotten Ways and The Shaping of Things To Come (with Mike Frost)

I'm really disappointed about the last newsletter - it was always the first bit of mail I opened and read and I've (we) have appreciated them very much for their breadth, thoughtfulness and honesty. Thanks heaps for all you've done to make it happen and all the best for the next stage. And I also appreciated your review of Heart of Christianity. Seems to me that Borg addresses all the big issues, reframes them and puts them all in very helpful perspective. We found Tim Scorers studies on the book to be wonderfully creative and supportive of the process of going through the book.

**Dave Cameron**

Thanks for the Spirited Exchanges Newsletter. I've appreciated it. I spent seven years editing a quarterly journal and I know how incessant those deadlines can seem I'm sorry to hear that its activities are winding down a bit, but I can quite understand why. I found the bridge analogy very useful - I think that people can take a while, couple of years or so, to cross the bridge, but after that they want to move on, and are less likely to return to hover about on the bridge - though perhaps occasionally to help others who are making their way across. Blessings on your journey ahead, and thanks for your support of the bridge on my journey.

**JA**

Over the past years I have been one of the silent readers of your e-mail magazine. I have not actually engaged in the “the exchanges” so I thought I would write now – since I probably represent a larger group of silent readership. I want to take this moment to voice my appreciation for the impact made by what I have gleaned over the last couple of years – or so...I remember being surprised and the “Churchless faith” banner you put up one year at the Parachute Global Expo. “I thought how can we be promoting people who are against the church?” Then as I received your mails and took time to read I found you are not advocating for or against rather responding to the reality of spiritual transition. What you have done and do is important. Especially in a country like ours where over 50% declare we are Christians at the census and about 15% allegedly actually attend church. As a nation we are spiritually hungry. I think your final issue really does round things off well and act as a springboard to the future. Well done! Thank you.

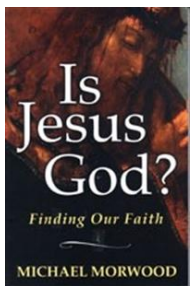
**Andy Miller**

Thanks so much for the full Spirited Exchanges bumper issue and your open and honest sharing in it. I've put some thoughts below about my journey through spirited exchanges. When I came along to the group at Central it was wonderful to hear of others journeys across different kinds of Christian churches that were similar to my own. This group met my needs for a short period, although I found peoples questions and ponderings had a different flavour to mine. Practicalities and physical distance had me let go attending the group, but I continued to receive from the newsletter and just knowing I was loosely connected, that there were others making the 'intrepid journey' outside of church.

My faith transition culminated in the questioning of the central beliefs of Christianity (see recommended book below), and I felt uncomfortable to say that aloud to others in the group or newsletter – particularly when I saw some of the responses that were really traditional in their view in latter newsletters. But by this time I had come to peace about what beliefs mattered and what Christian values mattered, and felt no need to discuss ideas any more.

My search became more personal – to find like minded others to BE with in our faith and life journey. I was looking for a sacred being space with people on my wavelength. I am beginning to find this now, as I can finally give some more time and energy to this part of my life again after all these years of study!

I wonder if others moved in a similar way through the group and on to what they needed next.



A book I've found extremely helpful in my journey is:

“Is Jesus God?: Finding our Faith” by Michael Morwood. (2001), New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.

What a relief to read someone from my faith tradition (Catholic), who questioned the sin/redemption model Christian beliefs have been built on and looked at Christian theology in a post modern way! Finally, I was reading that which resonated with my soul. This author spoke the hard questions I had been grappling with and not fully allowing myself to explore. In reading I could voice for myself the questions that had been haunting the corners of my mind and come to my own answers that lead me further into peace and able to move through to a new dimension of faith.

I'd highly recommend this book for those people who are questioning Christian beliefs. Michael Morwood does not try to convince the reader toward a particular answer – he does present the questions and ponderings around central tenants of Christian beliefs and world view simply and in an informed way, leaving the reader to form and make their own choices regarding beliefs.

**Sara**

The "Spirited Exchanges" initiatives have made possible revolutionary insights into "church leavers" that have benefited and uplifted the whole body of Christ. Of all the "original research" into congregational life that has taken place in the past decade, your work on church leavers is the most important. Its impact has been enormous. I require it of all my doctoral students of divinity, and it is referenced wherever I go. The fact that a local church made all these insights and inspirations possible speaks volumes about what is possible if only the people of God will be the creative, imaginative, courageous humans we were created to be.

**Len Sweet**

E. Stanley Jones Professor of Evangelism at Drew University, and  
a Visiting Distinguished Professor at George Fox University

A warm thank you for the work you have done in putting the newsletter out. I am still a church leaver and have not moved back to any position that even approximates faith. I have appreciated the newsletter very much as it keeps me on the thinking journey and it prompts me to move the questions from the back burner to the front of my mind again.

**Jillian Adams**

Engaging church "leavers," and those who have never belonged, is vitally important for church growth, and more importantly, for the invitation to discipleship in Christ that it offers. It is amazing what an impact a Church community that is committed to reach out to neighbours, friends and strangers with the invitation to become part of a vital church community, can have.

It is painful to think about the ending of this innovative and missional program in your congregation.

**Jim**

James W. Fowler  
Professor of Theology and Human Development (Emeritus),  
Candler School of Theology, Emory University

I have just read issue number 50. The fact that there will be no more of them will leave a big hole for me. We get a number of magazines in our home but this is the only one I read from cover to cover and I have kept every issue we have received.

I am probably the sort of person who has contributed to the present situation. I always meant to send a donation and didn't, I sometimes wondered about writing something of my own experience and didn't, I noted the Wellington groups and thought I might go and didn't. The only action I did take was to get and read some of the books - but that only benefited me I guess.

But it has been a source of great comfort to me to read peoples experiences that often mirror my own and I do thank everyone who has worked to produce it.

**Marion M**

I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to Donia Macartney-Coxson for her role co-editing and researching for the newsletter over the past 20 months. She has without a doubt raised the quality of production and enabled us to provide you with more in the way of resources. Her own journey and understanding of the Spirited Exchanges space gave her a depth of insight and quick understanding of what people find useful. Thank you Donia.

She is currently tidying up the loose ends of Spirited Exchanges as well as compiling all of the old newsletters into a form that can be downloaded off the website. These will be available in the near future. Watch out for these on [www.spiritedexchanges.org.nz](http://www.spiritedexchanges.org.nz)

**Jenny McIntosh**

It was sad to know that Spirited Exchanges is under review, but whatever the future holds I will always be eternally grateful for it. I first heard of Spirited Exchanges through an article in one of the local free papers. It was a couple of months after I'd decided I wasn't going to go to church anymore and I was feeling very lost and alone. I phoned Alan up to find out more and thought "this is for me!" Despite this I vacillated, taking fright for a while and then saying to myself "I'll go along for a few weeks and talk things through a bit and I'll be sorted"! Five years later I can look back and see that this was the start of a long, bumpy but ongoing process which shows no sign of losing its energy. I'm nowhere near "sorted" and don't expect I ever will be. But it made me feel much less alone to find some kindred spirits, to be part of discussions which helped me work out how I really felt and what I thought and to use the resources on offer. I often found it difficult to sleep after a Spirited Exchanges night- a mixture of anxiety and excitement which kept me up into the wee small hours.

As well as Spirited Exchanges there have been different things and people that have helped me at different times. But lately I've enjoyed being part of a small group at a church exploring some fundamental questions of the Christian faith through the "Living the Questions" series of DVD programs and discussions. (Though they haven't caused me any sleepless nights!). Journaling initially happened fairly spontaneously for me but the past 18 months I've been using a method devised by an American psychologist called Ira Progoff called "The Intensive Journal" which helps you "work with your experiences and feelings for gaining awareness about your life" ([www.intensivejournal.org](http://www.intensivejournal.org)). It seems to work for me. Working with a spiritual director has changed from being crisis survival to something more open and exploratory. Nowadays rather than going to a church service I find I like being part of a more informal meditative service.

And so life goes on! "Where will it go next?" I sometimes wonder. Where would I be now if I hadn't seen the article about Spirited Exchanges? I don't know. But this I do know. If I am more hopeful and trusting ( even though I don't know exactly what I believe), if I have regained my enthusiasm for life and am able more often to reach out with kindness to other people-that began when I read that article and lifted the phone.

With thanks to Jenny and Alan.

**Fiona McDougal**

A few years ago standing in Christchurch looking at a sign that told me how far my home town of London was, I realised that I really was the other side of the world, as far as I could go, and upside down from my family as I spoke with them on my mobile phone. Yet, some things travel such large distances, some things that have international impact. As I think of the Christian endeavours that have done so, Spirited Exchanges comes to mind. The impact of Spirited Exchanges on a whole generation of people struggling with church has been incalculable, and will I'm sure continue for a long time to come. I get to travel most months as a pastor and teacher to places around the world, and Spirited Exchanges is one that seems to have gone far beyond New Zealand in its impact. In fact that would be an understatement.

**Jason Clark**

Vineyard Church Sutton & Emergent UK

**From Jenny, Alan and myself (Donia) thank you for your comments, they are very much appreciated. I feel a little sad and somewhat reflective as I write this – what next? As one person responded “A seed must die before the new shoots appear. We wait and see.....”**