

Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

Newsletter

Community

We humans are social animals. Community, with its human contact and communication is essential to our well-being.

We nearly all belong to several communities: our family of origin, a family we create with a partner and possibly children, as well as the community where we live. Some of us are involved in a religious community and we will need to ask what role (if any) such communities can play in the modern world.

There are all sorts of communities with a specific purpose: communities for political action, for socialising, for helping others, for educating our children. The nature of our communities has changed rapidly over one or two generations. Women now go out to work rather than live in the suburbs and support voluntary organisations. Social media create new kinds of community and online games produce people so hooked on them that they almost never leave the house.

How can societies become communities? How can we work against them falling apart into mutually uncomprehending groups of rich and poor, upright and criminal, secular and religious, Western and Asian, healthy and mentally ill?

Conference this year will examine this question and this issue of the Newsletter also looks at various communities and how they can transform our world.

This issue looks first at an online community set up by the singer/songwriter Jewel Kilcher which aims to provide individuals with tools to deal with issues and difficulties in their lives.

It then looks at Grönenbach, a therapeutic community in Germany, which works with a variety of mental health issues.

Next comes the Sunday Gathering, a group that comes together monthly and is a radically different kind of celebration.

It also looks at Centrepont, an intentional residential community in Auckland with a lot of promise, that went off the rails in the intellectual ferment of the 60s and 70s.

Unfortunately, I was not able to include anything by or about Kim Workman, a former head of the prison service, who has very interesting things to say about a faith-based unit at Rimutaka prison and its demise. This unit aimed to integrate prisoner volunteers back into society through a spiritual transformation, but fell foul of the Correction Department's loyalty to the model of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

The Editor

To recognize the problem, you need a counter-perspective.
To resist the problem, you need a counter-community. Os Guinness

Internet Corner

jewelneverbroken.com

This is a website that the Alaskan singer/songwriter Jewel set up. It's not a famous big website with lots of traffic. Its byline is "Make Happiness a Habit" and the core is a section "The Work" which you need to register for before you can access it. The Work consists of meditative or mindfulness exercises introduced by Jewel and based on those that she devised when dealing with several major life difficulties. You can use the website as a workbook to record your experiences with the exercises. This may sound rather dull and unappealing, but it comes to life when connected with Jewel's life experience, which she writes about in a fresh and interesting way.

About Jewel

Jewel is not your ordinary singer/songwriter. I began to become aware of this many years ago, when I heard her being interviewed by Brian Edwards. Here was someone intelligent who was more than up to responding honestly to Brian's probing questions. This impression only deepened as I listened to her songs over the years and realised that her words carried significant meaning. Her own writing points up the contrast with many other singers and groups: "Many bands had no authentic message. Pure ear candy, but [they] stood for nothing." Jewel was the exact opposite. She does not attempt to project an image that is better or more perfect than reality. On the contrary, she is brutally open, honest and very emotionally expressive.

It was only later, when I read "Chasing down the Dawn: Stories from the Road" and "Never Broken: Songs Are Only Half the Story", that this impression deepened.

She has read material like Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Descartes and Plato's allegory of the cave. She made some sort of promise early on when on the street. As a result, once successful, she formed a charity Project Clean Water in 1997, for which she

sang at fundraising concerts. There was a charitable arm, which made a nationwide talent search for singer/songwriters who were then able to open for her across the country. She also gave testimony at a Senate Hearing on Homeless Youth, based on her own experience of living in a car for about a year.

See [youtube.com/watch?v=i8ThWLwXMaE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8ThWLwXMaE)

(10 mins) Her aim is not simply to produce works of art, but for her life to be a living work of art.

Jewel on Fixing Things

An excerpt from her biography is the best way to sample the flavour of her thinking. This is about fixing issues in a relationship: It took decades for me to realize it was not all mine to fix. Sometimes we have to step back and stop fixing. I love you enough to let you fix what is yours, and I love myself enough to leave if you are not willing or able to meet my needs. Sometimes fixing is a desperate attempt to resuscitate something that should die. I did not want to feel the grief and pain of the truth about my mom, and so I "fixed" everything I could right up to the bitter end... Saying I was done and that there was no more fixing to do was a frightening prospect indeed.

Jewel on the Internal Critic

Another exercise that worked for me was learning to recognize and dismiss my internal critic. One of the most pernicious aftereffects of abuse is that our abuser's ghost lingers and speaks to us still. We can hear them run us down in our minds as if they were there watching over our shoulder...Make distinctions between self and other here.



A young Jewel performing with her father

All about us

We are an association of people who have a common interest in exploring religious thought and expression from a non-dogmatic and human-oriented standpoint. We follow similar organisations in the UK and Australia in taking our name from the 1984 BBC TV series and book by the British religious academic, Don Cupitt. “Sea of Faith” traces the decline of traditional Christian influence in the West in the past 250 years and invites the viewer to consider what might replace it. In New Zealand, Sea of Faith provides a forum via Conference and Newsletter, for the continued exploration. The Sea of Faith Network itself has no creed. We draw our members from people of all faiths and also from those with no attachment to any religious institution.

Committee

Our national Committee publishes a newsletter, maintains a website at www.sof.org.nz, assists in setting up Local Groups, and organises an annual Conference.

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Treasurer: Phil Grimmer

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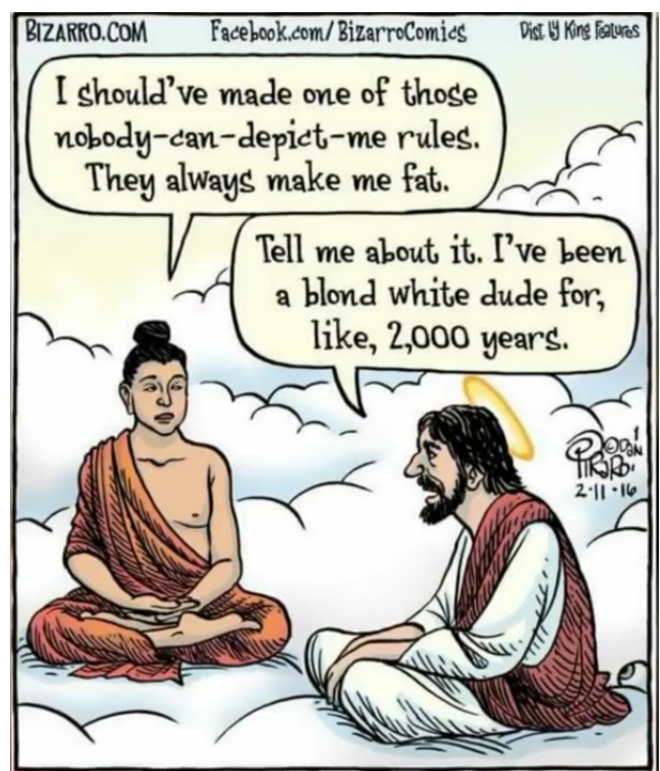
Life Members

Sir Lloyd Geering ONZ, Don Cupitt (UK) and Ian Harris. Also Suzi Thirwell, Yvonne Curtis and Peter Cowley (appointed at the 2017 AGM).

Publication deadline for the next Newsletter is 14 June 2019.

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Conference 2019

Transforming Communities: Finding Meaning in a Consumption-driven World

Midday Friday 1 November – 16.30 Saturday 2 November

All Souls' Church Complex 30 Church Lane, Merivale, Christchurch

Lloyd Geering lecture: Bronwyn Hayward

Keynote speakers: David Hanna and Merv Dickinson

- Mark your diary now
- Book flights soon for the best deal
- More details in the next newsletter

How to Contact Your Local Group

Below are email addresses of the convenors of each local group. If you want to know more about your group, or to find out when they next meet, just drop them a line.

Location	Convenor	Email
Auckland	Marion Hines	david.hines@xtra.co.nz
Hamilton	Michael Templer	m.templer@xtra.co.nz
Tauranga	Eddie Orsulich	orsuliche.m@Kinect.co.nz
Gisborne	Peter Cowley	prcowley@gmail.com
Hawke's Bay	John Warren	johnwarrenca@gmail.com
Palmerston North	Roger and Barbara Purchas	purchas@inspire.net.nz
Kapiti Coast (Ephesus)	Maureen Roxburgh	wandmroxburgh@xtra.co.nz
Wellington	Philip Grimmett	grimmettphil@gmail.com
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Blenheim	John Craighead	jcraighead@xtra.co.nz
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Timaru	Betty Manning	newmanning@xtra.co.nz
Central Otago	Noeline Watson	noelinewatson@gmail.com
Dunedin	Gretchen Kivell	gretchen.kivell@xtra.co.nz

Celtic Spirituality by Derek Pringle

On 14 April, the Auckland group was treated to a talk on “From Bohemia to the Isle of Iona – the spiritual journey of the Celts.” This has been a persistent theme for Derek and as a result he has visited many out-of-the-way places to gain a clearer picture of the Celtic past. He had many slides to illustrate his talk.

He also told us about the Celtic cross and its significance. The Celts believed in the goodness of nature and in ‘thin places’ that were close to the divine. Many Christian churches were built on sites sacred to the Celts.

Derek also sketched a number of Celtic saints: Ninian, Columba and Cuthbert.



Marion Hines about to Introduce Derek Pringle

Turning the Tide (on the Sea of Faith) - #3

The Committee has had two further meetings (by ZOOM) since the last update describing progress on four things we have identified as vital to reverse the worrying decline of the Sea of Faith in New Zealand. The four things are: holding a shorter, more outward-looking conference; strengthening the relationship between local groups and the national organization; reviewing the name Sea of Faith; and improving communications within and beyond the organisation. Here is the latest progress on these things.

1. Changing the nature of the conference

The theme of the 2019 Christchurch Conference is: *“Transforming Communities: Finding meaning in a consumption-driven world”*. It is hoped the conference will attract a number of people who subsequently become members. Much of the marketing of the conference will be geared towards such people. Conference organisation is well underway with three excellent speakers confirmed – Bronwyn Hayward, David Hanna, and Merv Dickinson. Bronwyn will be delivering the inaugural Lloyd Geering Lecture on the Friday evening. David and Merv will be giving their presentations on the Saturday morning. The conference will run from midday Friday to 4.30pm Saturday at the All Souls’ Church Complex, 30 Church Lane, Merivale, Christchurch. Despite a shorter format, much of the structure of previous Sea of Faith conferences will be retained. There will be three core groups, and the ending Panel as usual. In addition to the three keynote speakers we will also be having three people give a five minute introduction to the theme. The local organising group (Ian Crumpton, Tricia Crumpton, and Doug Sellman) are now beginning to focus on other important details, including accommodation, and details of these will be made available at the time of the next Newsletter.

2. Strengthening the local—national connection

Following a first successful ZOOM meeting between most of the facilitators of local groups a second meeting is going to be held in May (Thursday 23 May 7.30pm). Jan Calvert is Local Group coordinator on the

Committee this year and has already brought a feeling of greater connection between the Local Groups and the national network.

3. Reviewing the name ‘Sea of Faith’

We have continued to work hard on formulating several alternative names for the Sea of Faith to bring to the AGM in November for members to discuss and vote on. We have also continued to receive new suggestions for an alternative name for the Sea of Faith, of which five have been given serious consideration by the Committee since last Newsletter. They were:

Universal Sea of Enquiry
Sea of Life Aotearoa (SOLA)
Sceptics in Religion
Reasoning Religion
Life not Belief

These have each been considered carefully in relation to the previous top five, but following discussion none were considered by the Committee to be better than the existing names.

Following a process of considering the positive and negative aspects of each of the current top five alternatives the Committee decided to reduce the current number by one, and by unanimous decision “The Religious Enquiry Network” was voted the weakest, so has been dropped from the list. A useful test of names is imagining Guyon Espiner about to interview a spokesperson on Morning Report... “And now we have Bob Smith, spokesperson for who will comment on the rise of the white

supremacist movement in New Zealand. Good morning Bob...”.

The current top four alternative names under consideration now are:

Quest

Reimagining Religion

SOFIA (Sea of Faith in Aotearoa)

The Lloyd Geering Network

A number of members have written in support for the existing name, or in support of the tweaked version: SOFIA (Sea of Faith in Aotearoa). One of our Committee members in defending the use of the word faith reminded us of the Soren Kierkegaard quote: *"Faith is the highest passion in a human being. Many in every generation may not come that far, but none comes further"*, and contended that this is what the Sea of Faith is about. Notwithstanding the worthiness of this inspiring definition, a pragmatic counterview about the name is that unfortunately most people view the word faith as standing for some sort of (dogmatic) belief. The concern was expressed that these people would be immediately put off an organisation with faith in its title, thinking we are a religious group that believes in a certain set of revelations, rather than being a Post-Enlightenment group that is not afraid to use reason and inquiry in order to discern truth.

We all agree the tide of the Sea of Faith is receding because of the lack of new membership of people under the age of 45, and that if we don't attract new members, despite the excellent ideas that abound in the organisation, it will be a thing of the past within the next five years or so. A name that potentially puts people off at first look is not a good way of marketing our organisation to new members.

Retaining the by-line - **Exploring Values, Meaning, and Spirituality** – appears to be widely supported.

Let the discussion continue.

4. Improving communications

There is nothing particularly new to report on this item. We have made a strategic decision to hold off on major publicity outside of the organisation this year while the review of the name is being undertaken. But brewing in the background is a revamped new website, and serious consideration being given to a Facebook page. There is also a view in the Committee that the Newsletter might become available to a wider audience than simply current members, although not all agree and further discussion will be had on this matter over the next few months.

We continue to welcome comments and suggestions on any of these four strategic areas or any other matters that relate to the thriving and survival of the Sea of Faith.

Committee 2019

Doug Sellman – Christchurch (Chair)

Steve Collard – Auckland (Secretary)

Phil Grimmett – Wellington (Treasurer)

Jan Calvert – Hamilton (Local Groups)

Ian Crumpton – Christchurch

Brian Ellis – Auckland

Andrew Calvert – Hamilton (co-opted)

Natali Allen – Wellington (co-opted)

Pete Cowley – Gisborne (ex-officio)

Laurie Chisholm – Christchurch (ex-officio)

April 2019

Grönenbach: a Therapeutic Community

My best and deepest experience of a transforming community was at a psychosomatic clinic in the village of Bad Grönenbach in Germany. My next best experience was with the Student Christian Movement, particularly the week we spent together at Camp Iona near Oamaru during the May term holidays. There we lounged about on mattresses in front of the fire, listened to interesting speakers and discussed everything under the sun. My third best was the St Martin's Island Community. We travelled on weekends by boat to St Martin's Island in Otago Harbour, lived in primitive surroundings, worked to try to bring some semblance of order to the place, and had good discussions with the wide variety of members.

I have visited wards for mental patients and the experience was uniformly negative. The atmosphere was depressive and there was little interaction between patients. Grönenbach was nothing like this. We guests/clients/patients at the clinic told ourselves that this was our big chance to sort ourselves out. Failure might mean being transferred to a psychiatric clinic, which was a nightmarish prospect. One suicidal guest at the clinic was told to set up a timetable in which there would always be another patient monitoring. She was not expected to resist the urge to commit suicide, but she was responsible for organising a schedule of monitors to be with her. When she failed to do this, she was transferred.

How did I come to be at Grönenbach? The story is complicated. I don't believe in Providence, but I had a strong sense at the clinic that events had conspired to push me into the one place in the universe that I needed to be. My wife had preceded me at the clinic, and I saw that interesting and good things went on there. Clinic rules allowed partners to come immediately after the partner finished (otherwise there would be a waiting time of about a year). Also, the clinic claimed to cure migraine, something I had otherwise never heard of. I had suffered frequent migraines since primary school. The deal was clinched when my doctor said he would quite like to go there himself. That helped me overcome the stigma attached to anything that smacks of mental illness. Once there, I felt that if people knew what it was like, everyone would want to come.

Grönenbach offered an intensive programme of therapy. Guests stayed for a defined 12 weeks so each Monday, a new group would arrive. Therapy was almost

always group therapy, except for a one-on-one interview with a therapist at the beginning, middle and end of the period. There was a wide variety of therapeutic approaches. If there was an overarching methodology, it was "bonding psychotherapy"; the clinic director went on to write the definitive textbook on it. According to this approach, we need bonding with others, but negative experiences often interfere with it and result in symptoms because our needs are not met. The aim is to elicit emotions relating to those negative memories and restore normal functioning.

Accordingly, the focus is not on what is wrong with you, but on enabling you to function normally. The clinic accepted an enormous variety of people with different symptoms and the process was essentially the same for everyone. There were alcoholics, drug addicts, people who had tried to commit suicide multiple times, depressives, the morbidly obese as well as anorexics and bulimics. There was even a classical obsessive-compulsive who felt the need to wash his hands over and over. His Auflage was to go without washing for several days. The therapists seemed keen to prove their worth with guests with borderline personality disorder, but I steered clear of them, finding them strange and hard to relate to.

The day began with exercise. Those who could, ran, those who couldn't, walked. If you couldn't walk, you swam.

After breakfast, there would be a variety of groups. All belonged to a psychodynamic group. Most were part of a 12-step programme as well: AA, Overeaters anonymous, or Narcotics Anonymous. There was also an additional general group on addiction.

There were groups for emotional work, at which specific techniques were used to elicit otherwise hidden and controlled emotions.

There were frequent “committee meetings.” Most were led by elected guests and dealt mostly with relationship issues. The whole clinic might give feedback to one guest, if asked. At one or two, the therapists were also present and once a week, the public was invited. We generally felt that we were the normal ones, and that the public was uptight and inhibited.

Touch was encouraged. You could go up to anyone at a meeting and ask if you could put your arm around them or cuddle them. Once we knew someone, we usually would greet them with a full-body hug. We laughed at the “A-frame hugs” that the world outside gave, in which the upper body meets but the rest is kept discreetly apart.

Sex was not allowed (a rule occasionally broken!) but flirting was OK, as long as you didn’t spend a lot of time with one other. “Pair bonding” would be called out and the couple encouraged to diversify their interactions with a variety of other guests.

Auflagen were an often-used therapeutic tool. This word has about twenty different meanings but is used in the sense of a task that is laid upon someone. When they became aware that I was a “sad sack” I was given the Auflage of carrying around a bean bag and complaining to anyone I saw what a burden this was and how miserable I felt. I was also sent out to buy jeans to replace the rather traditional sports trousers with a front crease. Auflagen were suggestions; you accepted them if their purpose made sense to you. If it didn’t, you could always argue against being required to carry it out. One doctor guest was a compulsive womaniser. No sooner did he have one girlfriend than he was looking round for another, in case the first one dumped him. He was desperate not to end up alone. His Auflage was to sit in his room, reflect on his situation, and only come out when he had a conclusion to present to the group.

The clinic did not use medication as a therapeutic tool. As a result, I was not allowed painkillers for my migraines. All that was available was an ice-pack for my head.

This made no sense to me at the time, but I accepted it as part of the total package. Early on, during a migraine, I was visited by a woman who had chronic back pain. She gave me a foot massage and talked about how she dealt with pain. She didn’t like taking painkillers because this dulled her brain. “Breathe through the pain” she said. We learnt a lot from other guests.

Early on, I was in my psychodynamic group together with a rather belligerent and aggressive alcoholic. I could feel my irritation with him growing, but I was afraid to speak up. Because I hadn’t been taking painkillers, I was more aware of a migraine taking shape in my head and realised that I had the choice of impolitely interrupting the group and confronting this person or having another migraine. That was my first step towards healing. Another migraine sufferer had something like a biblical miracle experience. Suddenly, in the midst of a committee meeting, she declared that her migraine had gone.

The clinic also worked to give us concepts to help us understand what was going on. So we learnt transactional analysis. We also had a body therapy session during which we learnt some basic yoga positions. It was amazing how the therapist would become aware of what was going on with a group member, just through the way the body was reacting.

Fit guests were generally allowed to do a “dynamic meditation” instead of the morning jog. This was a technique borrowed from Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (now called Osho) and the clinic had a special basement built for it, with no windows and upholstered walls and floor.

Ordinary counselling sessions would never have been able to affect my migraines. The patterns that resulted in migraine lay far too deep. The clinic worked in depth on body, emotions and thinking. All three were necessary. A 12-week course is expensive and the health insurance companies must have looked carefully at the clinic’s results before agreeing to fund the programme.

The Editor

A New Form of Community?

The Sunday Gathering

“It’s high time that, from time to time, time is different.” That rather-too-clever play on words by German theologian Eberhard Jüngel was intended as an argument for celebrating the Church year, but it can equally serve as an argument for a special time on Sundays. That is certainly how the facilitator of the Sunday Gathering (SG), *Merv Dickinson*, sees it. He believes that our everydayness needs to be balanced by a special time, when, supported by a community of friends, we can be helped to discover another dimension to life – a spiritual dimension. Such is the purpose the



SG seeks to serve.

*A Sunday Gathering with Central Candle
The two additional candles and the cake were
one-offs, for the launch of Merv’s book
“Conversations with Bella.” These candles
have a precious history: they are Jewish
sabbath candles that Bella’s relatives brought
with them as refugees escaping Nazi rule.*

The SG reminds me of church (much more than the Sunday Assembly, for example), but it is nothing like church as we have known it. It is not intended, Merv says, as a replacement for church or as a modern version of it. It has evolved over almost 40 years but wasn’t consciously planned. After many years of static numbers, it is now growing. Merv is concerned that the kind of deep, and sometimes intimate, sharing that the SG encourages will not be possible if it

grows much bigger. But he doesn’t want to turn anyone away. The SG is not publicised in any way. When I first turned up at the retirement village where it is held, I looked at the noticeboard, but there was no mention of it. When I asked those sitting at tables in the main restaurant, no-one had heard of it. It was only when I asked the retirement village staff that I found out where to go.

Merv Dickinson

Merv is an ordained minister of the United Church of Canada and a retired presbyter of the Methodist Church of New Zealand. He also has a Ph.D. in psychology and is a trained psychotherapist. Always inclined to go “where the spirit leads,” he left his work in Toronto as a psychotherapist and university lecturer to become an organisational and leadership consultant in the United States. Fascinated by the possibilities of intentional communities, he and his wife Bella then moved to Scotland where they lived and worked in the new-age community of Findhorn. Still on the move, in 1981 they emigrated to New Zealand where Merv was appointed minister of the Okato cooperating (Methodist-Anglican) parish in Taranaki.

SG’s Origin

The origin of the SG goes back to Findhorn. It was the custom there to have a “communion meditation” on Sundays in the community sanctuary – a celebration that concluded with the sharing of bread and wine. He became the leader of these meditations. Prior to his arrival in New Zealand, Sister Wendy had conducted an evangelical campaign in the Okato parish and had set up several bible study groups. Merv’s arrival caused a great deal of suspicion; while they talked of “finding Jesus,” he was talking of “higher levels of consciousness.” When he returned from a music festival in Kaitaia with Eileen Caddy, the founder of the Findhorn community, parishioners met him with raised bibles to

fend off “the devil’s influence.” Merv

talking of similar experiences, but with different conceptual frameworks. The bible study groups quickly morphed into what became known as the Wednesday Night Gathering, held at the parsonage, attracting a wide range of people, including a community of hippies who lived on Mount Taranaki.

After 3 years in this parish, Merv and Bella moved to New Plymouth and founded Dayspring: A Centre for the Development of the Whole Person, where they lived cooperatively with others and facilitated a Sunday Gathering modelled on Findhorn’s Communion Meditation. Five years later, they moved to Christchurch with the intention of creating a larger residential community, which never got off the ground. Then, in 1995, they moved to a house on Scarborough Hill where they continued the SG, and six years ago moved into the Russley Retirement Village.

Outline of a Meeting

This is what happens at a monthly SG meeting. Tea and coffee are available beforehand, so many come early, go into the kitchen to prepare a drink, and then sit down and engage in conversation. At 10.00 am, the central candle is lit, with accompanying words that draw out its symbolism. This varies with the occasion: it might be about sacred mystery, or the oneness underlying the multiplicity of appearances. After Friday’s Christchurch terrorist attack it was about remembering those who had been killed and injured and the healing that was so badly needed.

We then listen to a piece of recorded music selected for its relevance to the theme. This is followed by group singing, supported by a smaller group that practises beforehand, and accompanied by a wonderfully talented keyboard player. Songs in the song book have been selected by popular vote. There are five different categories of songs (spirituals, folk songs, waiata, Christian hymns, and chants from other spiritual traditions.) At each Gathering, one song is sung from each category. After which, in a time of personal

gradually persuaded them that they were all sharing, folk are invited to a deeper sharing of whatever may be occurring in their lives.

A pit stop gives us time for a toilet break or to prepare things in the kitchen for the shared lunch. Then, in the final hour between 11:00 and noon, whoever is presenting focuses discussion on whatever the morning’s topic may be. Finally, in a “candles of community” ceremony, we are invited to light a candle from the central candle and bring into our circle whatever concerns we may have from the wider community – perhaps concern for a friend, or family member, or some political issue.

To conclude, we stand and join hands in a circle. We sing ‘Happy Birthday’ to anyone who has had a birthday since we last met, and who are then invited to blow out the candles. A communal lunch of shared food follows as, seated now at four-person tables, the conversation continues.

Conclusion

I find many aspects of the SG very attractive. There is not one leader; Merv is keen for others to provide input. (When he and Bella returned to Canada for two years, the SG continued without him.) The community is diverse: atheists, agnostics, humanists, Christians, Buddhists, and that category of folk now known as “spiritual but not religious.” There are good interactions between leader and group. Merv doesn’t read from a script; he is very much in the present moment and responds to what is currently going on. There is lots of humour too, typically accompanied by Merv’s full-throated belly laugh. Go Sunday Gathering!

In summary, the Gatherings typically take the following shape:

- Tea and coffee
- Welcome and brief personal introductions
- Lighting the central candle
- Recorded music
- Group singing
- Personal sharing of concerns
- Pit stop
- Presentation and discussion
- Candles of community
- Closing circle and extinguishing the candles

The Editor

Community Gone Awry

Centrepoint

We can take Centrepoint as an example of how a community that aims to be transforming can head in directions that are damaging and destructive for its members.

Beginning in 1978, it brought insights from the Encounter Groups popular in California in the '60s and '70s. The leader, Bert Potter, had spent some time at Esalen and other centres in the US, before returning to New Zealand. Initially, he offered group workshops. He wanted to make Encounter Groups even more challenging and confrontational.

Centrepoint began as a residential community in Albany, Auckland in February 1978. It collapsed in 2000 when thirteen members were convicted and sent to prison for drug offending, perjury and sexual offending against children.



The Centrepoint Community

The media are apt to sensationalise stories like this and to paint the community as simply evil. It seems to me that things began with idealism and a real desire to help people who often were in genuine need of therapy. Potter brought with him from Esalen a desire for self-transformation and self-actualisation and a variety of tools to facilitate more honest and emotionally intimate interpersonal relationships.

The community established close and warm relationships, both among adults and among children and teenagers. It aimed to break down the barriers that prevent a deepening of community and to focus on

personal and interpersonal change. Psychotherapy was being harnessed for personal growth. Primary school teachers commented that Centrepoint children had people skills that far exceeded those of their peers.

I find Centrepoint particularly interesting because it had many features of a cult while being humanistic and psychotherapeutic rather than religious. Bert Potter, the leader, became guru-like and dominated the community. The introduction of drugs was understandable at that time but added to a sense that normal boundaries no longer applied.

The laudible aim of sexual liberation went awry when Potter and other senior members turned to manipulating children and teenagers for their own sexual gratification rather than working for their development. Young girls found it particularly difficult to resist the frequent advances of older men and community attitudes often sided with the men. All therapy requires some sort of leverage to encourage clients to get out of the position they are stuck in, but when undue pressure is applied and the autonomy and freedom of the individual are not absolutely respected, a line is crossed.

The Editor

References

1. *Bert's Labyrinth: Revisiting Centrepoint*
In 2015, Anke Richter, a German journalist, stirred up lots of unresolved emotions when she tried to interview those who were children or teenagers at Centrepoint:
noted.co.nz/currently/social-issues/berts-labyrinth-revisiting-centrepoint/
2. *A Different Kind of Family: Retrospective Accounts of Growing up at Centrepoint and Implications for Adulthood*
massey.ac.nz/massey/fms/Massey%20News/2010/05/docs/Centrepoint_Report_2010.pdf
A well-written and detailed account.

Interesting Texts

The text printed below was framed and hung on the wall of the central meeting room at Grönenbach. I have since discovered that Richard Beauvais wrote it in 1965, while a resident in the original Daytop Therapeutic Community, which influenced Grönenbach. This text has been translated into more than a dozen languages and adapted by several therapeutic communities. It is described as a 'pledge' because it is a clear declaration that we have to face up to being in community and not try to escape from it. We also declare our hope that things will come right if we share our hidden secrets with that community.

The Daytop Philosophy

I am here because there is no refuge,
 Finally, from myself.
 Until I confront myself in the eyes
 And hearts of others, I am running.
 Until I suffer them to share my secrets,
 I have no safety from them.
 Afraid to be known, I can know neither myself
 Nor any others; I will be alone.
 Where else but on this common ground,
 Can I find such a mirror?
 Here, together, I can at last appear
 Clearly to myself,
 Not as the giant of my dreams,
 Not the dwarf of my fears,
 But as a person, part of a whole,
 With my share in its purpose.
 In this ground, I can take root and grow.
 Not alone anymore, as in death,
 But alive, to myself and to others.

Richard Beauvais

The Atheist Delusion

A curious feature of this kind of atheism is that some of its most fervent missionaries are philosophers. Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* claims to sketch a general theory of religion. In fact, it is mostly a polemic against American Christianity. This parochial focus is reflected in Dennett's view of religion, which for him means the belief that some kind of supernatural agency (whose approval believers seek) is needed to explain the way things are in the world. For Dennett, religions are efforts at doing something science does better - they are rudimentary or abortive theories, or else nonsense. "The

proposition that God exists," he writes severely, "is not even a theory." But religions do not consist of propositions struggling to become theories. The incomprehensibility of the divine is at the heart of Eastern Christianity, while in Orthodox Judaism practice tends to have priority over doctrine. Buddhism has always recognised that in spiritual matters truth is ineffable, as do Sufi traditions in Islam. Hinduism has never defined itself by anything as simplistic as a creed. It is only some western Christian traditions, under the influence of Greek philosophy, which have tried to turn religion into an explanatory theory. *John Gray*