

Chairman's Report

This year the changes/challenges kept rolling in...

Conference

Despite the ongoing COVID concerns we did manage to hold a conference in November 22. It was a hybrid version with both a physical presence and electronically by Zoom.

It wasn't without its challenges! The TV's in St Andrew's were not functional – they got zapped by a power surge so we ended up with a projector screen near the lectern and a projector in the aisle. The Zoom sound was an issue – the microphone really needed to be very close to the person speaking otherwise the zoom software considered it background noise and filtered it out. As much as I tried to find how to turn this feature off I was unable to do so at the time. This was particularly noticeable when playing the music for John Thornley's presentation and many apologies to John for this.

The number attending conference was very low with about 35 full registrations. There were a number of reasons for this:

- Carbon footprint – we have been talking about trading lightly on the planet in our newsletters
- Cost of travel, accommodation & food. Let's face it, it is not an inexpensive exercise to travel to conferences
- The sheer energy it takes to go to a conference when none of us are spring chickens!
- COVID was still in the community and a risk for us senior people.

The conference broke even on costs which was great, but in future, conferences will be (if possible) run in the regions on a smaller scale. That was the plan. The demise of the Auckland local group (which was the largest and most active group in the country) was a blow to these plans as they had been holding hybrid meetings of members physically in Auckland and Zooming their meetings nationally which quite a few of us enjoyed. Auckland Group donated their fund to the Sir Lloyd Geering Scholarship in Religion administered by Victoria University.

The Christchurch group led by Doug Sellman also disbanded and they were planning to hold the next hybrid meeting from down south.

Gisborne and Napier groups are going to try and organise a hybrid event but nearly all groups are struggling with energy levels and not to mention the technological complexities that arise with audio/video live communications. Most groups seem to be barely functioning. See Local Groups Report for details

Newsletters

Laurie has maintained a high standard magazine which is the key-stone of our organisation. We have now changed the newsletter formats. There is the fully electronic version with clickable links to see the articles as well as a link to the

printable version if wanted. This make reading articles online a lot easier as there are no columns and you can increase the size of the text or use a browser function (at least in Firefox) entitled "Reader". The printed newsletter has also lost its columns and the A3 format folded. This means the printed version is no longer tied to a multiple of four pages and can be any length. We are also using lighter A4 paper – this is important because I have been getting some static about the thickness of the envelopes with the newsletter inside. It was often just over the maximum. The lighter paper has improved this quite dramatically and up to 6 sheets of A4 still fit within the allowed thickness. I do realise that the printed version does not look as good at the tabloid format but that is a small price to pay I feel.

A special thanks to Editor Laurie Chisholm and his team of helpers for putting the newsletter together every two months. It's big job but appreciated very much!

Website

The website continued to be accessed by a good number of people far and wide. It offers a wealth of information and resources. Both of these offer important ways in which potential new members may discover us. See the website report for the actual details.

Financial

Our financial situation is good. We have quite a decent amount of money in the bank and our subscription income is covering our costs year-to-year. See the Treasurer's report for details.

Membership

Overall our membership has shrunk by 15 people over the year. The majority of that is from folk passing away, no longer able to read or feel they have completed their journey with us and retired. Our current active members as at 30 June is 169. See the membership report for details. Only one new member joined in the year.

Committee

Your committee has been small (4) but highly effective – we would welcome some new members. John Thornley has been doing an excellent job as Secretary and his willing participation in all areas has proved most useful. Mary Ellen Warren joined us last year and took over looking after the Local Groups and keeping in touch with them. She has done a great job in keeping the lines of communication open even though it is surprisingly difficult to get some groups to respond to emails.

Pete Cowley

Chair

SOFiA