

Refresh



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A way through the valley

Contemplative gifts for the future of the church

Contents



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Church – a community of people strolling with God by <i>Darryl Tempero</i>	3
Practising the Way: David Crawley talks to a young Vineyard pastor Sam Harvey	9
Wisdom more radiant by <i>Kenneth Tanner</i>	13
Training contemplative leaders by <i>Geoff New</i>	15
Unity in Contemplation - the coming wave - church leaders' statement 2001	17
Nurturing a contemplative stance for navigating challenging times by <i>Lynne M. Baab</i>	18
SDFP open for 2024 applications	22
Every Name by <i>Anna Lisa de Jong</i>	24
The Contemplative Journey – ending the 'divorce' between spirituality and theology by <i>Tracey Hunt</i>	26
The Church and Contemplative Spirituality by <i>Trish McBride</i>	30
Ways to meet with God – contemplative gifts for a small church by <i>Murray Mills</i>	34
A book for these times: Beholding - an interview with the author Strahan Coleman by <i>Kathryn Cass</i>	37
SGM News Matariki Appeal from Convenor Bruce Maden	39
Spiritual Director Formation Programme News from Fran Francis	40
The Last Word - questions for <i>Refresh</i> readers!	41
Weaving as contemplative practice by <i>Adrienne Thompson</i>	43
Shadowed by the Holy Spirit by <i>Lesley Farmer</i>	47
Contributors	48

Church – a community of people strolling with God

By Darryl Tempero

I remember a few years back sitting with Genesis 3, reading Eugene Peterson's *The Message* translation, where he poetically describes the scenario in verse 8 'When they heard the sound of God *strolling* in the garden in the evening breeze...'

Strolling? The God I grew up with was walking. Walking is purposeful, it has a destination in mind with our eyes fixed looking ahead, and often is a task.

Strolling on the other hand is more relaxed, easy, with more potential to notice things around you. Most of all it is more *intimate*. When you stroll with someone you are more interested in the moment, rather than where you are going. You are more present to the person you are strolling with. It can also have a more contemplative feel to it.

It shifts how we think about church, our formation as community, and the role of contemplative prayer. I belong to a church we call Kiwi Church. It's a network of small communities in Christchurch, and one in West Otago. We talk about church as family who 'strolls with God and each other.'

The essence of church is relationship, so we believe anything we do that nurtures the relationships between God and each other are valid expressions of church. This phrase of strolling with God captures the simplicity of how church can be. This has appealed to many of our people who've been part of church a long time, and have moved away from models of church that tend to have busy schedules and activities.

We want to explore more 'being' than 'doing'. 'We enjoy a number of 'conversation partners' who've strolled with us as we find our way – most significantly the Celts in the first millennium church. There are many aspects of their spirituality and Christian expression that resonate with us – and have much to teach us in 21st Century Aotearoa.

These include: faith is embedded in the life of the Trinity; communities are organic and not overly structured; they are intentional about nurturing a healthy relationship with the land; and it's natural to be able to find God in all things.

Most significantly is the monastic thread that weaves through their communities.

One of our companion partners is Simon Reed, author of *Creating Community: Ancient Ways for Modern Churches* – exploring what we learn about community from the Celts. Simon set out to address two questions – essentially the same two Kiwi Church started with: 'How do we create, maintain and deepen a genuine and lasting community?'²¹ and 'How do we create mature adult disciples of Jesus Christ?'²² This last question is critical because he found many people, including those who'd practised Christian faith for many years, 'didn't feel a closeness or confidence in their relationship with God'.²³ This has also been our experience.



© Sarah Hosking

Tracey Balzer, another companion with us on the way, says the Celts 'beckon us to join a life of freedom and joyful collaboration with God, where the holy presence of God himself can be easily accessed and enjoyed in particular places and experiences. *Doesn't that kind of life sound appealing?*'⁴ It certainly does sound appealing to us, and maybe to many others in Aotearoa.

Reed, and others, taught us that the Celtic Christian community was formed around three essential activities: a Way of Life, a network of Soul Friends, and a Rhythm of Prayer. In Kiwi Church, we focus on these, particularly exploring a Way of Life – akin to a monastic rule of life.

We adopted 'Rhythm of Life' because 'rule' tended to elicit unhelpful feelings from some who react to their church experiences from days gone by – we find the image of a trellis a helpful metaphor to help us grow.

One Sunday we painted the wood to make up our trellis, and the next gathering the young people put it together. Our rhythm has four simple words:

Rest
Notice
Bless



© Daryll Tempero

We want to take the Sabbath seriously and be more intentional with our rest. We want to 'Be' with God and commune with God. We want to notice what God is doing, and join in. We want to bless others – bless each other, our neighbour, the stranger, traveller, and our enemy.

These simple four words are finding a place in our lives. They resonate with their simplicity and depth – especially the 'Be' frame of the trellis.

The idea of moving from prayer as a 'doing' activity to a 'being' activity is now embraced by people in life-giving ways, forming us as disciples, and helping nurture deeper relationships.

In our various gatherings we often practise *lectio divina*, *visio divina*, Ignatian prayer, Centering Prayer, and silence. Our site has a stunning garden so we enjoy gathering outside. It's curious how many people sense God's closeness in the outdoors, yet most usual church activities are inside – sometimes even looking at images of outside!

Our language is very intentional – 'notice what you notice,' 'do what you can, not what you can't' and you are God's 'beloved.' Henri Nouwen encouraged us to help each other live our lives hearing 'you are beloved' from the Father, and from one another.

Emotional health is important to us. In a world where powerful competing voices demand our attention, often in toxic ways which impact our well-being, this focus on the reality that we are God's beloved helps to centre us. It allows us to be present to God in the midst of chaos. It is not easy, but it does bear fruit.

The place of contemplative prayer

Contemplative prayer is very different to the prayer our people have been used to. Many have found freedom in the mentoring of David Benner. '*There is something seriously wrong when we feel like "prayer" is something we should do. 'Prayer is more about invitation, 'Simply saying yes to God's invitation to a loving encounter.'*

Ray Simpson helps us understand '*contemplative prayer is natural, unprogrammed; it's perpetual openness to God, so in the openness God's concerns can flow in and out of our minds as he wills.*'⁶ Contemplative prayer helps dismantle the secular/sacred split in which we express our faith and breaks down division between the activity of everyday life and prayer. Speaking of Celtic prayers Esther de Waal reminds us, '*For the men and women who recited them, prayer was not a formal exercise: it was a state of mind.*'⁷

The word 'invitation' simply reframes our posture and activity as a church community. Many of our people have grown up with a frowning God, or a disappointed God. Over the years we identified unhelpful images of God (or as Joyce Huggett would say, the God of our guts⁸) and discover a God who smiles.

Dallas Willard says 'Jesus only ever invites us to come to me, abide in me, learn from me, and follow me.' Willard had a significant impact on me as a minister – responding

to an invitation is way more attractive than doing something I think I should do. At Kiwi Church we try to encourage a posture of prayer that 'punctuates the day and enables everyone consciously to connect with God and remember every hour belongs to him.'⁹

There are echoes of Aotearoa's indigenous spirituality with the Celts. Michael Mitton found, 'With the Celtic love for creation, many connect with the seasons and with all the various aspects of life in God's created order. Celtic Christians found it as natural to pray during the milking of a cow as they did to pray in church. In fact, it is vital to feel at ease in praying while you are doing such mundane things as milking your cow, because, if you could not do that, your spiritual and earthly worlds were becoming far too separate.'¹⁰

Encouraging contemplative practices have helped form us as individuals and as a community. They give permission for people to be authentic with God, help lighten a burden of expectation and sense of failure when it comes to prayer, and reframe it to be more accessible. We notice we become closer to each other when we spend time in contemplation together as it provides a delightful way to get to know each other more deeply. Plus it gives people a chance to take breath and time out from a busy, dusty world together.

Contemplating Scripture helps us engage with God's word, moving from predominantly 'reading and thinking,' to more 'listening and hearing.' For some it has been freeing to ask: 'what does it say?' (as opposed to what does it mean?) It is a subtle but significant shift for those used to doing 'quiet times' and trying to 'apply' Scripture to their lives.

As well as the more familiar contemplative practices, whenever there is a 5th Sunday in the month we have 'Outdoors church,' where we go into the hills, by the sea, or in the bush, and spend time with God and each other.

Some gather regularly on a Saturday morning to create together – some paint, some knit, some take photos, all in a contemplative space which leads to taking delight in each other's creativity – and to deepen relationships. We built a labyrinth in the garden and learned about it as an aid to prayer. We created a contemplative Easter journey to engage with the story more deeply.

Some comments from our people:

For the past two years, my experience of the Kiwi Church model and our emphasis on contemplative practice has been: simplification and growth, discovery and anticipation, greater experience of being on a shared journey with 'friends', greater trust of self and God's love of me, increased sense of relevance of faith to daily life and engagement in our complex world, fresh desire to be 'in step with God' on a daily basis. It's liberating and lovely... and I'm just getting going. (Dianne)

Our practices together encouraged me to slow down and notice God in my day; Hearing what others have noticed in a contemplative space gives me another perspective. It helps me understand a bit more about their world and the sorts of things that are important to

them. Shared contemplative experiences are about slowing down together, being with each other in the silence, being connected in a way that goes beyond words. (Ramon)

Being (as opposed to doing), particularly relevant to my personal/health & spiritual faith stages. My own mantra is to 'not rush' but enjoy what's going on around me, so strolling along is a gift that Kiwi Church highlights. Strolling in silence; strolling; stopping & noticing; strolling with companions in conversation... often opportune and spiritually relevant, even if/when God is not mentioned. God is companion. Being outdoors allows creation to cushion our feet, feed our eyes and creates space to be creative, enter into God's space, know presence at its/his most foundational. There's family, there's community... there's finding soul friends. (Heather)

At Kiwi Church we're wanting to nurture an ecosystem in which contemplative practices play a vital part in our life together. We don't do them to make anything happen, we do them because they help place us in the hands of our loving Creator, who forms us into the people God made us to be. They help us pause, take a breath, stroll with God, and notice the Divine's loving gaze on us. It helps centre us, recalibrate us, and encourage us as we participate with God restoring all things.

I leave the final words to our friend, Henri Nouwen:

*'Contemplative Prayer deepens in us the knowledge that we are already free, that we have already found a place to dwell, that we already belong to God, even though everything and everyone around us keep suggesting the opposite.'*¹¹

- 1 Simon Reed, *Creating Community: Ancient Ways for Modern Churches* (Abingdon, UK: BRF, 2013), Electronic Edition: Location 181.
- 2 *Ibid.*, loc 200.
- 3 *Ibid.*, loc 170.
- 4 Tracey Balzer, *Thin Places: An Evangelical Journey into Celtic Spirituality* (Ablene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2007), 32.
- 5 Borrowed from our friend Rev Spanky Moore and the Vocatio community in Christchurch, although we use the word 'Be' rather than 'Pray' given our context of people who have some allergies to some church language.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Esther De Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer: The Recovery of the Religious Imagination* (Image, 1999), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 950.
- 8 Joyce Huggett, *Learning the Language of Prayer* (Oxford, UK: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 1994) 91.
- 9 Reed, *Creating Community*, loc 323.
- 10 Michael Mitton, *Restoring the Woven Cord: Strands of Celtic Christianity for the Church Today 2nd ed.* (Abingdon: BRF 2010), 3.
- 7 Esther De Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer: The Recovery of the Religious Imagination* (Image, 1999), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 950.
- 8 Joyce Huggett, *Learning the Language of Prayer* (Oxford, UK: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 1994) 91.
- 9 Reed, *Creating Community*, loc 323.
- 10 Michael Mitton, *Restoring the Woven Cord: Strands of Celtic Christianity for the Church Today 2nd ed.* (Abingdon: BRF 2010), 3.

Practising the Way – new wave of contemplative pastors

Interesting things are happening in some local churches in relation to spiritual formation. SGM Workgroup's David Crawley recently caught up with Sam Harvey, 41, pastor of Bay Vineyard Church in Napier, to find out more.

David: Hi Sam. Thanks for making this time. I know you planted the church where you are now in Napier, about five years ago. How long have you been in pastoral ministry?

Sam: My dad's an Anglican vicar, so I spent 41 long years swimming in the church world, 20 of those in paid full-time vocational ministry in various churches around the country.

David: That's half your life! Tell us a little bit about the church you're currently pastoring.

Sam: We moved here six years ago and didn't know anyone. We started gathering friends and a couple of families helped us plant the church. Celebrated our fifth birthday last Saturday. So, we're established now, which is really cool. Even though COVID and everything made life tricky, we've still got a church!

David: You have a strong conviction that spiritual formation should be not a fringe thing, but at the centre of church life. How did that come about?

Sam: I've discovered that 'spiritual formation' can mean a lot of things for different people. It incorporates spiritual practices – silence and solitude, devotional practices, retreats, fasting, sabbath – but for me, it's synonymous with discipleship. It's orientated around following the way of Jesus. That conviction started when I was studying at the Bible College of New Zealand (now Laidlaw). To be honest, I thought that the spiritual formation track looked like the easiest option! But it exposed me to a whole world that's informed my own personal journey as a follower of Jesus and a pastor. When you're finding life in Jesus through spiritual practices, and you've tapped into authors and movements in that space, you can't help but share that with the community that you lead.

David: So how have you managed to bring that focus on discipleship, following the Jesus way, to your community?

Sam: Dallas Willard's been one of the catalytic voices in the last 30 or 40 years. He argues every pastor needs to be asking the question, 'how are we making disciples?' And then the second question, 'is it working?' Next was Bridgetown Church, in Portland, Oregon. They define discipleship or formation as growing in three areas: learning to be with Jesus, to become like Jesus, and do what Jesus did. That's the best summary I've ever heard of what it means to be a disciple.



© Sam Harvey

There are all sorts of things you can do to help you become like Jesus. But the problem's been we often put mission at the centre of what the church is all about. When discipleship is at the centre, mission will overflow, with far deeper roots, and far more authenticity.

Some people have felt uncomfortable with our focus as a church because, hey, isn't mission meant to be at the centre? Well, no, I think that's actually putting the cart before the horse.

So how do we do that? The first thing I observed is, as a rule, our under-45s have no interior life of Jesus on the average day. That's because they've grown up in a world of incredible distraction, with mobile phones and so on. They've grown up in a distraction economy with a lack of discipleship culture to teach people how to pray or to be with Jesus. But that has to be the anchor discipline in the Christian life.

We did some stuff on Sundays that taught people how to pray, using classic spiritual practices, set prayers, silence and solitude, and so on. We told them about apps for guided reflection.

We weren't prescriptive because that can slide into legalism super quick. What we did say is, 'What's the next click for you and your inner life with Jesus?' And because there's so much trying to form you to live a life just on your phone, or whatever, let's be accountable to one another, because we're at that level of crisis when it comes to people's interior life with Jesus.

We also oriented all our small group resources around practising the way of Jesus. We had modules on sabbath rest, deepening your devotional life, 24/7 prayer resources, and then things like Emotionally Healthy Spirituality that can help around the becoming like Jesus.

Then we began to lean into doing what Jesus did: missional life, justice, caring for the poor. In an embodied way, we're trying to step into being good news by slowing down. That was what we started with. Let's just teach our people to pray and foster a culture that celebrates that space, and then go from there in terms of building other spiritual disciplines.

We've just introduced the concept of a Rule of Life, where our schedule aligns with our values more and more.

David. You made a striking statement about the under 45s not having an interior life with Jesus. What's the response been like from that demographic?

Sam. Unreal. Initially, there was a bit of scepticism: 'I want this, but can I do it?' Because everyone feels like their lives fully busy, to the absolute limit. In the first couple of sessions, one of the guys said, 'I'm going to pull over on the way home from work.' He's a busy guy with a young family, a deputy principal with a lot on his plate. 'I'm going to

pull over on the way home for five minutes and just do some sort of passive devotional thing, if I can.'

Formation doesn't happen quickly, but fast forward and now that same person is getting up to spend an hour with Jesus early in the morning. In his words, it's the most life-giving part of his day. It's still a battle because there's a billion-dollar industry trying to distract them. But that doesn't bring life. It brings anxiety, depression, disappointment and disengagement.

All of this is in the context of community, which is very rich in itself. And it's spilt over missionally – coming out of an interior life with Jesus, not a moment of inspiration out of a conference or a sermon.

David. I understand last year you and a number of other Kiwi pastors went across to Portland, to the Practicing the Way conference. Tell us a bit about that.

Sam. Yeah. Practicing the Way is a parachurch organisation that's emerged out of a church called Bridgetown in Portland, a highly secular city, led by a guy called John Mark Comer. Fifteen years ago, he was wrestling with ecclesiology because he was so dissatisfied with what he'd been engaged with. He comes across all the Dallas Willard stuff, and Richard Foster, and thinks, 'How can we get this happening in our churches? What if we tried to put formation at the centre?'

A lot of the spiritual director types said, 'It's never been done. Don't try. This is just going to have to be a niche thing on the fringe.' But Bridgetown went about putting spiritual formation/discipleship at the centre of their church and learning spiritual practices in the way of Jesus. I stumbled across them about six years ago, which really helped shape what we're doing at Bay Vineyard. There's an enormous hunger for this, among pastors like me, dissatisfied with what our church focus has been.

Cycling back to that Dallas Willard question. Are we making disciples? I think the answer is, unequivocally, not well. Studies in the US show only 8% of millennials come out of church – Christian kids – with some sort of basic faith. For all the money and energy getting spent, we can hardly say we're forming resilient disciples of Jesus in our secular culture. John Mark has now set up a not-for-profit organisation with the goal of helping churches put this back at the centre: resources, pastors' training, all sorts of stuff (www.practicingtheway.org). It's one of many things that are happening.

It's early days, but I think it's a genuine move of God, where discipleship/spiritual formation are being restored to the centre of the church.

David. You know a little bit about Spiritual Growth Ministries. What do you think we can do, if anything, to help support that desire?

Sam. First, I think SGM should be celebrating that this is happening! This is an answer to prayer for why SGM exists. So, celebrate it and engage with it. I'd be saying to anyone involved with SGM, point your pastor or vicar to all this stuff, saying, 'Hey, isn't this

exciting? Because there's now resources for small groups, through Practicing the Way and other places, that have never been there before – around spiritual disciplines and all sorts of stuff. I had to film all my own stuff before all this came out. I had to build everything because there was very little out there.

The need is going to grow exponentially, I think, for spiritual directors. Fast forwarding 10 years, I see there's going to be a higher demand for spiritual directors.

Throughout church history, God brought waves of renewal to the church. I think this is another wave of renewal. Here's a challenge! How can SGM ride the wave? What does that look like in terms of training, in different centres, or retreats that people are desperate for? We can get comfortable on the fringe with a niche thing. But this requires a different organisational vision if it's starting to move formation/discipleship to the centre.

Next year there's going to be a big conference for pastors, talking about spiritual formation in the church. If I was an SGM person, I'd be crying tears of joy that this is happening and working out how I can bless it!

David. That's a good challenge, Sam, because some of us – not all – who are involved in SGM might be in a different place, theologically, or churchwise, to the Practicing the Way folks. But rather than saying, 'Oh, I can't relate to that language,' or 'I can't relate to that theology,' or whatever, we can look past all of that and ask, 'What is God doing here, and how can we support it?'

Sam. Fully. I think with any organisation that wants to have a national voice in this space, there has to be a high amount of grace. Today, with the force of secularism, the strength of formation through culture can't be overstated. So, it doesn't matter what your theology is on some of the secondary stuff, the basics of being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus and doing what Jesus did are all things we can agree are central.

David. Indeed! Thank you for your time, Sam, we'll continue to watch this space.

Practices deeper and wisdoms more radiant

by Kenneth Tanner

As a young man I discovered Christianity has traditions other than the one in which I was raised. I discovered (without judgment of my beloved cradle tradition) that the waters of Christian reflection and practice are deeper and its wisdoms more radiant than can be explored or beheld in a lifetime.

For me, these startling discoveries were always experiences of Jesus Christ: the words of the first Christians about the human God, the bread and wine on the table, transfiguring music and converting iconography, the poor, the prisoner, the stranger – all of these glimpses of – or encounters with Jesus.

As I learned (and continue to learn) – to read Scripture with the whole church, to join the time-tried prayers of her many eras, tribes, tongues, and places – humility about my tiny grasp of the immensities has settled somewhere in me somehow over time. And on my better days, humility keeps me in awe and joy rather than self-assurance and criticism.

Along nearly forty years of pilgrimage, it's been at times tempting to settle for the brilliance of the words or the beauty of the practices, to love the forms of dress or address, to imagine one facet or aspect of the mystery as the whole, to find a place or tradition or language or tribe that excels all others in the great church – but this is of course to misunderstand the nature of the bride and, more importantly, the bridegroom.

Jesus is what attracts me in all of this goodness and if it is not about Jesus, if the words or signs do not draw me deeper into the human God – specifically the nail-wounded son of Mary, from eternity the maker of all worlds and what they enclose – then any way of practising, of speaking, of organising the faith, any staked claim, exalted argument, better way or 'true church' – isn't compelling to me. It's Jesus or I'm out.

I have learned instead that I need every good thought and every good practice and every last tribe and every last tongue – all the Spirit-blessed movements and all martyrs – to see and to follow Jesus (never quite laying hold, ever-seeking still his face), nothing less and nothing more than the whole mystery of Christ as embodied in the people of God.

1 Corinthians 12.12-20

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -

Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body.

And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?

If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

If all were a single member, where would the body be?

As it is, there are many members, yet one body.

Training contemplative leaders

by Geoff New

I'm charged with the privilege of overseeing the training and formation of ordinands for the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa NZ. Those called into ordained ministry, upon completion of an undergraduate theological qualification, enter a 22-month internship programme. The internship comprises 75% day-to-day mission and ministry in a local congregation, and 25% is engaged in study and residential block courses.

The context for Christian ministry and leadership is compounded by the complexity of issues confronting people, and the depth and breadth of change in every regard. In such a milieu, our training and formation need to avoid one or both of two extremes: embracing power and offering a form of training that's (blindly) full of self-belief that the world is blessed we are at work in it; or succumbing to hopelessness – offering a form of training that is (quietly) devoid of faith that God is at work in this world.

To avoid such extremes, in the first pastoral care lecture, interns are required to answer two questions: 'So, how do *you* handle power?' and 'Are you weak enough to be a minister?'. Embedded in these questions are two losses that can mark contemporary Christianity; what it means to bear a cross (a sense of sacrifice in fulfilling the call of God), and the place of 'the fear of God' (a sense of reverence in responding to the call of God). Along with these primary questions is a primary exercise.

One of the first things we introduce to interns is the creation of a Rule of Life. This is a careful exercise whereby the interns audit their current spiritual practice and disciplines and reflect on how they will walk with the Spirit during their internship. Due to serendipitous events, I decided to re-engineer the Rule of Life exercise.

This year, interns will engage with the six streams of Christian tradition as articulated by Richard Foster in his book *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* and his subsequent ministry vehicle, *Renovaré*.

Flowing through centuries of the Christian experience, the six streams and expressions Foster describes are: the contemplative tradition, the holiness tradition, the charismatic tradition, the social justice tradition, the evangelical tradition, and the incarnational tradition.

Through an introductory lecture, interaction, personal reflection, and spiritual direction, each intern is expected to swim in their 'traditional' stream and at the very least, wade in one other stream they are either unfamiliar with or resistant to. From this exercise, they will create a Rule of Life for their time as an intern. From this spiritual engagement, they will immerse in a Rule of Life to welcome and host Christ.

It's my observation from training ordinands, that there is a hunger for the experience of God, but they are assaulted (and sometimes defeated) by competing pressures and demands in the service of God. That is to say, the hand and foot (busyness) dominate the eye and ear (attentiveness).



In leading interns to the banks of the six streams (aka Renovaré), the hope is to partly fulfil Karl Rahner's prophecy, 'The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he [sic] will not exist at all.'

In his book *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*, Philip Endean, unpacks and paraphrases Rahner's words, 'Tomorrow's devout person will either be a mystic – someone who has 'experienced' something – or else they will no longer be devout at all.' The 'experience' Endean refers to is God's grace with its outworking in the world.

It's my hypothesis the riverbeds of all six streams of Christian traditions Foster describes, are contemplative in essence. All six flow over (often unseen) riverbeds of contemplative stillness and attentiveness. The kind of stillness I have in mind is – again – best articulated by Rahner when he writes, 'Be still for once. Don't try to think of so many complex and varied things. Give those deeper realities of the spirit a chance now to rise to the surface: silence, fear, the ineffable longing for truth, for love, for fellowship, for God.'

Such stillness and attentiveness accord the primacy and supremacy of God *before* any theological work, prayer, or meditation. This is not to suggest passivity in ministry. The DNA of contemplation in Rahner's particular vocation (Ignatian spirituality), is *contemplativus in actione*: contemplatives in action.

It's my hope that through their Rule of Life, interns will grow in such qualities as discernment, wisdom, and maturity in Christ. It's my hope that through their Rule of Life, they'll move from the streams in which they swim, to a secret place. That through the Rule of Life they'll find that secret place which Jesus spoke of (Matt 6:6) and Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) testified about, 'There is a room in each one's heart where no man, no woman, no devil, no angel can go. Only you and God can go into that interior space.' That through the Rule of Life, interns will be the kind of mystic Rahner predicted and George MacDonald (1824–1905) preached about when he said that in every person, 'there is a loneliness, an inner chamber of peculiar life into which God only can enter... a chamber into which no brother, nay, no sister can come. ... From this it follows that there is a chamber also... a chamber in God himself, into which none can enter but the one, the individual.' And from this chamber, MacDonald says, the person will bring revelation and strength for others, and reveal the secret things of God.

In the training of interns, there are stark limits in how far and how deep human teachers can go. There are those sacred places in everyone's heart which only God can (thankfully!) go and there the business of heaven, earth, and kingdom are attended to by God and God's child.

From these sacred places, mystics for this present future emerge to exist and lead in this world.

¹ The question 'Are you weak enough to be a minister?' is an adaptation of Michael J. Buckley's S. J. question of seminarians in the 1970s

Unity and Contemplation

Twenty-two years ago, in 2001, this statement from church leaders in the United Kingdom foresaw a coming wave of contemplative spirituality which would bring unity to the Body of Christ. It was published in the inaugural edition of *Refresh*.

We believe welcome progress has been made recently in overcoming the ancient divisions between Christian churches. The power of the Gospel has often been veiled by the failure of Christians to love one another and to celebrate diversity as a sign of the richness of unity that there is in Christ.

We believe however, a new era is opening. In these times there is less call for words and ceremonies and more need for the authentic spiritual knowledge that arises through the silence of contemplation. The spiritual hunger and the widespread suspicion of religion in our society firmly points Christians to this depth dimension of their common faith.

The contemplative dimension of the Gospel is not a speciality of particular churches or groups. It belongs to all and summons us all, through the signs of the times, to recover it. Nor is this contemplative dimension of faith to be identified only with the vocation of some to solitude and quiet. It applies equally to the life of good works, prophetic protest against injustice and the patient labour of peace making.

Indeed, the integrity and vigour of the Christian life and its witness to the world depends upon the marriage of contemplation and action in the full experience of the mystery of God that passes understanding but is intimately known in daily acts of kindness. If we cannot understand the silence of Christ, we will not be able to understand his words, as an earlier Christian teacher asserted.

Because we are convinced of the urgent need to recover the contemplative dimension in our prayer, worship and ministries, we have committed ourselves to search for ways in which this can be better appreciated by all Christians and by the whole of society... We invite our brothers and sisters in all churches to reflect on and join in this contemplative endeavour and so enrich its vision with their own special insights and traditions. We believe too that in this age of violence and terror, friendship between the world religions is an indispensable foundation for the work for global peace and justice. If this friendship is to be sincere and transformative it also must be rooted in that experience of silence, stillness and simplicity that is the common ground of contemplation.

If we really can achieve a fuller harmony between contemplation and action, in this way we will surely better fulfil the greater desire of Christ that we 'may all be one'. Signed by:

- The Rt Hon & Rt Rev'd Richard Chartres, The Anglican Bishop of London
- Dom Laurence Freeman OSB, The World Community for Christian Meditation
- His Eminence Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster
- Rev Dr Leslie Griffiths, Supt. Minister of Wesley's Chapel and Leysian Centre
- Archbishop Gregorios of Thyratira and Gt. Britain.

Nurturing a contemplative stance for navigating challenging times

by Lynne M. Baab

A child wouldn't use 'contemplative stance,' but understands something significant about how to lean-in to her nurturing mother to receive love... Our ministry in this hurting world must be grounded in moments of resting in God's presence.

I never did enjoy golf, but my mother and brother loved it. I often overheard them talking about their stance as they used different golf clubs. They talked about intentionally changing their stance and practicing it until it came more easily. Stance matters in baseball and cricket, too, specifically for batters. In these three sports, a person might consider how far apart their feet are, the way their shoulders are positioned, and the angle of their head. According to Wikipedia's entry on batting in cricket, an ideal stance is 'comfortable, relaxed, and balanced.'¹

At first, a stance is a conscious choice of how to position our body. After a while, it becomes more natural, but tweaks to our stance are necessary from time to time.

Teaching pastoral theology at the University of Otago, I developed a course on the missional church – an approach to ministry centred on the idea that we're sent into the world as Jesus was sent (John 17:18) whether in our hometown or the other side of the world.² And while I'm still committed to developing a missional stance, I feel we need to take a step back to ask, 'how can we grow in listening to God for direction?' Alongside a missional stance, we need to nurture a contemplative stance for the church – to help us receive the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

This is especially true in this time of limited resources, tired parishioners, and an increasingly secular world. We need to be sure we're following God's guidance – both in how we nurture faith within our congregations and the way we mobilize Christians to reach out into our hurting world. Only God knows the best way to be Jesus' people here and now relying on the strength of the Holy Spirit.

So what is contemplation anyway?

The verb 'contemplate' – and its related words 'contemplation' and 'contemplative' – is ancient. The Latin word means to gaze attentively, observe, or consider. By the late fourteenth century, Christians used these words to refer to reflection, thought, and the act of holding something continuously before the mind. In the twenty-first century we might talk about pondering or mulling over. The focus of contemplation for Christians then and now is the Triune God and the purposes and desires of God – most fully revealed in Jesus and made real to us through the Holy Spirit.

So for those of us who want to bring Jesus' health, healing, and wholeness into our communities – it's worth asking exactly what are we pondering over as we plan congregational activities and outreach programmes. Is our planning primarily motivated

by fear? By the desire to look good? By a need to appease influential groups? By pressure to make a decision – right now?

Too often, our reflection isn't focused on God's purposes and priorities, but on more pressing issues and emotions.

A contemplative stance encourages appropriate pacing, clarity of motivations, and peaceful process toward decisions. I propose these seven components of a contemplative stance for Christians today to help focus us on what God is already doing. This stance can enable us to hear God's guidance and open ourselves to receive the Holy Spirit's power.

Seven components of a contemplative stance

1. Paying attention.

All too often, our minds are focused on regrets and fears. Regrets turn our attention to the past, what we could have done differently and what we wish we had known, thought about, or paid attention to before we made decisions we regret. Fears focus on negative future possibilities. A contemplative stance begins with letting regrets and fears wash away in the river of God's love, enabling us to focus on the present.

From the Buddhist tradition, many Christians have profited from the principles of mindfulness meditation: a focus on this moment, including what I'm experiencing through my five senses and what I'm feeling and thinking. Christians can add a tweak to traditional mindfulness meditation by seeking to be attentive enough to identify God's presence in this moment and place. This helps us develop a stance centred on a sense of God's presence, guidance, and empowerment here and now. In addition to mindfulness meditation, breath prayer is an effective spiritual practice to help us locate ourselves in the present.

2. Receptivity.

God gives good gifts to us (James 1:17) and an attitude of receptivity opens us to receive those gifts. Being receptive requires us to go beyond attentiveness to embrace holy curiosity about what God is doing in a situation before we arrive. Receptivity refers to being open to God's gifts and God's guidance in two different ways. On the one hand, God works in our lives in response to the needs we express in prayer, the concerns we have about people, and the tensions and anxieties we experience in everyday life. God invites us to open our hearts and minds to see the ways the Holy Spirit is moving in the situations we care about.

The second aspect of receptivity relates to our willingness to let God initiate, to let God be God in whatever form that takes. Jesus invites us to follow him, to let him set the agenda and lead us. 'Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,' Jesus encourages us (Matthew 11:29, NRSV).³ God guides us into places we wouldn't otherwise go and challenges us to grow in ways we never imagined. God gives us gifts that we could never have seen on our own, and calls us to use them in situations we never planned. Many

forms of Bible study and prayer can nurture receptivity if we shift our emphasis to an openness to receive from God.

3. *Listening to God.*

Receptivity opens us to God's voice and initiative. When we talk about listening to God, we are zooming in to the specific component of receptivity where we expect God to speak. Isaiah describes his listening stance: 'The Sovereign LORD . . . wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.' (Isaiah 50:4; NIV). The opening words of the ancient Rule of St Benedict emphasize listening to God with our ears and our hearts.⁴

If we know we are already loved, it will be easier to respond in obedience to God's voice. Two major ways God speaks to humans are through the Bible and nature, both of which are full of God's love for us. In so many Gospel stories Jesus shows tender care for the people he talks with, and John summarizes Jesus' ministry: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son' (John 3:16). Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si'*, argues that nature also helps us to hear that voice of love: 'The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God.'⁵ We listen to God to know we are loved, then we listen for further guidance.

4. *Reflection*

After we've paid attention to what's going on here and now, after we have opened ourselves to God's gifts and tried to listen for God's voice, we need to ponder what we've seen and heard. A stance that makes room for reflection usually involves both silence and conversation. Most of us need some amount of silence or stillness to reflect on what we hear from God, although for some, silence feels uncomfortable at first. A few strong extraverts do all their reflecting in conversation with others. Many spiritual practices and settings can help us reflect, including small groups, journaling, praying while walking in nature, and spiritual direction.

5. *Imagination*

Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) recommends we use our imagination to place ourselves in stories from the Bible, picturing what's happening, visualizing the smells, sounds, and tactile experiences of participants in the story. Many Christians imagine Jesus walking beside them, or picture an encounter with Jesus where they talk to him and listen to him.

In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, praying with icons involves imagining God is looking at us through the eyes of the icon. These and other forms of imaginative prayer help us nurture a contemplative stance because they help us slow down, receive from God, hear God's voice, reflect on God's priorities and values, and know that we are loved.

6. *Availability*

Essential to a contemplative stance is the willingness to be guided by the Holy Spirit into whatever path God has for us. After Isaiah receives a vision of God in a majestic temple

surrounded by angels, he says, 'Here I am, send me' (Isaiah 6:8). Our availability to God is a natural response when we encounter God and know we're loved. We model ourselves after Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: 'Not my will but yours be done' (Luke 22:42).

7. *Simplicity*

Most people find it extremely difficult to adopt a contemplative stance in the midst of chaos, pressure, and feelings of being overwhelmed. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun writes the goal of simplicity is 'to uncomplicate and untangle my life so I can focus on what really matters.'⁶ In the same way a stance in golf, cricket, or baseball requires a lot of attention at first, then frequent tweaks to keep it effective, Christians must intentionally consider the patterns of our lives so that we 'can focus on what really matters.'

Resting in God's Presence

Wikipedia's description of a good cricket stance as 'comfortable, relaxed, and balanced,' helps us understand that developing both a missional and contemplative stance requires practice. I encourage lightness about the whole process. Try some components of a contemplative stance, practice them more than once, see how they feel, and then let go of those practices that don't feel 'comfortable, relaxed, and balanced' at least some of the time. Psalm 131 presents a picture of a weaned child at peace in her mother's lap. She no longer comes to her mother primarily for the comfort and sustenance of food. Now that she's older, she leans against her mother to calm and quiet her soul. That child wouldn't use the words 'contemplative stance,' but she understands something significant about how to lean-in to her nurturing mother to receive love. Our ministry in this hurting world must be grounded in moments of resting in God's presence.

Psalm 46 is another vivid psalm that reinforces the significance of a contemplative stance. Because God is our refuge and strength, we do our best to ground ourselves in God's goodness when earthquakes and storms happen.

We know God is like a river running through the city of God, bringing joy. We pay attention to each moment, we try to receive God's gifts and listen to God, and we reflect on what we are perceiving and receiving. We use our imaginations to engage with the Bible and the needs of the world, and we make ourselves available to God. We embrace simplicity so we can clear away the clutter and focus on what matters most. These help us receive God's words through the psalmist: 'Be still, and know that I am God' (Psalm 46:10).

1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batting_\(cricket\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batting_(cricket))

2 One of my favorite books on the missional church uses the word 'posture' in the sub-title – a synonym for 'stance.' Australian minister and associate professor, Darren Cronshaw, co-authored the book with American minister Kim Hammond. *Sentness: Six Postures for Missional Christians* aims to help us serve and witness authentically in increasingly secular times.

3 The NRSV is used throughout this article, except when noted.

4 The rule of St Benedict, *Catholic Online*, <https://www.catholic.org/saints/rules/saintBenedict.php>

5 *Laudato Si'*, the Vatican, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

6 Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook, Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015*, 84.

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EVERY NAME

Ana Lisa de Jong, Living Tree Poetry

In this cradle of tree I sit
thanking you.
I will call you every name I know
and none will be heresy.
You are Papatūānuku
holding me in tree limbs.
Tāne Mahuta breathing from behind,
calling in the birds.
And Tangaroa
of the glass like sea,
this green silk stretch of river current
meeting the blue.
Yes, each name I call you
is more than true.
Just like each call of bird speaks something
we can't translate.

Last night we gazed upon Rangī-nui,
his bright sparks of stars
in the blanket of sky,
and spoke of infinity and
the Cosmic Christ.
And how in the daytime too,
the stars are there though
we cannot perceive them
And this morning I woke in Nature's aviary
considering all the myriad of birds
meeting the day.
Walked to the sea
in a continuance of thank you
to you, Runga Rawa,
the name at the tip of each tongue
and each bird's song.

I am deep in Rongo-mā-Tane,
sinking and floating at the same time.
God of the many names,
and each of them right,
you here now, and we, alive in your image.
That my lover asks why
I am always writing of you.
How to tell him how
when I speak of God,
I speak of him too.
Imago Dei.

Tane Mahuta's Triumph © Jane Crisp 2007



The Contemplative Journey – ending the ‘divorce’ between spirituality and theology

Tracey Hunt

Tracey Hunt reminds us of the rich history of ‘the contemplative tradition in the Church: a gift we can reclaim and share so contemporary Christians have another option within the church on which to feed their souls.’

When I think of contemplation, Thomas Merton comes to mind (1915-1968)

There’s an intoxication in the waters of contemplation...

These are the waters which the world does not know,

because it prefers the water of bitterness and contradiction.

These are the waters of peace, of which Christ said:

‘He that shall drink of the water that I shall give him shall not thirst forever.

But the water that I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water,

springing up into life everlasting.’

These are the waters of Siloe, that flow in silence.¹

Merton wrote this at the very beginning of *The Waters of Silence*, a history of the Cistercian order. Yet, to call it history can’t express the deep experience I had reading it.

The book is imbued with a spiritual atmosphere I’ve rarely encountered in contemporary church life. It reminds me of what my brother and I experienced in an empty stone room behind Canterbury Cathedral where – despite our then professed agnosticism – we stood in silence for quite some time simply soaking up the amazing atmosphere.

It also brings to mind the awe I experienced in Solesmes, a modern monastery in the Sarthe region of France. Living nearby for a time, I’d occasionally bike there to enjoy the sculptures. One day a service was on when I was visiting, complete with incense and plainsong. Again, I was transfixed.

Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything²

I’ve since studied this tradition which begins with Anthony (251? - 356) and the Desert Fathers. My favourite quote from that era is the one above by Abbot Moses (4th century AD). Partly because it’s so simple, and also because it expresses a counter-cultural view to today’s prevalent activism.

Our lives tend to be continually connected to media, other people, and various activities. The idea of sitting at home alone as the goal of our life seems ridiculous, and in its extreme it possibly is, but there’s value in maintaining a balance between the active life and the contemplative life.

Saint Augustine (354-430) said, ‘No one should be so contemplative that in his contemplation he does not think of his neighbour’s needs; no one so active that he

does not seek the contemplation of God.’³ John Milton (1608-1674) in his poem *On His Blindness*, reminds us, ‘They also serve who only stand and wait.’⁴

Perhaps we all learned something of this during Covid lockdowns, but most of us seem to quickly re-engage with our previous activities in an attempt to return ‘back to normal.’

*We believe in one God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.⁵*

The contemplative tradition can be seen as originating from a mix of Platonic ideas and Scripture. In very general terms, Plato (c.428-348 BC) taught that the soul belongs in the spiritual realm not the physical one, and the goal is for it to return to the spiritual.

Plotinus (c.205-270) expressed this journey as, ‘The flight of the alone to the [impersonal] Alone.’⁶ Of course, this thinking led to the dualism which divided the soul and the body, but in 325 AD the Christian Council of Nicaea stated that the body and soul are both created, and the great divide is actually between the person and God.

Mysticism traditionally seeks a way to bridge that divide through practices such as *hesychia* (stillness), asceticism and freedom from earthly desires.

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.⁷

For me this verse, 2 Corinthians 3:18, best expresses the hope of contemplation. We yearn to come so closely into the Lord’s presence that we are changed to be like him, as Moses experienced with his glowing face (Exodus 34:29-30).

Mysticism – and monasticism with which it’s closely associated – can be criticised for being world-denying. However, when their ideals are realised, contemplatives often attract people to live for God and in this way become a force for good in the world.

During the Reformation (1500s), when Protestants distanced themselves from Catholicism, they also largely rejected the monastic tradition – the era tended to value rational thought. Under the influence of scholasticism, the contemplative journey was approached from an intellectual and systematic standpoint.⁸ At the same time subjective experience was seen as increasingly emotive and was marginalised. McIntosh notes with sadness the ‘divorce’ between spirituality and theology at that time.⁹

The modern ‘spiritual marketplace’ is a challenge for all Christians: Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. But it is a particular challenge for Western Christians, whose mystical and contemplative traditions have (since at least the 16th century) been less prominent, and less accessible to the lay faithful, than those schools of mysticism native to the Christian East.¹⁰

In people’s perception these developments meant the physical world lost its spirituality and became machine-like.¹¹ This created a spiritual vacuum into which flowed other

influences, ideas from other religions (especially Hinduism and Buddhism) and occult teachings. Christopher Partridge calls this the 're-enchantment of the West.'¹² There's also been a turn to the self-promoting the idea we can each have our own truth. It's within this smorgasbord of spiritual ideas that Christianity seeks to retain its place.

*I began to sense all our contemporary thinking about silence
sees it as an absence or a lack of speech or sound – a totally negative condition.*

But I was not experiencing it like that.

*In the growth of my garden, in my appreciation of time and the natural world,
in the way I was praying, in my new sense of well-being and simple joy –
all of which grew clearer the more silent I was – I did not see lack or absence,
but a positive presence...of something which is not sound.¹³*

Myriad ideas constantly presented to us create a confusing environment. The contemplative tradition is a gift we can reclaim and share so contemporary Christians have another option within the church on which to feed their souls.

Personally, I seek to do this by creating a life that's not too busy, reading from the contemplative tradition, spending time in Scripture, maintaining a daily period of silent(-ish) prayer and having some form of annual retreat. I highly recommend the book *Coming to God in the Stillness* by Jim Borst as a starting point for practising contemplative prayer.¹⁴

Ultimately the contemplative life offers a personal adventure with God that's open to all who seek it. As well, pursuing it ideally allows us to share the gift of God's presence wherever we go.

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Church and Contemplative Spirituality

by Trish McBride

As we relate to a lovable God, we discover ourselves as loved, then the rest follows – the commitment to our neighbours, to social justice, to the earth, to the integration of scientific discoveries with our theology, and by no means least, to our own well-being.

A few decades ago, I pondered the ultimate purpose of Church. To get us all to Heaven? To build the kingdom of God on earth? To convert the rest of the world to Christianity? To provide a community setting where people who shared values could gather to support each other? None of these felt deep and personal enough.

Then I lit on the thought that Church is to bring /teach/ coach each person towards experiencing Divine Love. Sunday doings mostly don't do this. If this task can be achieved, then the rest will fall into place. I'm so grateful for the decades since of spiritual direction and the wise ones who have guided me in this process.

While official Church structures provided for this since the beginning through contemplative teaching, in say monastic institutions, lay people often found themselves enthralled by the Divine in ways that didn't depend on the ecclesial institution.

The Desert Mothers and Fathers, the medieval women mystics like Mechtilde, Hildegard, Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Siena, Marie d'Oignies and Angela of Foligno wrote of their experiences and guided and reassure many who have had similar experiences.

Then there were the Beguines, lay women who lived in community with an intense prayer and ministry life. Men too, like Meister Eckhart, Jan van Ruusbroec and Ignatius of Loyola. This could be hazardous in the times of persecution of heretics, especially during the Inquisition.

Only in recent decades, maybe five or six, have ordinary lay people had access to formal contemplative teaching. My beginning experiences in the Catholic Church from the 1960s were based first at the Cenacle (then in Lower Hutt), later at the Marist Retreat House Futuna in Wellington. Retreats were offered, with or without a guide, silent or not. They were precious times where unusual things might happen. That's what 'did it' for me. Learning prayer of Love and Listening was the key.

With all due respect due respect to the Reformers, to me they seem to have thrown the baby out with the bathwater – forgetting the core commandment in Deuteronomy 6.5: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. And in Matthew 22.37-39: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with

all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself.

Love God – not worship or fear or obey or imitate. Love! A God who wants above anything else to be loved! Relationship! The disciples were each enthralled first of all by their own relationship with Jesus. The rest followed.

Over the centuries, this Contemplative treasure has been surrounded by accretions of so many institutional rules, doctrinal requirements, and organisational fences – that it became invisible to the average person in pew and to a considerable degree it still is.

However, Christianity would never have lasted 2000 years without real people having real experiences of the Holy One! And so it goes on.

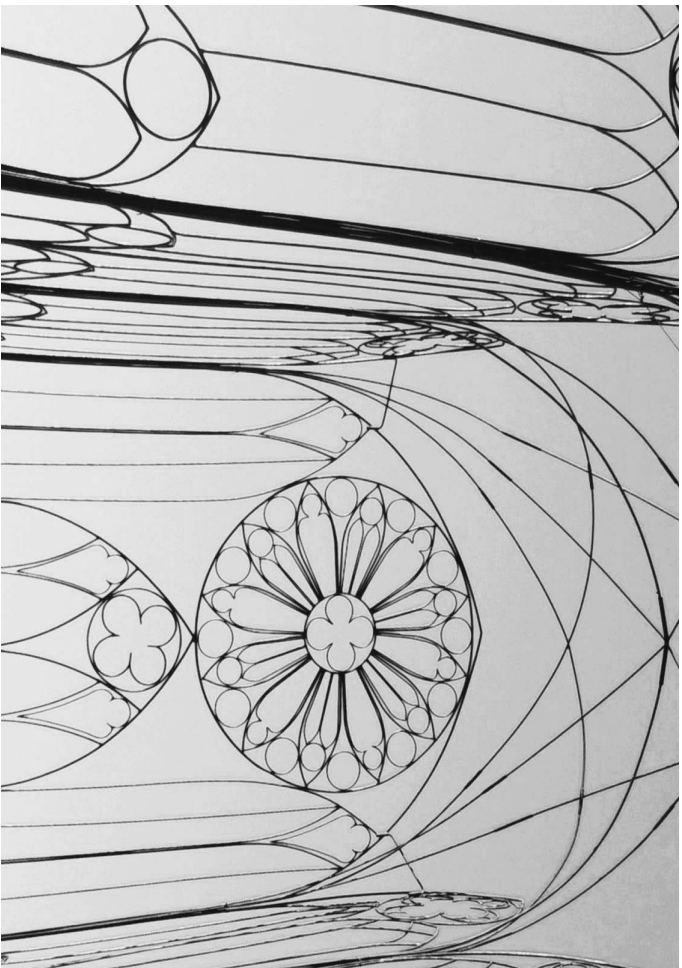
In Aotearoa, spiritual direction – which focuses on that quality of relating – found its way into Protestant church contexts in the 1980s when Presbyterians, John Franklin, Anne Hadfield and others, in conjunction with Dominican nuns, birthed Spiritual Growth Ministries, which has flourished across denominations ever since.

As we relate to a lovable God, we discover ourselves as loved, then the rest follows – the commitment to our neighbours, to social justice, to the earth, to the integration of scientific discoveries with our theology, and by no means least, to our own well-being. Maybe the Contemplative strand will enrich churches, maybe it will grow beyond institutions. 'The devout Christian of the future will either be a 'mystic,' one who has experienced 'something,' or he will cease to be anything at all.' So runs the by-now famous quote from the late Karl Rahner, SJ .

If all clergy across all denominations engaged in – then taught – this Contemplative process, the entire Christian Church would become more authentic and less likely to cause damage to people's lives. There would be a universal Gospel-based reversal of power dynamics. The common Church language, which distances God to out there somewhere and talks of seeking and finding God, would transmute to teaching the recognition of the Loving God here and now within each of us, within our lives, within our communities.

Prayer language like 'send down...', 'Father in heaven' would disappear. The ancient three-tier universe language would disappear as scientific realities are embraced as further revelations of God.

Way back in 2000 I wrote the following Millennium reflection, born from my frustration and that of many others trying to get basic justice from churches.



Potential

I have a dream. A dream for the Christian church

A dream of a way it could celebrate the 2000th anniversary, give or take, of the birth of the Jesus whose life and mission it sees itself as embodying.

The church preaches truth, compassion and justice

It sees itself as a beacon of light in a world of darkness,

As sanctuary, salvation, safety to those who take refuge in it.

But the experience of many, many people is of being hurt and harmed

by those whose task it was to help.

My dream is this: that the scales fall from the eyes of the institutional churches

that they look with new clarity at their own internal workings
and honestly compare what they see with what they proclaim.

I would like them to understand that far from being leaders in the ways of truth,
compassion and justice,

They're lagging behind secular society in some very important areas.

If the scales fell from their eyes

How then could the churches justify their exemption from Human Rights legislation?

How then could they continue with sexist and homophobic theologies?
How then could authoritarian injustices be perpetrated and defended?

How then could structures that depend on lack of accountability be sustained?

I dream that the scales will fall from their eyes
and they will recapture the vision of a church culture

that practises what it preaches, a church that walks the talk.

The losses could be great, but the gains would be immeasurable.

Credibility and authenticity are such precious and attractive attributes.

I doubt that my dream will come true next month, next year, or even next century.

But in the meantime I have an idea.

We have ombudsmen for the state sector, the banking and insurance industries.

There are Commissioners for Human Rights, welfare of children,

Race Relations, Health and Disability.

These roles all establish accountability to the wider community,

the right of appeal when someone is not satisfied

with the way they have been dealt with.

What I'd like to see is an ombudsman for church affairs – an impartial person entrusted
with examining the justice of church dealings with individuals and groups.

At the moment if one disagrees with a church decision,

there is no place to go – nowhere that is, but out the door.

Such an ombudsman, jointly funded by all the churches,

would be a pledge to the wider community

of the intention of the churches to deal fairly,

honestly and transparently with everyone both internally and externally.

It would be a sign of a commitment to Shalom, to a peace based on God's justice.

To give birth to such a concept would be a fitting celebration of the new millennium.

I dream of a labour leading towards this birth,

I dream of the birth of a healthier church however it may come.

Today that dream is becoming a reality with the Government acceptance of the
recommendation of the Royal Commission on Abuse in State and Faith-based Care.

There's to be a new independent entity to receive all complaints about abuse and
administer redress as appropriate, hopefully with the full cooperation of all churches.

The growth of the Contemplative movement in the churches will, I say hopefully, renew
and heal Christianity in all its dealings with those who belong, and with those who may
yet seek the 'life to the full' promised by Jesus.

Ways to meet with God – contemplative gifts for a small church

by Murray Mills

...he just asked us to be still, to sit in silence, holding hands, and he gently led us in a guided meditation to 'become the love-filled community' God in Christ calls us to be!

For thirty-six years, eighteen in retirement, Judy and I enjoyed living in Napier city, and worshipping in Waiapu Cathedral, with its splendid liturgical and musical traditions. Then two years ago, with the disruptions of Covid, we responded to the urging of three of our five adult children to move North, to become part of their community on the Tutukaka Coast, out of Whangarei.

The less hurried pace of life in our little village of Ngunguru involved our 'total immersion' in the breath-taking scenery of coastline, beach, and estuary – this and many-layered hills covered with native bush, abundant flora and bird life. We were plunged back into four generations of our active whanau, including three new great-grandchildren born in the last two years. All these have breathed a rush of new energy into our spiritual life.

Equally refreshing has been exploring the life of the small ecumenical faith community of the 'Tutukaka Coast Community Church' – which gathers in her tiny, but much-prayed-in, church building. She's seen her days on three scattered Northland sites, as a Presbyterian Church and as an Anglican/Presbyterian/Methodist Co-operative Venture. Today her regular membership also includes Salvation Army, Brethren, Catholic, Assembly of God, and more. Respect for difference is enriching and precious to us.

The building only seats forty, and we average over twenty each Sunday (augmented at holidays by visitors: for Christmas and Easter we hire a bigger hall). Half of that twenty have joined in as regulars since we came here.

There's no ordained minister. The three founding churches offer worship leaders for half the services. But the planning and leading of the rest, as well as general oversight, is in the hands of those who attend. This can be demanding on 'the few', in time and creativity.

I found myself up-front more often in the last two years than in all my 18 years in a well-staffed Cathedral parish! No longer can I hide behind formal Prayer Book formats.

Covid brought a long closure to usual church going. Worried how we'd cope with an influx of summer visitors we took the opportunity to experiment with small Sunday gatherings in our home. Then shocked into action by war in the Ukraine, we held informal meetings in the church building for prayer, and Bible reflection.

Today 'post Covid', a very relaxed form of Sunday gathering has emerged and stayed with us. (Laughably different from the Cathedral style, I might add). The unashamedly vociferous gathering of the congregation, the generous physical sharing of the Peace (with everyone!), the time for sharing Community News, and the extended 'after match' coffee and biscuits, and even cake, all help build community.



Being small in number, we learned to arrange the seating to meet the occasion. We often prefer sitting face to face, in one or two circles. As often as not, the 'sermon slot' leads into conversations in pairs or threes, or as a whole group sharing insights.

We've become newly conscious of the depth of experience so often 'hidden in the pew'. As a result, we exchange a surprising range of books for spiritual reading. We can respond to requests for teaching – even unlikely sessions on the Book of Revelation!

Several of our members with a rich (and international) background of Christian living and service, are now frail, or living with disabilities. But they still know how to read and enunciate the Scriptures clearly and meaningfully! One woman, a respected Anglican priest, taught us the huge value of not hurrying the service, and making positive use of pauses and silences.

Recently, during a gap in rosters, our ninety-three year old 'Kaumatua' offered to be 'the speaker'. We looked forward to a wisdom-filled testimony: but after a short introduction, he just asked us to be still, to sit in silence, holding hands, and he gently led us in a guided meditation to 'become the love-filled community' that God in Christ calls us to be! Ten minutes of Real Presence and Holy Communion!

Rituals are important. We all agreed to cut back to monthly Anglican style Communion. Not the preferred custom for half of the 'regulars' – but it works for us together. The lighting of candles in silence with pauses, the use of flowers, icons, evocative slides – even dancing – all enhance either quiet or celebration.

Music plays a lively part too. We're fortunate to have two excellent keyboard players (and teachers), able guitarists, and sometimes a ukelele. One of our men plays the flute – providing uplifting interludes or background to reflection.

We sing together well. We also appreciate learning and using te reo regularly in waiata and prayers. We find in Ian Render's *Sunday by Sunday* – new songs and contemporary words – invaluable along with old favourites. Helpfully, the leadership stays with the ecumenical Lectionary, adding structure to our spiritual journey.

The plain, cosy building has a warm colourful stained-glass window, symbolising God in Trinity. It grabs everyone's attention on entering for worship. But tall old-style clear-glass sash windows on the side walls keep us aware of the sunshine and clouds outside; we glimpse green grass and lush bush and veggie gardens; and we hear the movement of the wind, or detect bird song, or hints of human activity, around us. This 'grounds' our sense of God being in the midst of everyday life, and in our care for our environment.

The involvement of key worshippers in the local Medical Centre, Primary School, Sports Centre, and voluntary service, keeps us alert to the social needs and inequities in our rural communities in the North, and so open to practical loving action.

When we left Hawkes Bay we realised we'd be cutting ourselves off from a familiar and full life. But perhaps we have, in our new setting, found the seeds of a more relaxed, contemplative approach to gathering as a faith community.

Books

Beholding: Deepening Our Experience in God

by **Strahan Coleman**

Publisher: David C Cook (February 7, 2023)

An Interview with the author: by Kathryn Overall

Strahan, congratulations on the launch of your new book, *Beholding!* What can you tell us about it?

Thanks! *Beholding* is an invitation to prayer as a God-empowered life. I think so many of us subconsciously think of prayer as conscious mental dialogue, but the gospels offer us something more radical and integrative than that - a life intermingled with the Trinity.

If beholding is our staring lovingly into God as he stares lovingly back, then beholding asks us to see God in our whole lives and to give our lives to that divine stare, saying with David, "One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord." (Psalm 27:4) When I wrote *Beholding* I wanted to share my own story of stumbling into that life through chronic illness and to propose that relearning prayer, relearning existence this way, may just provide the kindling for the renewal we need in our times.

What hopes do you hold for *Beholding*?

My dream is that it will inspire the church not only into deeper divine communion, but to see the whole Christian project differently. For individuals, first and foremost, to discover a rested friendship with God. The peace, gentleness and communion that can come from a whole life lived openly before God.

But I also hope that it will inspire churches to be different. To become harbours for noise refugees in our world. To display the gentleness and beauty of God in our nature and our gatherings. To rethink our liturgies, our presentation, our worship styles. I can see a whole recalibration taking place that makes the church attractive to not only the world, but Christians again and not with a 'new' or clever idea, but an old and well-worn way.

Can you tell us about your recent partnership with 'Practicing the Way', the formation movement led by John Mark Comer in Portland, Oregon?

I consider myself a cheerleader and friend of Practicing the Way. Really, anything I've done with them to date is just born out of my friendship with John Mark and our shared passion for deepening lives in prayer. I hope to think that my giving my own life to teaching prayer to others and my being an outside/New Zealand voice can add something of our own national flavour to the work God is doing in the formation movement. If I can help move the needle of the church toward a more contemplative and rested communion through my partnership with Practising the Way I would be a grateful man.

What need or hunger do you see that Practicing the Way is seeking to meet?

It seems to me so many, especially pastors and church leaders, are desperate to find a map for transformation. These last years have really showed up our shallowness as a wider community as far as depth, resilience and community are concerned.



I hear from others that there's a desire to find a way to create long-term maturity and growth in the church again and this won't happen via the same consumer style diet the church has fed herself on the past few decades. Maybe for the first time in a long while we're finally being honest about how little our people have grown and how thin our connections are. COVID-19 certainly laid that bare. But I think there's a real hunger for the ancient church too, which is the very DNA of the formation movement and of Practicing the Way's own heart.

What do you see happening within the contemplative stream in Aotearoa, New Zealand at this time?

To me it seems as if the contemplative stream is really knocking on the doors of our mainstream or otherwise non-contemplative church communities. There's undoubtedly a hunger in young adults especially, to approach God through a more contemplative framework, but it's so countercultural to the way our churches are set up that often communities are struggling to inhabit it.

I think there's also a jostle between conservative and liberal contemplative stances. There's the more Benedictine and disciplined approach expressing itself in the formational movement, then the more experiential and mystic contemplative form adopted more by charismatic and post-charismatic folk. I love that, because the contemplative stream, to me at least, doesn't feel like one size fits all but more of a liberation from narrow reductionism the reformation fed into many of our denominations and church communities.

I'm noticing often people feel they need to choose between their newfound contemplative liberation and their local church. If there were one pressing issue for the church in Aotearoa to face and address in this moment, for me it would be relieving that unnecessary dichotomy by reconsidering our concert model on Sundays for a more prayerful/cathedral inspired one.

You completed Year One of the SGM Spiritual Directors Formation Programme in 2022. What were your hopes and what have you received so far?

I feel convinced that the pastors of tomorrow must be more spiritual director than CEO and it felt important to participate in that transformation myself. My hope was to learn to be more inquisitive with others, more God-curious, and better at sitting with them in their own journeys toward communion. To become the pastor, in heart at least, that I've longed to have in my own life all these years.

My biggest takeaway so far has been learning to let God do the work in spiritual conversations. I have a reflex that kicks in hard to explain, explore or teach when the opportunity arises and I've often felt it a weakness rather than a strength. The course so far has really helped me pause and wait for the Spirit to do the work by staying curious with others. I've so much to learn, but that, has provided a real breakthrough for me in my sitting with others.

¹ *The following is an excerpt from a blogpost published on the SGM website in March 2023. In this interview, Kathryn Overall has a conversation with Strahan Coleman about his new book 'Beholding, his partnership with Practicing the Way and his sense of the contemplative currents flowing throughout Aotearoa, New Zealand. Visit www.sgm.org.nz/blog to read the full interview.*

SGM News Matariki Appeal

Tena koutou e whānau o SGM. I greet you under the stars of Matariki, a time of gratitude for past blessing and ongoing renewal. March Workgroup, with the welcoming of two new Workgroup members, Donald Scott and Kathryn Overall, provided the opportunity to strategically and contemplatively reflect on where God is leading us by reviewing the original kaupapa of SGM and its subsequent journey over the past 41 years. In this review we reaffirmed the founding principle of SGM as ecumenically diverse 'broad church', and our core focus on professionally equipping anam cara (soul friends) through the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme (SDFP).

Forming spiritual directors is central to SGM's vision to nurture healthy contemplative spirituality in Aotearoa. There's a hunger for trustworthy, skilled spiritual companionship in our churches and wider community. SDFP formed spiritual directors become agents of grace as they creatively live out their contemplative callings in a variety of contexts.

Organisationally, SGM is in a transitional phase of growth and development. We're shifting from a long pioneering phase to focus on sustainability as we mature as an organisation. This is occurring in a rapidly changing and challenging context, where there are increasing numbers of people deconstructing their faith, refugees from old and new church systems and spiritual seekers who've never been part of organised faith systems.

SGM is responding to these challenges. We believe the contemplative movement provides a significant perspective as the Christian world is buffeted by these winds.

Our focus on renewal includes rewriting and updating SDFP content and resources, ongoing development of our website presence, developing an online spiritual formation course and refreshing *Refresh*. We also committed ourselves to being a 'just' employer – paying market-appropriate salaries to our SDFP Coordinators to reflect their skills and professional training, and basing payments to ancillary support staff on the living wage. It's a time of significant input and we believe – in faith – abundance will ultimately flow from our strategic commitments.

However, we face financial challenges as we pivot. We're mindful of the cost-of-living challenges for participants as we set our SDFP fees. At present, we anticipate a \$7000-8000 shortfall in our annual budget. As kaitiaki (guardians) of SGM, we extend an invitation to you – the SGM Village who share our commitment to nurture the health of contemplative spirituality in Aotearoa – to consider making a one-off donation to our Matariki Appeal. In this time of transition and renewal, your donation will support the financial sustainability of SGM and the SDFP Programme. Donations can be made via online banking to 03-0166-0198782-00 (use Matariki as reference) or via the SGM website (www.sgm.org.nz/donate). Please email admin@sgm.org.nz with any donation payment enquiries.

Ma te Atua kia koutou e manaaki, God's blessings upon you all.

SGM Convenor Bruce Maden

Spiritual Direction Formation Programme News

by Fran Francis

‘As we have been fed by the seed, that became grain, and then became bread, may we go out into the world to plant seeds of justice, transformation and hope.’

This generative and hopeful prayer nestled at the end of the communion liturgy of a recent SGM silent retreat, reminds me what lies at the heart of the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme. We join with people at a particular point in their faith journey that is essentially an invitation to grow. And grow we do! Over the two years of the programme through contemplative prayer and giving and receiving spiritual direction we – facilitators and participants together – experience spiritual growth.

I’m realising afresh the vision of SGM Trust and the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme isn’t spiritual direction as much as it is spiritual growth. We are Spiritual Growth Ministries not spiritual direction ministries. We are privileged to handle the seed that has become grain and see it turning into bread that goes out into the world. Participants may not formally offer spiritual direction after completing the programme, but they are and always will be bread for the spiritually hungry and sowers of seeds of justice, transformation and hope. The programme nurtures that.

Speaking of justice, transformation and hope, this year we are celebrating the inclusion, at last, of spiritual direction formation texts from non-European voices – probably white privilege has silenced them until now and it’s their own initiative which has produced these two terrific books. *Kaleidoscope: Broadening the Palette in Spiritual Direction* edited by Ineda Pearl Adesanya, and *Embodied Spirits: Stories of Spiritual Directors of Color*. The second is not a required text but is a life-giving immersion in the contemplative experience of ‘contemplatives of color’ (as the blurb on the back names them), a worthwhile read for anyone. *Art and Faith* by Makoto Fujimora is an exploration of the theology of making, reminding us spirituality is creative. I’ve wanted our participants to hear from people like them not like me, and now eagerly await the contribution of our own voices of colour in spiritual direction formation. And here’s a plug for the Special Interest Projects on our website by non-Pākehā writers... Samoan spirituality, shame in Asian cultures and much more. This year we have five participants from Singapore and Malaysia.

StatsNZ forecasts greater diversity in our population over the next two decades with Asian people likely to account for 1 in 4, New Zealanders by 2043. I won’t be leading this programme then, but I can encourage you now, let’s listen to and learn from each other! It’s how we grow.

As always, I celebrate with gratitude the miracles of provision for those called by God into the formation programme. If you are one of those providers, thank you. If you are moved to provide, thank you. Thanks to you the current economic climate won’t prevent God doing what God wants to do in sowing seeds of justice, transformation and hope.

The Last Word

Hello again! I’m sitting in the Editor’s chair once more [temporarily] as SGM recalibrates itself for the challenges of an exciting future. This edition focuses on how contemplative spirituality is impacting and will likely inform the church of the future in its promised diversity and unpredictable modalities. To this I add the voice of G.B. Caird, ‘To follow Jesus ... does not consist in conformity to any stereotype pattern. It consists rather in learning from Jesus an attitude of mind which comprises sensitivity to the presence of God and to the will of God – which is the only authority. A constant submission of personal interest to the pursuit of that will in the well-being of others and a confidence that whatever the immediate consequences may appear to be, the outcome can safely be left in God’s hands.’¹

Refresh Reader Survey

SGM Workgroup is also in the creative process of discerning the future direction for *Refresh*. Input from our readers is an integral part of this and we’d love to hear from you! The *Refresh* Reader Survey is available on the SGM website in an easy-to-use digital format. It can be completed anytime from now until July 31st, 2023. Please visit www.sgm.org.nz/refresh-readers

- The purpose of the *Refresh* Reader Survey is:
- To better understand who our *Refresh* readers are.
 - To learn what you value about *Refresh* and any changes you’d like to see.
 - To seek your input on ideas we have about our future direction.
 - To inform our decisions regarding print vs digital publication of *Refresh*.
 - To ask open questions of our readers and listen contemplatively to your responses.

Summer 2024 *Refresh* theme ‘The heart of contemplation’

Deadline Sept 28, 2023

Who or what is at the heart of contemplation? What is it for you? Your experience of it? How has your perception of the heart changed over your years of practice? What voices have informed your journey toward the heart of contemplation?

Guidelines for writers – please, please, please!

- keep contributions to fewer than 2000 words
- use single quotation marks
- be conversational in style
- use conjunctions wherever possible
- use endnotes instead of footnotes
- use inclusive language wherever possible
- ensure any images you send are larger than 2MB

¹ G.B. Caird, *New Testament Theology*, Clarendon Press, revised edition, 1995 p. 203

Expressions of interest sought – SGM Administrator

Our Administrator, Adrienne Bruce, is retiring from this role. SGM Workgroup is looking for someone to fill this position. The present role is part-time, averaging 40 hours per month, and involves administrative responsibilities for both the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme as well as SGM as a whole.

The person we are looking for will:

- be committed to the vision and ministry of SGM
- have high standards of integrity and confidentiality
- be well organised, and comfortable working on their own and in consultation with others
- be able to demonstrate administrative competence and efficiency
- be able to work mainly from their home/office with office equipment provided by SGM
- have good computer skills including competency with Microsoft WORD and EXCEL, pdfs, email, and online banking. (Familiarity with XERO helpful, but not a requirement as this can be taught.)

If you think you might be the person we're looking for, and would like more information, please send a brief email expressing your interest to:

Bruce Maden Convenor of Spiritual Growth Ministries
bruce.maden@infogen.net.nz

Weaving as contemplative practice

by Adrienne Thompson

As I settle into this practice it becomes something like prayer.

Sometimes amid all the bizarre flotsam and jetsam of Facebook something rare and beautiful washes up on my feed and changes my life.

It happened last month when I came across a free five-day course in weaving from the Heter School of Māori Art. I'd seen an exhibition by Veranoa Heter – stunningly beautiful kete and korowai created by a master artist, the daughter and grand-daughter of famous weavers¹. I had a relatively free week ahead, the course would take only an hour a day and I thought it would be fun.

It was! It was delight. It took more than an hour a day. It also led me to sign up for a full year course of study. I am learning to weave.

Labelled as a child 'not good at art' and 'uncoordinated' I didn't discover until my 20s there was pleasure for me in handcrafts. I still wear those labels sometimes, but I learned over many years the joy of playing with colour and texture and the deep satisfaction of making something by hand.

In my 40s, I began to practise prayer with crayons or pastels. Incurable 'head-person' that I am and a deep lover of words – using my hands and senses helped me begin to encounter God with my whole self: body, brain, and heart. No spiritual director will be surprised at any of that!

And I wasn't surprised when weaving immediately became a contemplative practice.

What does surprise me though is the many dimensions unfolding for me in this mahi toi – this making work.

Harakeke, New Zealand flax, grows all over Aotearoa. It's abundant in our locality, I have bushes in our garden. Harvesting requires me to attune to the environment. One doesn't cut flax when it's raining or windy or after dark. Watch, pay attention. And when the weather is right, don't rush out with a Stanley knife and start hacking. Be mindful.

A Māori friend tapped me on the shoulder as we stood in line for dinner. 'This weaving you're doing. Do you karakia?' 'Yes, I assured him. 'What do you say?' 'I mihi to the sky, to Ranginui, for the sun and rain on the harakeke. I mihi to the earth, to Papatūānuku, for sustaining the plant's life. I acknowledge Te Atua, the Creator. I say thank you to the harakeke bush for sparing its leaves for me.' Wayne nodded, ka pai, that'll do.

How good it is to stand outside, feel the sun, breathe the air, look at the greenness before me and offer thanks. I cut the flax leaves, being careful to leave the central three in each fan: the rito (the baby) and the two awahi rito (the parents who embrace the baby). I try to pick only enough for this day's project. I take a moment to honour the purpose for which I will weave today. I often remember the women and men who have harvested harakeke over the centuries.

My teacher tells us to use this opportunity to serve the bush, pulling out dead leaves and clearing away human litter from around the plants.

I take my bundle of leaves home and sit on our deck to trim and size them. Each leaf will give me two or four or sometimes six 'whenu' – weaving strips. There's a calming rhythm to it, the feel of smooth leaves and the faint oiliness they leave on my hands, the brightness of the green, the fresh smell.

And now the whenu are prepared, wait. Two or three hours they will lie in a warm place, drying out a little until they curl at the edges. Then another task, take each whenu and soften it with the blunt back of a knife. I have an old silver butter knife. To prepare just 20 whenu in this way might take 20 minutes or longer. Again, I find a rhythm and a pleasure in this simple physical task. It gives me great satisfaction that nothing is rubbish, all these scraps and stems go straight back to replenish the earth.

Now, finally, I can begin to weave. And it's hard. The leaves are slippery, and my fingers are clumsy. Over and over again I replay the instructional video and slow it down, watching and listening and trying to copy what I see.

Last night I attempted a new shape of simple basket. I sat absorbed in it for over two hours. I used prosaic clothes pegs to secure the escaping whenu. I muttered to myself: 'Make the ara, up down up down up. Lay the whenu, down up down up down....'

I enjoyed the rhythm, but it wasn't working. I pulled it undone and started again from the beginning. I felt frustration rising and the flax calmed me out of it. Mistakes don't matter, they really don't. This is not about perfection; it's about learning and making.

Long ago, the six-year-old was ashamed of her drawing because it wasn't very good. This kono I'm making isn't very good, but I'm making it for no other purpose than joy.

As I settle into this practice it becomes something like prayer. A quiet content emerges. I finish my basket, noticing how sore are my shoulders, how stiff is my neck and how replete my spirit.

I need to weave my life each day. The separate strands are constantly escaping me, needing to be woven in again, needing to be anchored by the simple ordinary habits that hold me together. Making tea, writing my Journal, hanging out washing, sitting to pray, listening for birds. (And I could write another whole another article about the contemplative practice of making ratatouille.)

Day after day, something is done, and undone, and done again, sometimes with patience, often with hope, usually because it must be done. Grace is found in the doing.

Reflecting with my spiritual director I discover this weaving work has woven its way into my image of my spiritual direction practice.



As Henri Nouwen so beautifully says: 'Hospitality – [or spiritual direction] – is not to change anything, but to offer a space in which change can take place.'²

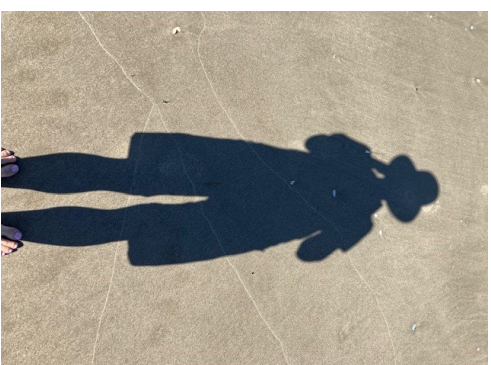
My kono – this woven basket – is a space, enclosed but open.

This is what I offer to people who sit with me. It's organic, simple and functional, not flashy, not highly coloured. It's created with care but it is far from perfect. This hour, like my basket, is a space where a directee can put stuff and look at it, and see it held, safely and lightly, until they are ready to take it and move on – or leave it behind.

So, weaving connects me to te Tai Ao, the environment, to the long past of Aotearoa, to te Ao Māori and its tikanga, to myself and my body and heart, and to my work of spiritual direction.

And one more: In te Reo Māori 'aranga' is one of the words for weaving. A Rangatira is a chiefly leader: one interpretation of this word is 'the one who weaves people'³. When I pray the Lord's prayer (another of my daily pegs!) I say 'Kia tae mai tōu rangatiratanga'. Not 'your kingdom come,' which can carry negative connotations for me, but 'May your weaving be on earth as it is in heaven'.

When I end the prayer I say, 'Nōu hoki te rangatiratanga. 'Yours is the weaving. God is the Weaver: may I join in the weaving.



Shadowed by the Holy Spirit

by Lesley Farmer

My photo of my shadow cast onto the sands of Whangamata got me reflecting.

My shadow – created by the sun behind me – and there in the sand was a full-size image of me!

As I looked at the photo the next day, a thought came to mind.

I am here!

I never leave you;

it's just that at times you're unaware of me.

Does the shadow only exist because I have the sun to my back or side? Or is my shadow always there, waiting to be illuminated by the right situation?

I'm talking about the Holy Spirit! Part of the Holy Trinity...Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When I first became a Christian, there was a honeymoon period where it seemed the Holy Spirit revealed himself to me daily, in many ways. I would read a passage from the Bible, and it was as if Jesus were speaking straight to me! The message shared by the Pastor hit me right in the chest, my heart beat faster and I sensed God was talking to me.

Over the passage of years, I have at times felt abandoned by God. Where are you, Lord? The Bible failed to reassure me. I struggled to connect into that indescribable sense of peace when you abandon yourself to God and sense His presence soak you. When tears of joy and sadness ran freely, and you were left filled with a love uncontaminable.

But what about those dry years, the stuck in the valley months, the doing my best in my own strength days?

Well, suddenly, unexpectedly He sends you a sign. A shadow on the beach, the bell chime of a tui, the sound of the ocean, the beauty of the forest...green on green on green of the Waitakere ranges. Perhaps the words of a worship song or a text with a verse sent by a friend. A word in time, and on time!

As for Jesus and his grace given gift, the Holy Spirit, He never leaves you. Just like my shadow I may be unaware of his presence at times but rest assured he is there. Such a gentleman, longing for you to tune into his soft quiet whisper, 'I am here'.

Deuteronomy 31:8

It is the Lord who goes before you; He will be with you.

He will not fail you or abandon you. Do not fear or be dismayed.

1 Veranoa Hete, Te Atiawa, Ngāi Tiwharetoa, Ngāi Maniapoto.

<https://heteitschoolofmaoriart.com/about>

Ngā mhi nui ki a koe, e te Kaiwhatu rangatira! My grateful thanks to her:

2 Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out* Collins 1976, p 69

3 This is an evocative interpretation for me, my grateful appreciation to the unknown person who offered it. Not all Māori scholars and speakers would agree on this explanation. In sharing this understanding of 'nōu te rangatiratanga' I'm speaking for myself and not claiming the authority of Māori theology.

Contributors

Darryl Tempero is a follower of Jesus, a husband, father, minister, and lecturer who loves finding God in all things, including the outdoors, sport and movies.

David Crawley lives in Ttirangi with his wife Sarah and Florence, their cat. His life is an enjoyable mix of offering spiritual direction and supervision, forming spiritual directors through SGM, teaching the odd class at Laidlaw College, and helping lead the local Anglican Church. Relaxation comes from retreat days, coffee at a local café and jazz.

Kenneth Tanner is pastor at Holy Redeemer Church, Rochester Hills Michigan. Their aim is magnifying Jesus Christ in Word, Sacrament and Spirit and joining Jesus in the renewal of all Creation.

Lynne Baab is author of numerous books and Bible study guides, most recently *Two Hands: Grief and Gratitude in the Christian Life*. Her best-selling book, *Sabbath Keeping*, is now available as an audiobook as well as paperback and kindle. Lynne blogs weekly about prayer at lynnebaab.com. She served as senior lecturer in pastoral theology at the University of Otago from 2007 to 2017.

Geoff New is Principal of Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership in Dunedin. He's written on preaching and contemplative disciplines. His next book is a collaboration with authors from Latin America and NZ on preaching the parables.

Margaret Gwynn loves gardening, reading and watching the changing patterns of sea and sky. She's learning to live with arthritis.

Tracey Hunt is married to Ian Waddington and they live in Swanson, Auckland. She works at Laidlaw College and her article is based on her studies there. Tracey is excited to have started spiritual direction training this year. When time allows, she likes to work on her creative photo albums.

Trish McBride is a happily-settled resident in a brand new retirement village, closer to her favourite bush walks. She enjoys getting to know her 70+ new neighbours, as well as maintaining the happy full-enough life she had before last year's move. Still listening, learning and loving. As well as the lettings go that come with ageing.

Murray Mills is now in his 62nd year of ordained ministry! He spent his last 11 years, before retirement in 2002, as Anglican Bishop of the widespread East Coast diocese Waiapu, after 6 years as Dean of Waiapu Cathedral in Napier. Earlier he was in parish ministry and Christian Education in the Waikato diocese, and before that in Auckland. As preparation for retirement, he trained as a Spiritual Director and has continued to enjoy his association with S.G.M.

Adrienne Thompson lives with her husband and flatmates by the Waipāhīhī stream in Karori, so spiritual direction and supervision sessions are punctuated by music from kākākā, riroriro, and tūi. She's involved in the SGM/SD Formation Programme as supervisor, marker and workshop leader. Each week time is given to the delightful duties of being daughter and a grandmother. Family, community, and living faithfully in Aotearoa are her longstanding preoccupations.

Ana Lisa de Jong is a contemplative poet and published author of nine collections, with two more in gestation. Ana Lisa's evocative, spiritually charged poetry is born of the flora and fauna and unique landscapes of Aotearoa, and a deep, earthy faith. With both Celtic and Maori heritage, Ana Lisa responds to the natural world as innately alive and with a story to tell, which she seeks to weave into her words. Sharing her poetry widely on Facebook and at livingtreepoetry.com, Ana Lisa enjoys connecting with readers and creating collections to gift to others.

Lesley Farmer was asked what she did before working for 13 years for a social service supporting homeless and vulnerable families. Her answer: first I was a daughter, sister, cousin, friend, mother and recently a nana. I've had other careers but the most important is being a mum and a nana.

Fran Francis, as national coordinator of the SDFP, is committed to collaborating with God to develop spiritual direction skills in others.

Bruce Maden (SGM Convenor) lives in Palmerston North. He and his wife Elizabeth have been deeply committed to solidarity with disadvantaged communities and being an incarnational presence within them. He also provides leadership mentoring, tutoring, spiritual direction and supervision.

Kathryn Overall-Cass is a spiritual director, website creator and songwriter from Tauranga Moana. She deeply loves the contemplative stream and finds its flow in her marriage, garden, kitchen and playing with her nieces.

