

Refresh

A person is rappelling down a rope against a bright sun in a clear blue sky. The person is silhouetted against the sun, which is a large, bright starburst in the upper right quadrant. The rope extends from the top right towards the person. The overall scene is one of freedom and letting go.

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Letting Go



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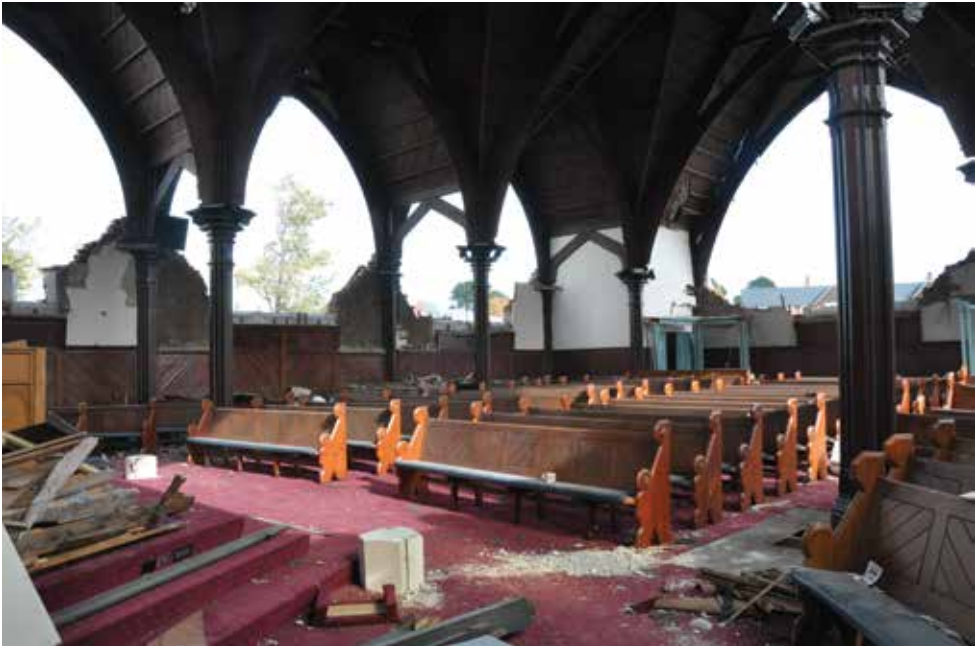
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Anna Johnstone - a wall in New Brighton after the earthquakes.



© John Roxborough

Earthquakes on the journey

by John Hunt

The First Earthquake

A loud rumbling in the distance woke me. It was approaching! The house shook. We were tossed out of bed. The noise was horrific: cabinets tumbling over, glass breaking, pantry shelves crashing. I lay hard alongside the bed; Lesley on the other side. I found myself however, calmly waiting for it to end. We had friends staying. We checked on them, 'Are you okay?' Thankfully, they were safe.

We sat in the living room, wrapped in rugs, waiting for the dawn. I lit a candle for light, comfort and prayer. Later we stood by shaking cars, listening to the radio for news. We live in Kirwee, ten kilometres from the centre of the Greendale Fault! I started cleaning up, our friends helped. I had a feeling of well-being. We'd been cared for. It was a Saturday.

On Sunday we found bricks had fallen into the sanctuary at St Giles. We gathered in the Lounge. I began worship with, 'We give thanks that we are alive.' Everyone responded, 'Amen!' I went on: 'I invite you to hug your neighbour.' There was a wonderful outpouring of affection. After a time I said, 'I invite you to tell your neighbour how it's been for you.' We talked for about twenty minutes. We sang the twenty-third psalm. Our healing and letting-go of a frightening experience began.

My Retirement

I'd been planning and imagining my retirement. For thirty years, I'd been minister of St. Giles. The church carried the songs, tears, laughter, words of faith, hope and love of my ministry. The spirits of people we loved and lost were still present where they once sat. I could still hear the voices of our little sons, sitting with me on the steps. I'd imagined what my last Sunday would be like. What I didn't know is: on that Sunday after the first quake; I'd lead worship in St Giles for the last time. Following the second quake, it was demolished.

The Second Earthquake

That day I was attending a retirement seminar. We got under the tables. A woman's face was an inch or two away from mine. As the room shook, she said, 'We must stop meeting like this!' The second was much more destructive. People lost their homes. People died.

An Earthquake is not an 'act of God'.

An earthquake is a morally neutral movement of tectonic plates. An earthquake will mean different things to different people. Our faith, hope and love will help us handle and share the pain and discern meaning.

People struggled

People were dealing with the loss of precious things, their home, their friends. People grieved the loss of their sense of security - we need to know we stand on firm safe

ground. People reconnected with earlier experiences of vulnerability. One woman struggled with childhood memories of the London Blitz. Another was taken back to her powerlessness as a young person who suffered sexual abuse.

Contemplative reflection on earthquakes in the Scriptures

I discovered earthquakes in Scripture can be good news. I invite you to quietly dwell with me in those earthquakes, and ponder what God has for us.

An earthquake at the tomb

The women, on their way to anoint Jesus' body, worried how they'd roll away the stone over the entrance to the tomb. (Mark 16.3-4) You and I could worry how we might handle something we have ahead of us. Matthew tells us,

'After the Sabbath, as Sunday morning was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. Suddenly there was a violent earthquake; an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled the stone away and sat on it...The angel spoke to the women "You must not be afraid," he said. "I know you're looking for Jesus who was crucified. He isn't here; he has been raised."' Matthew 28.1-6 GNB

There was a violent earthquake. The women were afraid. Imagine what they were feeling. Are our families safe? Are we going to die? What about our homes? Bring to mind a time when you have been afraid.

When they get to the tomb, they find the earthquake rolled the stone away! They're filled with thankfulness and wonder. They can anoint Jesus' body! An angel sitting on the stone tells them the tomb is empty! They are filled with joy and awe. An angel in the earthquake! God's love in Jesus crucified – burst out from the tomb!

With our earthquakes, there was a wonderful bursting out of love! Reserved neighbours who'd hardly ever spoken, checked on one another and became friends. Young men demolished an older neighbour's crooked chimney. A man got his barbeque going and made breakfast and dinners for the street. The Student Army cleared liquefaction; hardware merchants provided wheelbarrows and shovels. The Fanny Army came in from the country with heavy machinery. An older couple moved into their caravan, so a mother with three small children could live in their house. Air New Zealand gave hurting people free flights for respite in Auckland. With the earthquake there was an angel bringing down barriers and opening hearts to love and be loved.

An earthquake in the jail

Paul and Silas were in prison, in chains. Reflect on your own life situation. Do you feel imprisoned – perhaps by your work, your lack of money, your commitments? Do you feel chained – maybe by your regrets, your lack of confidence, your fears?

'About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a violent earthquake, which shook the prison to its foundations. At once the doors opened and the chains fell off all the prisoners. The jailer woke up, and when he saw that the prison doors open, he thought

that the prisoners had escaped; so he pulled out his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul shouted at the top of his voice, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" Acts 16.25-28 GNB

The earthquake set the prisoners free. It was a profound freedom. They were free to go. With Paul's spirit, they chose to stay. They had love for the jailer whose life would have been forfeit. What might freedom mean for you? It could be being free of anger, resentment, a need to control. Our freedom might be in having a sense of well-being and purpose where we are.

Freedom in our Christchurch earthquake

Having handled the earthquakes, people have found the confidence to make a break with things that had held them back. People have moved house, changed jobs, left behind unhelpful attitudes. Those who'd collected precious things, then lost them in the earthquakes, are now valuing more their family and their neighbours.

We dwell in the love and in the freedom, the gifts of the earthquakes.

After the earthquake

Elijah has fled Jezebel. He has been depressed. An angel has cared for him. He feels he is the only prophet left.

The Lord said to Elijah, 'Go out and stand before me on the top of the mountain. There was an earthquake – but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the soft whisper of a voice.' 1 Kings 19.1-12 GNB

What do you think the Lord whispered in Elijah's ear? Maybe, 'Well done, Elijah. You handled the wind, fire and earthquake. You handled Jezebel. You can handle anything or anyone! Don't worry Elijah. You're not alone; I am with you, you will be okay. And Elijah, have love for your neighbours and for yourself.'

Christchurch after the earthquake

It may be after the earthquake that we hear the affirming voice of God. We remember the fear, the distress and the calm – and we remember those wonderful days of an outpouring of love, of neighbourliness. We remember seeing that, at heart, people are kind and generous. We saw the love turning the worst of times into the best of times.

Congregations discovered they like sitting in chairs in a semi-circle in a hall, rather than in rows of pews as they had in the church. Today we can give one another a smile and feel closer. We have a new freedom. We found we don't need the building to remember: we carry the memories of the church, its people and its story in our hearts. Neighbouring congregations are sharing resources and dreams, coming together as one. The land is now still. The rebuild is progressing. We have let go of our fear. We dwell in the love and in the freedom, the gifts of the earthquakes.

Joy returns

by Barbara Sampson

Joy returns
after the quaking shaking breaking
not in great gushes
or bucket loads
but in gentle drops
like rain on newly sown carrot seeds
or tears of welcome over a new baby

Joy comes
just a glimpse
a glance
a sudden lifting of hope
like an old familiar friend
awaiting my return
even as I wait and long for her

All of life – a slow letting go

by Barbara Sampson

It seems that all of life is a slow letting go.

I was only 15 when I had to let go my Dad. I mark the night he died as the cross-over point from my childhood into adulthood. My 'happy ever after' stories burst like a bubble. Just eight years later, when my first baby was only 18 days old, my Mum died.

The word was 'abandoned'.

The prayer was 'God help me do this without them.'

My husband and I set off for missionary service in Africa when that first baby was two and his little sister was only six months old. Three years into what we thought would be a lifetime of missionary service, I got sick and we were told to pack our bags and head home. Letting go of that dream was like coming home with a bagful of broken pieces.

The words were 'finished', 'failure'.

The prayer was 'God what can you do with this brokenness?'

I was in my mid-forties when my son and his wife had their first baby and my daughter turned 21. It seemed no time at all since I was the young parent, the one entering my adult years. Now I was observing my children as they made these significant life transitions.

The question was 'where did that time go?'

The prayer was 'God help me do this new season with grace.'

During the time that my husband and I worked at our Salvation Army training college in Upper Hutt, we took a group of cadets-in-training-for-ministry to Sydenham Corps. This had been the appointment from which we had gone to the college. It was not so long since this was 'my' platform where 'my' people listened to my preaching. Now I sat in the congregation and watched as others took the front place.

The word was 'sidelined'.

The prayer was 'God what use can I be from this vantage point?'

After a long term at the college, years full of great opportunities and wondrous gifts, my husband took early retirement and we moved to Christchurch. I knew we needed to be here for a reason, but never imagined that an earthquake would be the reason! In one terrifying moment in the early hours of 4 September 2010, the comfortable, stable world in which I had lived for 60 years was shaken apart.

This was a further huge letting go of all that I had taken so much for granted.

**'How do you give shade to
anyone when you are standing
stark and bare yourself?'**

Macrina Wiederkehr

I felt sorry for my grandchildren, but realised that this experience would become part of their folklore.

The word for me in that experience was 'abandonment'. I was right back again in the place of loss and confusion that overwhelmed me when my parents died. This time it was God who seemed to have gone AWOL.

The prayer was 'Mercy, Lord Jesus, have mercy.'

Slowly, steadily, over a period of months and even as the aftershocks continued, God led me to a psalm that helped me back into prayer and back to the awareness of his presence. An appointment as director of a Salvation Army community ministries centre in the heart of need and chaos helped both to distract me from my own 'stuff' and taught me a deeper compassion for those who had lost so much.

At the start of 2014, however, I knew my time of active service was coming to an end and I entered into retirement. Welcome to this latest season of letting go! It was a relief, quite frankly, to pass on the responsibility of an ever-expanding task to someone else. But letting go of the buzz of the leadership role, the creative possibilities, the warm affirmations, and watching as another director found their voice, made their mark, set the standard and the tone, took time. Letting go of 'my' team, standing back from relationships with people I had loved, worked with, eaten and laughed and done life with, wasn't so easy. I know that the best thing I can do is pray for them but to a number 5 on the enneagram, is that ever going to be enough?

The word was 'finished'.

The prayer is 'Lord, show me how I can best serve you now'.

This latest season of letting go is a mix of relief and grief woven together. It could all be depletion, emptying, draining out. As poet Macrina Wiederkehr asks, 'How do you give shade to anyone when you are standing stark and bare yourself?'

But I have to confess that I love the more spacious days of retirement, the wider margins, the opportunity to do what I am best wired to do at a pace that suits me. I recall and give thanks for wonderful memories, amazing opportunities and a wide range of friends.

The words taking shape in this present season of letting go are

'gratitude', 'reverence', and 'blessing'.

The prayer is 'For all that has been, Lord, I thank you. For all that is now, help me to say yes.

For all that this new season will hold, I say welcome.'

Leaving our losses behind

by Janice Robb

Ever since I was asked to write some words about 'letting go', I equated it with 'loss'.

I thought rather boastfully, that with the help of my faith, I managed to turn round the enormous losses I incurred – since the beginning of the Christchurch's 'Earthquake season' – into 'letting go'. However this morning, one of my Bible readings (from the lectionary) was about just that – boasting.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul tells us, 'boasting isn't a good thing' and encourages us to 'celebrate with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth'.

I realise – to be honest and truthful – I still have a long way to go in leaving my losses behind. When I talk to people from outside Christchurch, I still look for their disbelief of how broken the city still is. I still look for their admiration that we lived and continue to live with chaos and change. So I do still grieve my losses, our losses, for I know I'm but one of thousands still struggling to come to terms with a very different life than the one for which they hoped.

During all this, I had to cope with my own deteriorating health as well as my mother's slow and cruel death from Alzheimer's.

What has this to do with 'letting go'?

For me it's taken much time and prayer to turn all this grief around. I hope eventually it becomes freeing. Even now I can see that much of what I lost was clutter. Precious clutter – like the last pieces of grandmother's wedding china – but clutter all the same.

I'm coming to terms with what is, rather than what was desired. All of us have had disappointments in our lives. If I greet each disappointment with anger, I won't be able to see the possibilities in it. Some disappointments are only minor; I can shrug them off, and hopefully learn something from them.

However, others are more than disappointments; they are huge, tear-jerking mountains of pain and grief. How do we let them go?

February 22nd 2011 is a day many of us will never forget. We all have our own stories to tell. There were two things that stand out the most for me. The first was this: as the dust settled, we ran out of our apartment next door to our beloved church. It was a ruin. IT WAS A RUIN. Many people gathered on the lawn as after shocks continued all afternoon. We looked in disbelief and shock.

The second was when we were told we couldn't stay in our house overnight and therefore had a nightmarish journey out to our daughter's. We didn't realise at the time, we'd never live there again. We wouldn't even be able to go into the house for four months except briefly – to gather essential items.

Four years on, we have a new place in a new town. But the sun shines here as well as it did there. Our church rebuild is only at the early planning stage.

I can still cry over my losses, but I realise they won't return. I can't turn the clock back.

I can plan a new garden, make new friends, focus on the positive, and when it gets too hard I weep, pray and ring friends who have had their losses too. Dwelling on what was lost was necessary at first. I couldn't let go until I knew how much and exactly what I had lost. But now, more and more I can let go. I'm not boasting to say this.

There are many times loss still grabs me by the throat. I couldn't begin to let go without my faith, my husband and my friends. Letting go isn't about pretending it didn't happen, or shrugging my shoulders and saying it didn't matter. For me letting go has been a journey of tears, grief, anger, and disappointment, as well as hugs and talks and an awareness of God's presence throughout.

Advice to depressed self

by Mary Mitt

Into the tunnel of soul's dark night

Down, down...

Drifting into darkness as fast as

Devious thoughts replace devotion;

As surely as dishonesty delivers doubt.

And dissembling leads to the disassembly
of purpose, motive and logical thought.

Half-heartedness leaves a vacuum for chaos

On the other side of hope.

Don't mine down there!

Don't grind to a halt in your mind-shaft!

Get your ugliness surgically removed!

Those filthy attitudes are not beyond being washed off,

That determination can yet be shored up;

Those worthy thoughts reinforced.

God's Holy Spirit waits,

Eyes aglow with comprehension

And deep compassion,

To gaze into your soul

And begin the renovation you request.

Holding out empty hands

by M. Jane Hansen

I had it all worked out;
Planned in detail;
Knew just how it should be;
Told myself, convinced myself –
Nothing could be better than this;
Pinned all my hopes, and
Tomorrows, on it.

But the small speck on the horizon
Didn't, wouldn't, stop growing
– or getting closer;
Until I was lost in it,
Caught up in all the chaos of a
Tsunami of seismic proportions;
Watching, as hopes and
dreams
And tomorrows were
Carried away.

Now, I am alone amidst the rubble,
Known landmarks gone, and
No sense of where, or who,
I am.
Memories of a kinder, gentler world
My only company when
Sleep deserts me and
Morning seems so far away.

With nothing left to offer now but
Myself, and what might have been,
I am learning, slowly, painfully, to
Let go of past dreams
The arrogance that says
'I'm entitled'; and
The impatience that
Wants it all –
'NOW'!

I'm letting go of my need to know
– in advance – that
All will be well.
Asking You to still my storm as
You did another storm long ago, with
'Peace, be still'.

Holding out empty hands
I am trusting, believing, that
You will fill them once more, with
Unexpected, everyday blessings
– and new dreams –
for me to hold lightly and
carry in faith
into each tomorrow.

The grace of letting go

by Judith Anne O'Sullivan

Today, on my way to the airport in the midst of a conversation, I mentioned to my companion that I didn't like writing for publication as this was not my gift. So when she replied that I may well feel that way, but it wasn't the reality she saw, I felt slightly disturbed and challenged. Perhaps then, I said to myself, I need to let go of this perception and be willing to go beyond my comfort zone. Hence this article about 'letting go'!

Arriving at the airport, I was told my flight was cancelled because the plane I was booked on couldn't land – the runway was too icy. *More* food for thought.

I had to wait until the ice had thawed. Fortunately, I had brought with me the last publication of Refresh with its theme 'Image of God'. So I decided this was a golden opportunity to read the articles.

With this gift of free time, I had the opportunity to ponder my image of God today. As I sat quietly in the airport with many others stranded by the ice, I found myself in awe at the level of acceptance at what is beyond our control. I had an almost felt presence of the Spirit hovering around encouraging us all to accept the situation. Then, as time moved on and the sun came out, I experienced God as the source of the sun (Son) which began to melt the ice.

Here was the Trinity, incredibly close, encouraging me to 'let go' of any plans I may have had for the day – and not just me! Everyone I spoke with at the airport was 'letting go' – adapting to a new situation so different from the one they'd planned.

Being with this new image of the Trinity, I found the time seemed to pass very quickly until I boarded the plane. What a surprise. I'd been transferred to a large plane! Now this really was the God of surprises. I'd 'let go' of any desire to be anywhere, and what initially seemed like a problem, became a gift.

As I pondered this gift, 'memory lane' came to my aid. I realised there was a pattern here. So often after receiving the Grace to 'let go', the consequences were a gift of something better. Often in my life, when I'd planned a new initiative and my heart was set on carrying this out, other people's ideas would appear to block or delay what I was hoping for.

Then would begin the struggle of 'letting go' in order to be enriched by the wisdom of the other. It was never easy – especially when my desires were quite definite. Many examples come to mind, but one stands out – a time I was due to have a Sabbatical in order to discern a new direction for the future. In the meantime, I was asked to accept a position of Leadership by my Community. This was not on my agenda at all. But to this day, I can say in 'letting go' and accepting the new challenge, I was deeply blessed and my life enriched.

It seems to me, as we adopt a discerning life style – listening to the Spirit both within our hearts and outside ourselves through the call of others – a deep peace settles within. We learn to 'let go', or to use another expression, 'close one door to allow another to open'. Even in very small ways, I find I'm about to do something and a phone call or an inner intuition invites me to 'let go' of my former plan to embrace a new one. I call this simply 'being led by the Spirit' and it's very rewarding.

One of the most powerful passages in Scripture, and one which nourishes me as I grow older, is found in St John's Gospel chapter 21: 18-19.

'I'm telling you the truth: when you were young you used to get ready and go anywhere you wanted to; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands and someone else will take you where you do not want to go'.

This, to me, is the life journey of 'letting go'.

No one really wants to be led by someone else, yet we know as life diminishes, we can become utterly dependent on another.

Insofar as we learn this lesson while we're still young, we become interdependent and so the 'letting go' so essential in older age, will be a blessing. Who knows to what extent we'll be required to 'let go' because of a change in our health, an accident or some unexpected trauma? Who can predict what the journey into frailty and aloneness will be like – as we await the final call into 'letting go' of this temporary life, for Eternity?

*So often after receiving
the Grace to 'let go' the
consequences were a gift of
something better.*

So here we have it. The journey of life is about the Paschal mystery, death and Resurrection – about living the simple yet profound message of the Gospel, about letting go our own preconceived ideas of how life should be and our own need to hold on and be in control. It's about dying to ourselves and living in the love and goodness of God, who calls us in our 'letting go' to become One with the Divine – with ourselves and all of creation. O blessed 'letting go'.

Held

by Valerie Roberts

Dry leaves falling
Blown by the wind
Can't choose where to land

Naked branches
Last leaf dangling
Struggles to hold on

Final surrender
Fragile connection broken
Destined for transformation

I cling onto thin threads
Fearing loss of control
Anticipating engulfing emptiness

The moist earth
Holds autumn's gifts
Regeneration begins

Unclasped hands
Open heart
Changed mind

I too will be held
In the unknowing
That follows letting go

Intuition

by Andrew Brown

Sometimes I feel the strong romantic tug of pilgrimage
The deep desire to climb into my tiny coracle
And cast myself upon the waves where-ever Christ would carry me.
More often I find the gentle and not so gentle tug
Of God pulling up my roots - bit by painful bit
With strife, worry, illness, pestilence and trouble
Loosing, somewhat unwillingly, my grip on life around me.
Reminding me that whatever my illusions
I still strive for absolute control.

The power of letting go

by Bev van der Westhuyzen

Looking back over my life there have been many letting go's.

In our younger years, with excitement we left our home country and let go the life we'd known. Beginning a new life in Australia meant geographical and cultural letting go as well as goodbyes to families left behind.

After a brief four years, there were more goodbyes and letting go. We moved to New Zealand to study at the Bible College with the intention to return to Australia – and for my husband his engineering job.

Yet, there were different purposes in store for us and more letting go. As it turned out, we STAYED in New Zealand and entered full time ministry. No longer depending on a secure salary, but 'living by faith'. Through these letting go's a deeper work was being wrought in us. What developed was the ability to face the challenges set before us – and through our obedience – a growing faith and trust in God.

Our ministry was to Vietnamese refugees living in stark prison-like conditions.

Then came a call to the mission field. Living in Hong Kong had its challenges. Our ministry was to the Vietnamese refugees living in stark prison-like conditions. We grew accustomed to the surroundings and loved the people. One day as I sat on the concrete in worship with our group (smelling the toilets close by) I felt the inner nudge and soft still voice, 'can you let this go?'

I couldn't, I was shocked – how could this be?

Letting go was hard, returning to New Zealand was hard. The change from a busy vibrant ministry to a life where there seemed to be no place for me was a dying time. What emerged for me out of this was my desire for a Spiritual Director. A new phase of inner work began.

As time went by, my husband and I travelled into Vietnam regularly growing a flourishing ministry from a seemingly dead stump. And lessons learned.

Then a new invitation came. It was time for me to let go the identity and ministry of being a missionary. Who would I be and what would I do, if I let the essence of my being go? But the request was clear.

It took time, plenty of time. Gradually I began to realize, that what had originated as an inner call from God had slowly and subtly turned to a response to outward expectations and pressures. And so I became more acquainted with my ego – the comfortable part of me that didn't want to let go. The very self-centered part of me – that wanted to hold on to what I knew.

The process reminded me of an incident where a toddler picks up an old fashioned double sided razor blade off the side of the bath. To her horror, as his mother tries to

take it from him, he begins to close his little fist over it. Instantly she has to change her tactics – to talking him round to freely giving it to her without damaging himself.

To carry on as a missionary would be damaging both for me and the people with whom I ministered. I had to take an honest look within. I was physically tired and knew that spiritually there seemed to be a void; there was nothing more to give. But still the clamoring questions remained. Not only, 'would I let go?' but, 'who would I be?'. HOW to let go was the dilemma I faced.

The wooing of the Father was gentle and patient as I moved from the ego towards my true self – searching for Richard Rohr's 'immortal diamond', Thomas Keating's 'gold nugget' or Jesus' 'pearl of great price'.

Often in life, stepping away from things can be more challenging than stepping into them. Some analogies come to mind – a chrysalis becoming a butterfly or an acorn the mighty oak. A repeated theme: death and resurrection. Both involving surrender and letting go for the sake of becoming something different through dying.

According to Cynthia Bourgeault, true surrender (handing oneself over) can be seen as a sign of strength not weakness.¹ Often easier said than done! But as time progressed – and I learned more about 'Falling Upward'² – the thought of letting go became an active process of entrusting myself and my future to a caring and loving God.

In all this I discovered a change happening. Just as our missionary call led to an upward outward spiral – propelled by pressure from others and myself – so this new call seemed to reverse the spiral back down and inwards – to where the Trinity was waiting to receive me.

Now if I am leaning too much on the ego side of myself, the filter I use to help me stay grounded and aware is this prayer:

'I let go my desire for safety and security
I let go my desire for esteem and affection
I let go my desire for power and control
I let go my desire to change the situation'³

Each touch on the core values we hold dear and are the bedrock of life. A shift from the often unconscious desire for all these needs being met by outward relationships or things to really relying on God to meet these needs has begun. Is it easy? No. Do I forget? Yes. Was it instantaneous? By no means ... and the journey continues. What is being learnt in the process?

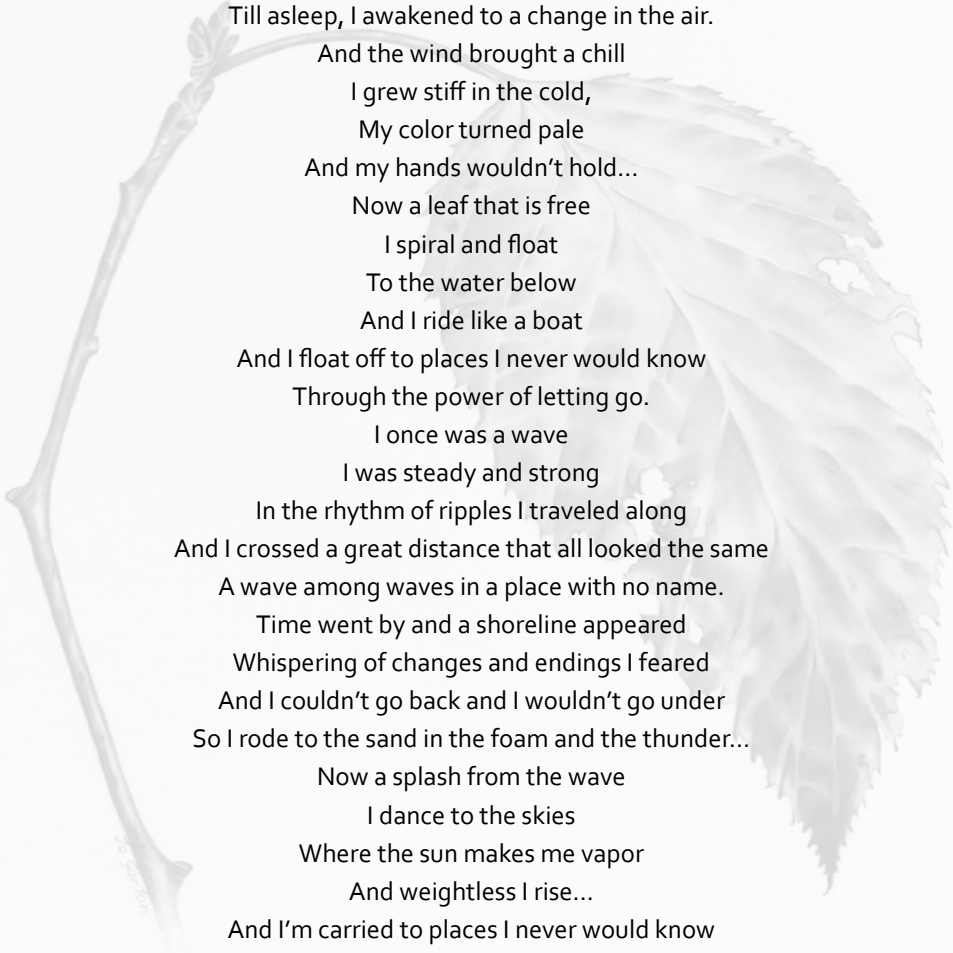
Letting go at any level is not easy, but there is a divine power released in the subtle and challenging art of letting go.

¹ Cynthia Bourgeault 'Wisdom Way of Knowing', 72

² Richard Rohr

³ Cynthia Bourgeault 'Centering Prayer'

The Power of Letting Go¹



I once was a leaf among leaves on a tree
Where I grew and I shaded the things beneath me.
When the wind blew strong I held the tree tight
When the sun lit the heavens I reached for the light.
And I passed many days without worry or care
Till asleep, I awakened to a change in the air.
And the wind brought a chill
I grew stiff in the cold,
My color turned pale
And my hands wouldn't hold...
Now a leaf that is free
I spiral and float
To the water below
And I ride like a boat
And I float off to places I never would know
Through the power of letting go.
I once was a wave
I was steady and strong
In the rhythm of ripples I traveled along
And I crossed a great distance that all looked the same
A wave among waves in a place with no name.
Time went by and a shoreline appeared
Whispering of changes and endings I feared
And I couldn't go back and I wouldn't go under
So I rode to the sand in the foam and the thunder...
Now a splash from the wave
I dance to the skies
Where the sun makes me vapor
And weightless I rise...
And I'm carried to places I never would know
Through the power of letting go.

¹ Music & Lyrics: Chris Spheeris used with permission.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpraEL1xfog>, sung by Shaina Noll

Life stages of letting go

by Trish McBride

Life is about letting go! So many life stages, so much pain in the letting go – sometimes a choice, but often not – then the new freedoms and the work of living into them.

To be born, we let go of our security in the womb. To stand and walk alone, we let go the support of the sofa. Through childhood and adolescence, to a greater or lesser degree, we let go of our parents. We leave home and bond with a partner. Pregnancy and 20 odd years of child-rearing mean letting go of so much freedom!

Even choosing to continue a career means letting a precious child go into the care of someone else. Then letting them go free to make their own lives is a further birth-giving. They may or may not come back or stay close.

As I think back over my own major lettings go, I'm aware of the God-Presence in Jesus, my life-companion.

Along the adult journey, there's the letting go of dreams, then health and later autonomy as old age approaches. Finally the letting go of death itself.

As I think back over my own major lettings go, I'm aware of the God-Presence in Jesus, my life-companion: always there, if not necessarily in an obvious way, obvious to me at the time.

We immigrated to New Zealand when I was nine. No choice there. In the days before children were meant to have emotional struggles there was grief and major adjustments to be made. Jesus – in church and the Eucharist – was about the only familiar experience in this new place half a world away.

In middle adulthood, I learned a great deal about letting go during my time in Al-Anon: the 12 step programme for friends and families of alcoholics. Step 1: recognising I'm powerless over the alcoholic. Efforts to control their drinking are fruitless, wear you down, and can usefully stop! And the corollary: trying to control anyone else's life is not only fruitless, but unloving, disrespectful and counter-productive.

There's the Al-anon slogan 'Let go and let God'. I simply can't manage outcomes. There will always be unknown imponderables when setting off on a course of action. Another slogan 'detach with love', points to a way between caring too much and choosing to care no longer.

And there's the Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity to accept what I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.

I discovered the key role played by the final line: letting go the conviction that I was the best arbiter of what could and couldn't change. This led to astonishment as circumstances reframed themselves around me. Then came willingness to change what could in fact be changed. Eventually serenity crept in – once I could let go into the hands of a loving God all that was genuinely outside my ability to control.

Another major set of letting go came in later in my God-and-faith-and-Church journey. My physical health suffered as I fought to reconcile the Spirit working within me with the ways of the church I'd grown up in, learned so much from, and loved so deeply. Each Sunday became an ordeal – as the vision of the Holy One coming to birth in me conflicted almost violently with the language and imagery in the service.

What would leaving mean? Letting go the Eucharist – my food since I was small. Letting go a community I was fond of. Letting go the fear that rejecting familiar words, authority, and some teachings would be setting myself up as 'prideful'.

Thankfully, I had no fear of eternal damnation, but that can be a challenge for others in similar circumstances. Trusting that Jesus, the Compassion of God, would lead, teach and keep me on track became very important: 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he'll lead you to the complete truth'. 'Yes, but what if...?' 'Trust, love and be loved!' [John 16.13] And 'If you are guided by the Spirit, you will be in no danger of yielding to self-indulgence.' [Galatians 5.16]

*Eventually serenity crept in
– once I could let go into the
hands of a loving God all that
was genuinely outside my
ability to control.*

Some challenges land in our laps – inviting us to let go our complete-looking understandings of God and Church. Can we choose to dismantle our tidy jigsaws to incorporate new experiences, insights and understanding? To reject new information simply to preserve the familiar is to court stagnation!

After times of bewilderment, I let go of striving to find God. I found eventually it was replaced by the recognitions and the joys. God has always been right here, simply waiting for my eyes to let go of their scales - discovering myself as fish in the ocean of Love.

Eucharist, too, has been there all the time – simply waiting to be recognised once I tore myself away from ritual. Ritual always pointed to real life. Eucharist is there when I share coffee with a friend, ice-cream with a grandchild, a sandwich offered by a mental-health client, when a directee breaks open their life-story to my privileged hearing, and when I open myself – heart, mind, body and soul – to the love of the One.

Over the next couple of decades with the approach of aging, I near the other necessary 'releasings': my health, my active role in the support of others, the much loved treasures of a lifetime, my precious house, where solitude, peace and the view of the harbour are a constant joy. Will I be pruned from here to a bed-sit with a view of a brick wall?

Conversely, I hope and pray relationships with family and friends endure and deepen. But who knows how many of my tribe of beautiful grandchildren I'll see grow to adulthood?

Dying doesn't seem a problem, but the getting there might be.

Can I trust the Love of my life to be beside me for that journey too? My mind says yes, but my heart isn't so sure. All I can do is pray for what I'll need to walk peacefully into the final letting go, trusting that all will indeed be well!

God has always been right here,
simply waiting for my eyes to let
go of their scales

Sea Fever

by Nola Myles

with reference to Sea Fever by John Masefield

The call of the sea and the surf draws me
and I must go down again
to the lonely sea and the sky
and look to the dark blue horizon
where they meet but don't meet

the grey mist hovers over the sandy shore
while the sun dances on the waves beyond
kelp tumbles and rocks jumble
and the waves wash over them, relentlessly
one at a time

the call of the running tide is relentless, constant, energetic,
cleansing, refreshing,
sometimes boisterous and wild,
ever changing yet constant

no flung spray or blown spume today
yet still the seagulls crying

but here with the sound and rhythm of the waves
washing over my senses
I feel close to You

I can feel how it is when I am in the water and I feel You
the waves supporting and holding me up
foam on my face
the stillness when I dive beneath
the thrill as I ride my boogie board
the comforting sand when I find my feet

I recall with joy my childhood days jumping and diving
from the big flat rock at Turnbull's Bay
just like these at St Clair

I love the tumbling waves like waves of your love
never ceasing, constant, cleansing, invigorating, energising,
yet always different,
always new and fresh

I am the tall ship
You my star to steer by
so I need not fear the lonely sea and the sky
yet in me it's a wild call and a clear call
that cannot be denied "I must go down to the sea again"

White water rafting

by Sheila Pritchard

It's all about letting go I've decided – life I mean – all of it!

Sometimes it's OK, 'Oh, I'll just let that go. No big deal!' Other times it is excruciating! I want to cling to the familiar, the tried and true, the safe 'known' way, (or person, or job, or theology...)

I look back on my life and notice that the times I've clung the hardest and experienced the most pain and anxiety letting go, have been the entry points into surprisingly wonderful new vistas.

From the vantage point of one of those experiences I wrote this poem in 1995.

White Water Rafting

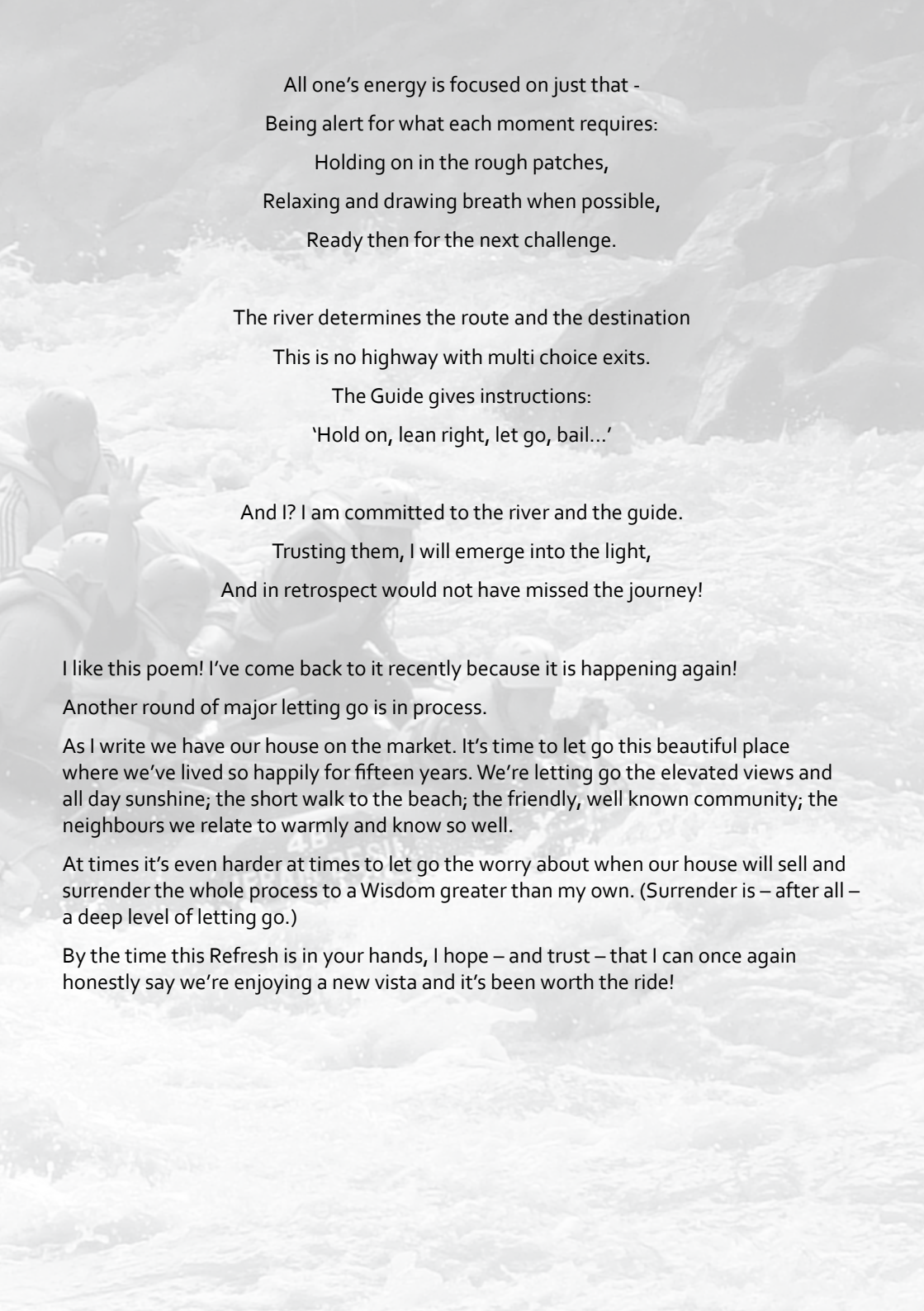
White water rafting in the caverns of my soul
terrifying, exhilarating -
this is no time to analyse
just hang on and go with it.

Hold the sides of the boat and lean into the curves.

No jumping out or going back now
No use trying to grab the solid looking rocks
that flash by - to hold onto them would mean
being wrenched out of the boat and left behind.

It's dark in these underground caves and
no way of knowing what is around the next bend.

Shooting the rapids one minute
Gliding calmly the next - the trick is
to be alert and fully aware of each moment.



All one's energy is focused on just that -
Being alert for what each moment requires:
Holding on in the rough patches,
Relaxing and drawing breath when possible,
Ready then for the next challenge.

The river determines the route and the destination
This is no highway with multi choice exits.
The Guide gives instructions:
'Hold on, lean right, let go, bail...'

And I? I am committed to the river and the guide.
Trusting them, I will emerge into the light,
And in retrospect would not have missed the journey!

I like this poem! I've come back to it recently because it is happening again!

Another round of major letting go is in process.

As I write we have our house on the market. It's time to let go this beautiful place where we've lived so happily for fifteen years. We're letting go the elevated views and all day sunshine; the short walk to the beach; the friendly, well known community; the neighbours we relate to warmly and know so well.

At times it's even harder at times to let go the worry about when our house will sell and surrender the whole process to a Wisdom greater than my own. (Surrender is – after all – a deep level of letting go.)

By the time this Refresh is in your hands, I hope – and trust – that I can once again honestly say we're enjoying a new vista and it's been worth the ride!

Complete Surrender

by Maggie Quinlan

Up and up I go
as the constant throb of the Cessna
carries me high above the town.
A little scary
but with little option
out I jump.
The rush of air on my face;
everything left behind.
Not a care in the world.
Falling down and down
but the freedom, the joy
the beauty to be seen in no other way;
nothing to fear,
held by the parachute.

Til now there has been only
the dance of survival,
achievements and struggles to the top.
But now I want to jump;
fall from the false self.
This is truly scary!
But I will jump.
I will let go of everything
that impedes finding my true self;
leaving my own aspirations.
Complete surrender
as I fly in the arms of God;
freedom I had never known;
deep mutual relationship with my love.
This is real life in abundance.





Letting go of agendas so we can listen to God and to others

by Lynne Baab

Eleven years ago, our son came to ask our advice about whether he should marry his girlfriend of three years. They were both 23, and he felt that was too young to get married. My husband and I agreed with that assessment, but also agreed that this lovely young woman was just about the best thing that ever happened to him.

After our son talked through the pros and cons of getting married, I said: 'Yes, you're both too young to get married, and yes, she's an absolutely wonderful person. You have a tough decision to make.'

For the first time as a parent, I genuinely had no opinion about what he should do. Previously, I'd struggled and prayed whether to voice my opinions. This time, I truly didn't know what he should do.

I've looked back on that moment many times. The quality of my listening changed when I realized I genuinely didn't have an opinion, and that I genuinely wanted to support whatever he decided to do. Yes, I'd pray for guidance for him, but it was his (and her) big decision to make, not mine.

Over the past three years I've been researching, teaching, speaking and writing about listening. I've come to believe many of the same listening skills – and obstacles – apply both to listening to people and listening to God.

One of the biggest impediments comes from having an agenda while listening. That agenda might be our certainty that we know what another person should do or believe – which I so frequently experienced as a mother of teenagers. My kids would talk about something they wanted to do, and I could see so clearly it wasn't a good idea. My struggle in the conversation was to find wisdom. What was the best way to influence them?

Agendas that block our listening to people

Cognitive ideas in conversations – such as being sure that we're right about something or wondering how to counter someone's words – might block listening because these thoughts function as a kind of agenda.

Imagine you have a friend who's been learning Buddhist meditation, and you're having a conversation with that friend about her experience. You're adamantly convinced Buddhist meditation will never meet her needs in the way Jesus Christ would.

As you listen to her, you're watching for opportunities to say something about Jesus. Or perhaps you want to say something about Jesus, but feel woefully ill equipped to counter what she's saying about Buddhist practice.

A part of you wants to hear her story.

How did she get involved in this new practice? What factors in her life led her here? What has she learned?

But another part of you is deeply concerned about her and how you'll respond. The inner tension or anxiety you feel while listening to her, may very well block your ability to listen carefully. The desire to relieve our anxiety or tension functions as another kind of agenda that can block listening.

Have you ever been at a family meal when someone starts talking intensely about something? The intensity in their voice makes some people around the table uncomfortable. Pretty soon someone jumps up and says, 'Let's get those dishes done!'

Intensity can make us feel uncomfortable, and one way we deal with our discomfort is to shut down the conversation. In that instance, our agenda is to manage our own discomfort.

Sometimes in conversations we're tense or anxious because of our awareness of the passage of time. Maybe we have an appointment coming up and we need to get going. How will we extricate ourselves from the conversation? Maybe it's a day with a long to-do list, and spending time talking to someone just isn't on the list. That list spinning around our mind makes us tense. Our agenda shifts from caring for the other person to relieving our own anxiety.

*The quality of my listening
changed when I realized I
genuinely didn't have an
opinion*

I keep coming back to that instance with my son. 'You have a big decision to make,' I said. I could see clearly it was his decision, not mine. For some unknown and wonderful reason, I felt no anxiety that I didn't know what he should do. He was intensely concerned about his decision, but in that one moment, blessed by God, his intensity didn't bother me and make me want to change the subject or shut down the conversation. I was able to be present to him, let him talk through the pros and cons, and leave the decision in his and his girlfriend's hands.

What made me able to listen well to him?

For that brief moment, I actually didn't have an agenda for his life. I knew the decision was his to make, and his life ultimately belonged to God not to me. What's more – for that brief moment – I felt no tension about what I should think or say about his situation. I wasn't sidetracked by the need to relieve my inner turmoil. In the moment, there was an element of knowing I wasn't responsible for his life – that I could trust God. That peace and trust was a true gift from God. I've been thinking ever since how to replicate that peace and trust in other conversations.

Agendas that block listening to God

Similar agendas can block our listening to God. Some of them are cognitive and related to what we believe or think about something: 'I shouldn't be struggling with this.' 'What's wrong with me, that this situation is bugging me so much?' 'What kind of a person would have this issue in their life?' These inner thoughts, focused on judgment and self-criticism, keep our minds occupied when we could be listening to God.

Tension and anxiety can also block listening to God, just like they block listening to people. 'Oh my gosh, what will happen? How will I cope? This is awful! Help me, God.'

Throughout the psalms we see the people of God always brought their pain, terror, frustration and sorrow to God and praying in the midst of hard times always an essential part of knowing and loving God. But, I can tell the difference within myself between the anxiety – even terror – that blocks my listening to God and the worries I leave in God's hands because my life belongs to God.

Curious what he'd decide, I said to my son, 'You have a big decision to make,' Perhaps a parallel is the moment I say to God, 'I have a big decision to make. I'm curious how you'll guide me. I want to let go of the anxiety that sometimes overwhelms me when I think about it. I want to trust you in it.'

Choosing an attitude of curiosity, and as much as we can, setting aside anxiety, can open us up to listening – whether to God or to others.

'Be still and know that I am God,' the psalmist says (Psalm 46:10). I always thought the psalmist was referring to sitting still. Now I believe at least part of the stillness necessary to hearing God involves stilling the inner swirling of our thoughts. Being still acknowledges our tendency to emphasise our own agendas and our overwhelming drive to soothe our own anxieties.

I have always found it easier to engage in listening prayer if I'm doing something rhythmical as well: walking, swimming or playing the piano.

I wonder if the rhythm quiets my anxious thoughts to some extent, enabling me to be still and know that God is God – even though I'm not physically still. It's worth spending time pondering the places in your life where you most easily experience the stilling of your emotions and agendas: Gardening, perhaps? Tramping? Walking on a beach?

Letting Go

I've been arguing that to grow in our ability to listen to God and to people, we need to learn to let go of our agendas. Those agendas might be our certainty that we're right or our need to relieve the anxiety we feel in some conversations. I can see clearly from my own experience, I'm better able to listen and grow in my listening skills, when I can set aside those agendas.

The converse is also true. I notice that practising listening skills helps me let go of all

sorts of expectations of myself and others. Consciously working on listening well, helps me set aside many forms of certainty, anxiety and tension. Listening skills fuel letting go of my agendas, and letting go of my agendas fuels my listening skills.

Why should we bother to set aside our agendas while listening?

This 'letting go' help us draw near to the people in our lives, accept them as they are and support them in their journey. We're more honest when we decide to speak up, because we're more in touch with what's going on inside us. And when we practise setting aside our own agendas, we're more able to hear God's voice.

A post-script: Ten years ago, our son married that wonderful young woman. She continues to be a gift to him. A few months ago, they gave us our first grandchild, a beautiful little girl. Now I have to grow in my ability to let go of my agendas regarding my granddaughter!

*practising listening skills
helps me let go of all sorts of
expectations of myself and
others.*

Questions for Reflection, Journaling or Discussion:

Have you had moments where you clearly understood your partner in conversation had a difficult decision to make, and you didn't have an opinion about what they should decide? In what ways did that free you to listen well?

Do you think it's possible to listen well even when you strongly disagree with what the other person is talking about? What might that look like for you?

Where are the places in your life you experience the stilling of your emotions and agendas? In what ways do those places open you up to God and hearing God's voice? What are the obstacles to your going to those places often?



NOW

LATER

Letting go

by Anna Johnstone

Matthew 6:25–34
Easy words, harder concept

The more difficult the problem
the tighter we tend to hang on
as if by grim determination
we should squeeze the answer out
like the last toothpaste from
an already-squashed, flat tube
when there are full ones, round and smooth
bursting with promise in God's store-house
our names on the labels

This is the God who gave free takeaways
six days a week for forty years in the desert
and never forgot to double the sixth day's supplies

This is the God who shared his power
so that a man held a stick over the water
and the sea cut itself in two
leaving a carpet of dry land

This is the God who took a boy's picnic lunch
and filled the stomachs of hungry thousands

This is the God who looked at death
and said, Yes, I'm willing
Who died in agony and blackness
and broke its curse

This is the God who holds the future
as he holds this world
safely
securely
strongly
who says, I love you
Don't waste time leaning out
of the windows of today
trying to reach for your tomorrows

Enjoy the now
for this is where I am
Walk with me
in now-time

first published in The God Walk

Letting go of Labels

by Lesley Ayers

'So, what are you doing with yourself nowadays? Are you still...counselling, in chaplaincy, writing...?' These are questions I find myself responding to with an amorphous one-size-fits-all reply: 'I'm retired now'.

There can be an interesting, slightly dismissive reaction to this statement. But within my reply lies a story of letting go, of shedding my 'labels' and the terms that define me.

Our society places much value on what we do, particularly when it's paid work. I've had to ask 'who am I?' when I'm no longer defined as a counsellor, or a writer?

The letting go has been far from easy – that 'counsellor' label was hard won in mid-life. Twenty-five years after leaving university I was again studying, believing this was what God was calling me to.

After completing three intense, stretching years, followed by many hours of practical work, and a final interview, I'd become a member of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors. There was blood, sweat and tears involved in the certificate that hung on the wall.

The process of leaving was gradual: cutting back client hours until it hardly seemed feasible to pay membership fees. Still, that final giving up was painful, like a knife severing a thread of my life.

Strangely enough, after that came a new feeling of freedom, almost euphoria.

I remember being on a plane to visit family in Rarotonga. Where the form had a gap for occupation, I wrote with a flourish 'retired'. For me, it echoed the biblical paradox: in giving up we gain new riches. In losing our identity we find our identity.

What do my days look like?

I used to joke, when I was a counsellor, that my therapy of choice would be either 'walking alongside therapy' or 'cup of tea therapy'. Now, it seems, I have the freedom to enjoy both.

I find myself having amazingly interesting conversations at the local shops, on a bus, or on the train. And it's good to be able to meet up with old friends. For years our brief encounters in the supermarket or in the street were like a 'speed catch-up', as we rattled off what our families were up to, before dashing off to the next appointment.

Now, over coffee, or walking together along a beautiful river, we can share heart concerns, grief and loss, come to terms with ageing, tease-out issues over housing and location. Then come the really deep questions about what our lives have been about and questions of eternity.

You may notice I haven't mentioned the 'writing' label.

Yes, I still retain membership in the New Zealand Society of Authors, and yes I still write. Yet, I no longer feel the need to say that I'm a writer, with the focus that might presume. There is in this, a new freedom.

I might decide go to the hospice and use my skills to help people tell their life story as a gift to their family. But I no longer have the same need to 'make it' in the world of authors.

Another thing I've had to let go of is the idea I'm still around 50 years old – as that's how I feel inside. But the reality is I no longer have that energy. Oh, I may still be able to work out that cryptic crossword, but it takes longer to 'download' the answers from the convoluted depths of my memory.

*There was blood, sweat and
tears involved in the certificate
that hung on the wall*

I don't bounce back the same way after being sick, or the twinges in my back or wrist after gardening.

And there's the reality of letting go the idea I can control my life. After all, there's no telling what's round the corner. Each day is of value. I can ask 'what's in this day loving God?' and be open to what comes. Eternity puts my tiny life into perspective.

All this reminds me of a scene I love, in *The Silver Chair* in CS Lewis's Narnia Chronicles. Two children, Eustace Scrubb and Jill Pole stand precariously at the edge of a high cliff. In the distance far below is the land of Narnia. They can't go back, but how can they go forward? Then Aslan, the great Lion, blows – and they're transported safely to Narnia by his breath.

The poet, Denise Levertov, explores her own sense of the brevity of human life in the light of eternity. From *The Beginning of Wisdom*.

Are you holding
The universe? You hold
Onto my smallness. How do you grasp it,
how does it not slip away?

Retirement, and getting older are, in some ways, getting closer to that cliff – the cliff of eternity – the cliff of the end of our lives. I've had to let go of my former self- image with its supports of career, energy and mental agility.

Yet in many ways, I find this current stage of life not something to be feared. It's almost like an experience of freefalling with God at times, carried and borne up by the breath of the Spirit.

In the end the only label I need, the one I should always have given primacy, is the label 'loved child of God'.



There's a time to...

by Jill McLeod

(From Orere Point to Tararu Retirement Village, Thames.)

2012 – 2013

IT'S TIME. It's time to let go and move on.
But I was going to die here!
Sea, bush, beach, hills – four generations have enjoyed
this special place of peace,
in storm and sunshine.
How CAN we leave it?
How can we leave it to someone else?
Perhaps, though, for someone else to treasure?

How do we pack up, leave, and let go of 66 years?
Always there to escape to.....
Did Sara feel like this when Abram said, 'We're moving;
pack up!'
But it is time.

And it takes time to discover that we can
give so much away: to family,
friends, Fairs, Fundraisers, rubbish collections....
and still have more than enough.
It takes time to decide what is special and treasured;
time to strike cuttings; memories that will grow
and settle in new soil.

But the grief, the guilt, the tears, the pain – where are they?
They are deep down, like a turbid underground stream,
bubbling up and choking me at unexpected times.
Along that stream are borne so many memories,
but those I take with me, and gradually
the stream is clearing and becoming peaceful,
because it was time, time to let go.

'So I leave my boats behind,
leave them on familiar shores,
set my heart upon the deep,
follow You again, my Lord.'¹

¹ The Galilee Song. Frank Anderson MSC Chevalier Publications



The art of Spiritual Direction outside the Church

by Sheila Varghese

As I began the Spiritual Director Formation Programme, I was struck by Simon Brown's *Mission and the Art of Spiritual Direction*. He wrote, 'I believe Christian Spiritual Direction has a place among the many seekers who as yet do not know Christ or His church, but are drawn none-the-less to God through inexplicable spiritual experiences...While not denying the need for excellent spiritual direction amongst Christians, this essay will argue that the mission field is wide open for Christian Spiritual Direction for people outside of the church as well.'¹

I'm a retired medical doctor who's worked in Hindu and Buddhist cultures for the last 35 years. Many of these people are good and close friends whom I got to know at a heart level. I see in a few of them, a real thirst for God who is Truth. They are asking real questions about life.

In 2012, I was asked to lead a 'spiritual workshop' by a group of non-Christian doctors who were looking for 'spiritual food'. I was challenged by this request. My initial response was 'No'. I asked myself, 'How can I lead a group of Hindus or Buddhists?' Yet I wondered, 'Can spiritual direction be the first step in introducing others to Christ?'

As I prayed about it, I realised if God lives in me and wants to use me, who am I to stop that? I felt God can use any situation to speak to 'other sheep'² if only we make ourselves available. If God made me as I am and God wants to use me in the contemplative phase I'm going through, I ought to make myself available to God in this way. So I said, 'Yes' to my friends.

I asked the leader what they were looking for. She said 'Something about peace...we want peace in our clinics and peace in our families and homes'. So 'peace' became the theme of my three day workshop. I decided to use the 'symbols' of Jesus: Peace, Door, and Water.

Peace Workshop Day One: centrepiece – a tray of germinating seeds

To introduce the theme of peace and serenity in our lives, I took two examples from medical practice where someone brought peace into a situation to highlight that peace is a person. I then talked about peace and serenity in the Christian tradition using examples from the Desert Fathers and Mothers and peace and serenity in the Hindu tradition.

Small group discussion followed on our experiences of peace in the context of our own religious teachings and practices. We came back together to share our findings. After this we looked at modern trends and the need for silence in our busy lives. More

1 Simon Brown, *Mission and the Art of Spiritual Direction*

www.sgm.org.nz/Research%20Papers/Mission%20and%20the%20Art%20of%20Spiritual%20Direction.pdf

2 John10:16

than ever, we're a toxically over stimulated profession, because of cell phones, iPads, TVs, iPods, and PCs. We need to make space for the luxury of silence. So together we practised ten minutes of silence.

Later in the day, we watched a BBC documentary, *The Big Silence*³, which emphasises Fr Christopher Jamieson's view: 'The ego gets what it wants with words. The soul finds what it needs in silence...The door to our souls is silence and at that door is the opening to God.'

Again we practised silence for ten minutes followed by a reflection from Margaret Silf's *Landmarks*⁴ – Where am I? How am I? Who am I? – as a way to examine our lives in silence.

Peace Workshop Day Two: centrepiece – a door decorated with flowers

The theme for this day was taken from Jamieson's, 'The door to our souls is silence and at that door is the opening to God.' After ten minutes silence, I introduced the symbol of 'the door' and a reflective exercise using photographs of a variety of doors.

I told them a story from the Gospel⁵ about four friends who took a paraplegic to Jesus. How they had to make a door in the roof, when there was no room to come in the actual door because of the crowd. I used my own words and changed it into a village scene in Himachal where we live. Instead of Jesus, I said 'seer' or 'prophet'. I was trying to bring home the idea that when one door doesn't work for you, you need to find another door.

In the afternoon, we focussed on 'attachments' and how they get in the way of silence and prayer. In silence, we examined our everyday attachments and chose one to work on.

We concluded the day sharing ideas about how to make our clinics and homes more peaceful. I shared how my Christian faith helps me in my work and home.

Peace Workshop Day Three: centrepiece – a river made from blue cloths

Water was the theme: We were to look at our need for prayer to quench our inner thirst and at silence as a way of praying. Silence was to be practised together several times during the day. I prepared a reflection on the Samaritan woman at the well and her conversation with the 'prophet'.⁶

Process of planning for the workshop

In preparation, I reflected on similarities and differences between Hinduism, Buddhism and the Christian faith. I used my own experience as well as the internet and books. I thought it would be most helpful to focus on similarities.

3 Christopher Jamieson: BBC Documentary *The Big Silence*
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7DED2A8F9A4501CC>

4 Margaret Silf: *Landmarks*, (Darton, Longman, Todd) P31,33,& 35
5 Mark 2:1-12

6 John 4:1-26 (Unfortunately this day was cancelled.)

The one thing common to all three religions was 'silence'. This led me to use silence as a way to pray – one to which all could connect – even if they hadn't practised it. During our Formation Programme workshop on discernment, I studied Margaret Silf's *Landmarks*. Her concept seemed appropriate for all faiths: allowing prayer to help move us in our inner journey, from the 'who am I' centre to 'the where am I' in my life. I used this reflection each day.

As I researched, I realized the Hinduism of religious books (Vedas, Gita, and Upanishads) is far from the practice of the person in the street.

The majority of Hindus don't know their scriptures, so their practice is often far removed from pure Hindu philosophy. Therefore, I focussed on only a few similarities with Christianity. (I considered Hinduism and Buddhism together, as one came out of the other and they have much in common.)

Similarities: not being jealous, filling your mind with good thoughts, peace, God's will, truth and surrender. Hinduism's goal is 'self-realization', which in a way is to recognize God in you. There's a 'trinity' in Hinduism, but it's the names of three gods: Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu.

Differences: On reading more I discovered the deeper meanings of truth and peace, are different. Peace in Hinduism⁷ is a way towards realization of God – whereas in Christianity peace is having Jesus in your life. Hindus equate peace with non-violence and relate it to good works. In Hinduism, God's will involves karma and destiny.⁸

I wondered, 'Can spiritual direction be the first step in introducing others to Christ?'

In Hinduism there are numerous 'rebirths'⁹ which give one many opportunities to 'right' one's self. There's no concept of 'judgment day' or accountability for sin. Hinduism is based on a 'code of life': dharma or 'doing good'. In the Christian faith 'doing good' comes *after* believing – as a fruit of God's Spirit in us. In Hinduism, there's no concept of 'repentance'.¹⁰

Meditation in Hinduism is thought-less-ness or emptiness, whereas in Christian meditation we are making space for God's Word and Spirit. In Hinduism meditation

7 *Peace (Shanti) is considered the greatest yearning of the Hindus, and the main theme of the Vedas and Upanishads. It is preached and practised by many eminent Hindus. Ceremonies in Hinduism are based on a number of mantras and in the end of each mantra, they pronounce 'Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti' (Peace, Peace, Peace).*

8 Karma (action or deeds) is the philosophy that one's deeds are involved in the 'cause and effect' process of life - that if you sow good you reap good...if you sow evil you reap evil.

9 Rebirth – Hindus believe that they have many, many births so there is enough opportunity to make one self-righteous through good works and there is no concept of judgment after life.

10 Repentance in Hinduism - Two thousand years ago South India's weaver saint Tiruvalluvar said 'All suffering recoils on the wrongdoer himself. Therefore, those who desire not to suffer refrain from causing others pain.' This verse tells that the Hindu is eventually convinced by the belief that violence committed by an individual will return to him/her by a cosmic process that is accurate and definite.

does not lead to 'action'. In Christianity contemplation and meditation lead to action. In Christian practice quietening the mind leads into contemplation – not only to achieve detachment, but as prayer.

Practising Hinduism requires much willpower and focuses less on letting go. There's no concept of relationship with God in Hinduism. What Christianity regards as personal and God, Hinduism regards in non-personal, non-relational ways – using terms like 'destiny'. In Christianity, virtue isn't possible without Christ. In Hinduism, nonviolence is referred to as wisdom. Hinduism advocates abandoning desire and being content with things as they are.

Having considered these similarities and differences between Faiths, I chose to focus in the workshops on TRUTH (about ourselves) and our need for SURRENDER, and PEACE. Our shared practice was SILENCE as a way to pray, the gateway to the soul and the road to God.

Feedback from participants

At the end of the workshop, a common comment was they felt at home having a Christian lead the workshop and comfortable with my concepts.

I was delighted they'd deeply heard my comment that 'Peace is the presence of another Person' and, following my testimony at the end of the workshop, one of them wondered if they needed to find a 'guru' to follow, like I had found Jesus to follow.

My own reflections and learning:

My initial response to this invitation was negative as I was mostly thinking of spiritual direction, retreats and spiritual workshops being for people of the same faith. However, as I prayed and spent time in reflection, I was reminded again and again about 'the other sheep' Jesus talked about in the Gospels¹¹ so I decided to say yes to the invitation.

During the workshop I realized a few of the participants already used meditation and 'mantras' for quietening and centring themselves. They found it easy to be quiet and reflect. I found an openness in them to all I suggested they do during the times of reflection and self-examination.

During the sharing following reflections, I noticed the concept of karma and destiny was very strong amongst them. This included the concept of many rebirths which was foreign to my own thinking.

I did find it difficult to be in sync with the participants at a deeper level. This was different from spiritual direction sessions where I know the other person knows Christ and where the fundamentals of faith are shared by both of us.

I realized this was 'sowing time' for me, not harvest time and it wasn't right to expect any dramatic conversions of thought or life. The seeds sown might take time to germinate and show life. If I were to do something similar again, I'd have two or three people working with me as a team because I felt very alone facilitating the workshop.

¹¹ John10:16.

SGM News – letting go and signing off

Having recently turned 65 and received my gold card, it's time to let go of my role as Convenor and member of SGM Workgroup.

Some swirling thoughts: In September 2002 when I started, I didn't know I'd still be Convenor 12 years later. I wonder what it will be like to no longer be on Workgroup with colleagues I love and have worked with for so long. So, I'm 65.

What does 'retirement' mean – especially when I've been self-employed in a variety of ministry contexts over the last couple of decades? What emotions and body sensations are associated with this letting go?

Perhaps surprisingly, as I walk towards this new phase, my predominant feelings are excitement and anticipation! My body relaxes. I breathe more slowly and deeply and I stretch – somehow reaching toward the discovery of what lies ahead.

Two things I know about myself – I'm an explorer by nature and love learning new things. So letting go the SGM Convenorship provides me with new opportunities. First and foremost, giving me the time to respond more fully to the longing and call to deepening my contemplative life. Secondly, it gives me time for teaching, retreats and resourcing people in ministry.

Many years ago I came across some work Robert Clinton did at Fuller Seminary on Leadership Development and Finishing Well. His research suggests for many leaders there's a phase, usually later in life's work, they name 'Convergence': a time one is free to do fewer things they may do well yet aren't core to who they are. A time to do more of what deeply fulfils and motivates them. For me, administration and chairing or convening leadership teams has been a significant part of my working life – but it's learning, teaching and sharing spiritual life that spins my wheels!

So, I anticipate letting go of my role as SGM Convenor will help me be a better Assistant Coordinator of the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme, a better teacher of Salvation Army Cadets at Booth College of Mission, a better spiritual director, supervisor and retreat giver... and I'm looking forward to that!

I'm also looking forward to dusting off my wood-turning lathe that's seen precious little use the last few years, pottering in my sheds and playing more golf! I rather suspect Lynn has a list of things I need to do around the house too; probably almost as long as my list of books I haven't yet read!

'So who'll be the new Convenor?' I hear you ask. 'We will!' say the other members of Workgroup. Each will have a specific portfolio, and more of the finance and accounting function will be outsourced. Mike Wright will have executive oversight and chair workgroup meetings.

Letting go provides new opportunities for growth, for me and for SGM.

May the God of growth bless us all!

Andrew Pritchard

ACSD Training Event 2015

August 28 – 30, 2015

Many of you reading this will have contributed to our planning for the next biennial event. You did so in replying to the survey we sent out a few months ago. Thank you for all you offered. The Wellington organising group is working to implement as many of your suggestions as possible.

Pip Nicholls and Molly King are the ACSD Executive members on the organising group and have the help of Jane Wilkinson, Jo Anastasiadis, Bede Haughey and Clare O'Connor. We've met several times, sorted tasks. Things are gradually falling into place. If there's anything you want to ask or contribute please just drop an email to either Molly or Pip.

The survey indicated that people want the input for the 2015 event to relate directly to Spiritual Direction practice. There was energy for a main speaker and that we draw on our significant membership talent as well.

After careful discernment, we have contacted Patrick Oliver from Queensland, Australia to be our keynote speaker on the Friday of the three day event. His website www.patrickoliver.net.au provides helpful information about his work, spiritual direction background and books he's authored.

We have yet to finalise the theme for our event and continue in conversation with Patrick about this. Clearly there are several areas where he has appropriate skills to work with us. We know some of you have used his books and found them very helpful.

Cost was another factor you asked us to re-consider. Last time the event was in Wellington it was held at the Brentwood Hotel. This meant that all those who needed accommodation had the hotel as their main option with little else available in nearby Kilbirnie or Miramar. What you told us in the survey, is the cost of accommodation impacts significantly on your ability to attend.

So we looked for a venue offering a variety of residential options, finally choosing The Home of Compassion Retreat and Conference Centre in Island Bay as the venue for the event. The Centre can accommodate 25 of us. We will also offer billeting and a range of motel options in nearby Newtown for you to consider. We're also aware some of you will have family and friends living in Wellington that you may choose to stay with. Whatever option you choose, we'll schedule the event so you don't need to miss any of it.

We encourage you to join us in Wellington for this 3 day event.

August 28 – 30, 2015

Mark your diaries now!



Refresh Book Reviews

Mysticism in Postmodernist Long Poems: Contemplation of the Divine

by Joe Moffett (Author)

178 pages

Lehigh University Press (November 14, 2014)

ISBN-10: 1611461626 ISBN-13: 978-1611461626



Written from a literary critic's perspective, *Mysticism in Postmodernist Long Poems* borrows insights from Religious Studies and critical theory to examine the role of spirituality in contemporary poetry, specifically the long poem genre.

Descending from Whitman's *Song of Myself*, the long poem is often considered the American twentieth-century equivalent of the epic poem, but unlike the epic, it carries few generic expectations aside from the fact that it simply must be long. This makes the form particularly pliable as a tool for spiritual inquiry.

The period following World War II is often described as a secular age, but spirituality continued as a concern for poets, as evidenced by this study. These writers look beyond conventional faith systems and instead seek individual paths of understanding; they engage in mysticism, in other words.

With chapters on H.D. and Brenda Hillman, Robert Duncan, James Merrill, Charles Wright, and Galway Kinnell and Gary Snyder, this study demonstrates how these poets engage the culture of consumption in the post-war years at the same time they search for opportunities for transcendence. Not content to throw over the earthly in favour of the otherworldly, these poets reject the familiar binary of the worldly and metaphysical to produce distinctive paths of spiritual understanding that fuel what Wright calls a 'contemplation of the divine.'

*Waking, Dreaming, Being:
Self and Consciousness in
Neuroscience,
Meditation, and Philosophy*

by Evan Thompson (Author)

496 pages

Columbia University Press (November 18, 2014)

ISBN-10: 0231137095 ISBN-13: 978-0231137096



A renowned philosopher of the mind, also known for his ground-breaking work on Buddhism and cognitive science, Evan Thompson combines the latest neuroscience research on sleep, dreaming, and meditation with Indian and Western philosophy of the mind, casting new light on the self and its relation to the brain.

Thompson shows how the self is a changing process, not a static thing. When we are awake we identify with our body, but if we let our mind wander or daydream, we project a mentally imagined self into the remembered past or anticipated future. As we fall asleep, the impression of being a bounded self, distinct from the world, dissolves but the self reappears in the dream state. If we have a lucid dream, we no longer identify only with the self within the dream. Our sense of self now includes our dreaming self, the "I" as dreamer. Finally, as we meditate -- either in the waking state or in a lucid dream -- we can observe whatever images or thoughts arise and how we tend to identify with them as "me." We can also experience sheer awareness itself, distinct from the changing contents that make up our image of the self.

Contemplative traditions say that we can learn to let go of the self, so that when we die we can witness the dissolution of the self with equanimity. Thompson weaves together neuroscience, philosophy, and personal narrative to depict these transformations, adding uncommon depth to life's profound questions. Contemplative experience comes to illuminate scientific findings, and scientific evidence enriches the vast knowledge acquired by contemplatives.

The Last Word

Many thanks to all those who bared their hearts in *Letting Go*. Every edition of *Refresh* I think, 'this time I'll write more than an Editorial!' But what happens is this: I edit all these beautiful pieces from other people and that leaves me touched and inspired yet strangely drained of what I probably would have said. So I'm letting go of the 'ought to write' in favour of 'when God inspires me I will.'

When the SGM Board met in September, the world was reeling from watching a very lopsided war in Gaza, as well as random acts of extreme and irrational violence. So we wanted to dedicate the winter 2015 edition of *Refresh* to an exploration of peace-making from a Christian contemplative perspective. Particularly, in light of Jesus' teaching and steadfast commitment to non-retaliation even unto death. I look forward to being inspired and drained from that edition too!

Blessings

Diane [dianegw@actrix.co.nz]

Winter 2015 Refresh theme 'Just Peace'

Deadline February 28, 2015

How does our contemplative experience form our response to questions of peace-making and conflict management in the geo-political sphere? What about in our faith communities? Our workplace? Our family? Can there ever be a 'just' reason to make war? What are the complexities which cause us to groan inwardly?

Writers please!

- keep contributions to fewer than 2000 words
- provide a few sentences about yourself for the Contributors' page
- images must be over 2 megapixels to be usable
- use single quotation marks
- conversational in style using conjunctions
- reference all quotations as **endnotes**
- try to use inclusive language wherever possible

Autumn Leaf

by Jo Garton

*Autumn leaf
dangling
dying beautifully
Are you desperately
holding on -
or letting go?
Is the buffeting breeze
an enemy -
or a friend?
Let go
Dance*



Contributors

John Hunt is thankful for early SGM days at Teschemakers (then a Dominican Retreat Centre near Oamaru). He's written and led retreats and workshops in Celtic Spirituality. The Celts would say we know God in the natural world – in all its moods. Repairs to John's earthquake-damaged home were completed recently on the fourth anniversary of the event.

Barbara Sampson is enjoying her first year of retirement, a sabbatical year of spiritual direction, retreat giving and writing. Wife of one, mother of two, grandmother of ten.

Janice Robb is a registered nurse who retired early because of ill-health. Her days revolve as much as possible around a contemplative lifestyle of prayer, reading and writing. She also enjoys novels, knitting and embroidery.

Mary Mitt lives in the Hokianga which a Kaumatua recently translated as 'the-springs-of-the-water-of-light'. She feels privileged to live next to the waterfall that is so named.

Jane Hansen, married to Jim, is also mum and grandma. Jane enjoys country life close to the Wairere Falls beneath the Kaimai Ranges, visits from family and friends, and writing in response to God's grace.

Judith Anne O'Sullivan is a Dominican Sister living in Community in Dunedin. Contemplation, reflecting with others on the daily Word of God and hospitality are central to the life of the Community. From this lifestyle flows the great privilege of being a companion to others on their spiritual journey.

Valerie Roberts is a Spiritual director living on the Kapiti Coast. She does voluntary work with the L'Arche Kapiti community (adults with intellectual disabilities) and is a foster carer. Being creative is essential to her wellbeing.

Andrew Brown is Senior Minister of Pakuranga Baptist Church. He's interested in spiritual direction, professional supervision, non-profit directorship and going bush with God just as often as he can.

Bev van der Westhuyzen loves living in Tauranga where she so enjoys the beauty of God's creation; especially the ebb and flow of the tides. She also plays a significant role in her grandchildren's lives. ('so I've been told :)')

Lynne Baab is senior lecturer in pastoral theology at the University of Otago. She is a Presbyterian minister and author of many books on Christian spiritual practices, including Sabbath Keeping and Fasting. Her most recent book is *The Power of Listening: Building Skills for Mission and Ministry*. Visit her website and blog to read blog posts and articles about listening: www.lynebaab.com.

Sheila Pritchard is grateful to be making the transition from Torbay to Orewa and settling in to a new community. She continues her work in spiritual direction and supervision from her new location.

Maggie Quinlan is a semi-retired GP, living on a lifestyle farm at Ararimu, south of Auckland. She is a member of the ministry team at Clevedon Anglican Parish. Time away from a busy medical surgery has given the space to focus more on contemplation and her love of writing.

Nola Myles' life in retirement is full of all the things she loves to do. This includes the privilege of accompanying others in spiritual direction. She is also blessed by family, a capella choir singing, embroidery, cafes with friends, movies, time at the beach, and Dunedin's local spiritual directors' group.

Trish McBride's writings come from life as a pilgrim, as a privileged hearer of other people's stories, then reflection on these and on her own. She's a Wellington spiritual director, counsellor, and chaplain in a mental health context.

Anna Johnstone enjoys living on Auckland's North Shore with her writer/photographer husband, exploring new paths of creativity, trying out new recipes and learning to play the clarinet. <http://annajohnstone.com>

Lesley Ayers lives in Palmerston North. She finds the gift of life amazing, and enjoys walking in the bush, along the river, and by the ocean. There is delight for her in family, friendships, hearing people's life stories and good coffee.

Jill McLeod is a long-time lover of silent retreats, and spiritual direction. Life in Tararu Retirement Village Thames gives her a sense of freedom and peace. She is enjoying the garden she inherited, harvesting vegetables, and replanting flowers and shrubs. The sea air and view are as fresh and delightful as the others who live in the Village. Jill has lots of time to walk, read, do jigsaws, and maybe pick up drawing and painting again.

Dr Sheila Varghese and her husband live in Manali, North India. Sheila is a retired medical doctor who has worked in Hindu and Buddhist cultures for the last 35 years. Sheila has established a small retreat centre near her home. She completed SGM's Spiritual Director Formation Programme in 2013.

Andrew Pritchard, husband of 1, father of 3, grandfather of 2, loves God and life! Teaching, spiritual direction, supervision and administration fill his working days. Reading, listening to music, walking, playing golf and pottering in his shed are vital for his physical, mental and spiritual health!

Jo Garton has been discovering the beauty of colour pencil in an art class at Nathan Homestead in Manurewa, Auckland. Her other 'spare' time activities include working as a spiritual director and as administrator for SGM.

