Sea of Faith Network 2016 Conference

With or Without God:
Community in a Post-theistic Age

Friday 7 October to Sunday 9 October 2016

Silverstream Retreat and Conference Centre,
3 Reynolds Bach Drive
Silverstream, Upper Hutt

The Programme

FRIDAY 7 October

12:30 pm – 2:00 pm	Committee meets over lunch
2:00 pm – 2:45 pm	**Registration**. Tea and Coffee available
3:00 pm – 3:10 pm	**Conference Opening**
3:10 pm – 3.30 pm	**Conference Introduction:**
3:30 pm – 4:30 pm	**Keynote: Sir Lloyd Geering – What constitutes human community from family to global?**
4:30 pm – 5:30 pm	**Core Group Discussion**
5:30 pm – 6:00 pm	Happy (half) Hour
6:00 pm – 7:00 pm	DINNER
7:30 pm – 8:30 pm	A.G.M.

SATURDAY 8 October

7:00 am – 8.00 am	BREAKFAST - Cooked and Continental
8:30 am – 9:30 am	**Keynote: Prof. Michael Benedikt - Theopraxy**
9:30 am – 10:30 am	**Core Group**
10:30 am – 11:00 am	MORNING TEA
11:00 am – 12:00 pm	**Keynote: Rev Gretta Vosper – Building a world beyond beliefs that divide**
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm	**Core Group Discussion**
1:00 pm – 1:45pm	LUNCH
1:45 pm – 5:00 pm	**VISITS** or **WORKSHOPS** (See visits and activities section for details)
2:00 pm – 3:30 pm	**Workshop 1 (Scott Kearns)**
3:30 pm – 4:00 pm	Afternoon Tea
4:00 pm – 5:30 pm	**Workshop 2 (Tom Hall)**
5:30 pm – 6:30 pm	Happy Hour
6:30 pm – 7:30 pm	CONFERENCE DINNER
8:00 pm – 9:15 pm	**ENTERTAINMENT** – TBA

SUNDAY 9 October

7:00 am – 8.00 am	BREAKFAST - Cooked and Continental
8:30 am – 9:30 am	**Keynote: Dr Geoff Troughton – The Religious State we are in**
9:30 am – 10:30 am	**Core Group Discussion**
10:30 am – 11:00 am	MORNING TEA
11:00 am – 12:30 pm	**PANEL DISCUSSION**
12:30 pm – 1:00 pm	Conference Wind Up and Introduction to Conference 2017
1:00 pm	Packed LUNCH and DEPARTURE
1:30 pm	Steering Committee Meets

Note: copies of this program can be downloaded from sof.org.nz

The Papers and Guest Presenters

Conference Introduction & Keynote: Sir Lloyd Geering - What Constitutes Human Community from Family to Global

Keynote: Rev Gretta Vosper - Building a World Beyond Beliefs that Divide

Keynote: Prof. Michael Benedikt (recorded address) - Theopraxy

Keynote: Dr Geoff Troughton – The religious state we are in

Panel Discussion: Noel Cheer

All of the available Keynote Speakers are brought together into an on-stage discussion (including a Skype presence with Michael Benedikt) moderated by Noel Cheer. Provision will be made for the audience to ask questions.

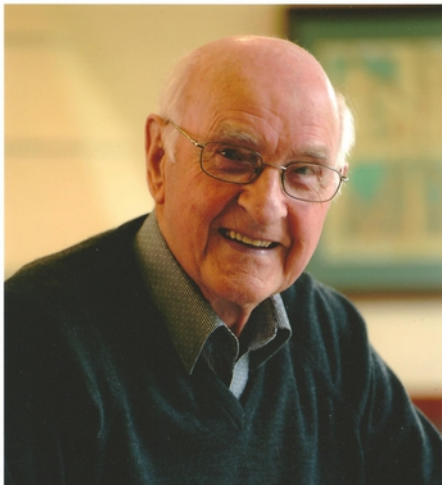
Workshops

Scott Kearns – Songs for everyone

Tom Hall – The Tao of Jesus: The Way of the Way

The Speakers and Panel Chairman

Sir Lloyd Geering – What Constitutes Human Community from Family to Global



Abstract: This paper will discuss how human community was first made possible by the creation of language and came to expression first in families, then tribes, then nations and is now in the process of becoming global. In the course of this evolution it will discuss the role of beliefs in the identity of a culture, giving particular attention to the concept of God and the teaching of Jesus about 'the Kingdom of God'. It will then argue that the Christian civilization, being shaped by these basic beliefs, was instrumental in giving birth to the modern, secular, world that acknowledges the products of scientific method to be the basis of the coming global culture.

Bio: Sir Lloyd Geering, a Life Member of The Sea of Faith Network (NZ) is New Zealand's best-known and most controversial commentator on theological issues.

Lloyd held Chairs of Old Testament Studies at theological colleges in Brisbane and Dunedin before being appointed as the foundation Professor of Religious Studies at Victoria University and is best remembered by many New Zealanders for the high-profile 1967 trial in which he faced charges of heresy for his controversial statements.

Since his retirement in 1984 he has continued to write and lecture widely throughout New Zealand, and has presented 10 Keynote addresses at Sea of Faith Conferences. He is theologian-in-residence for The St Andrew's on the Terrace and until recently Principal Lecturer for the St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society in Wellington and in this latter capacity he has presented more than 20 lectures series, which have been published as small books, and/or on audio media. He is the author of at least 10 books, including his autobiography, *Wrestling with God,* (2006)

He was awarded an Honorary DD by the University of Otago in 1976 and a CBE in 1988;

in 2001 he was named a Principal Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit and in 2007 he was admitted to the Order of New Zealand.

Professor Michael Benedikt – Theopraxy (video)

Abstract: Theopraxy means "the practice of God." The word follows from the thesis that God is the good we *do*—and *only* the good we do. My talk, drawn from my book *God Is the Good Do: Theology of Theopraxy*, will be divided into five parts. The first investigates the reasons that theology has for so long been connected to cosmogony (God as Creator). The second looks at the several things we mean by "existence," and then at how God might indeed exist. The third tries to throw fresh light on the age-old Problem of Evil, which is the atheist's easiest challenge to believers. (We will wonder: what about the Problem of Good for atheists?) The fourth will seek to understand what it means to seek God's guidance. Since some skeptics find theopraxy "too religious"—i.e., too tied to God-talk—and since some believers find it "not religious enough," claiming that theopraxy posits a God hardly worth worshiping, I conclude, fifthly, with a discussion of what it might mean to behold God's presence. To this end, I will also offer an exegesis of Exodus 33:18-23, then of a statement of the 12th Century Zen master Unmon, and finally of a saying of the 18th Century Hasidic sage known as the Baal Shem Tov (meaning "keeper of the Good Name").

Bio: Michael Benedikt is ACSA Distinguished Professor of Architecture at the University of Texas at Austin, where he also holds the Hal Box Chair in Urbanism. The son of two holocaust survivors, he was born in Adelaide, Australia, and was educated in South Africa and at Yale University. He teaches architectural theory and design studio, and directs the Center for American Architecture and Design. He practiced and consulted as an architect, with several buildings to his name. He has published over a hundred articles and chapters in books, and edited or written eight books on ethics, design, phenomenology, and perception, including his 2008 *God Is the Good We Do: Theology of Theopraxy*. He has lectured widely in the U.S. and abroad. His book-in-progress is called *Architecture Beyond Experience*.

Some of his writings are at **http://www.mbenedikt.com**, where there is also audio of *God Is the Good We Do* being read by the author (**http://www.mbenedikt.com/god-is-the-good-we-do-theol.html**). The book itself is available at **http://www.amazon.com/God-Good-We-Do-Theopraxy/dp/0979375401**.This URL links to a 2008 interview about theopraxy by Tom Spencer of KLRU in Austin: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zw9tScdg_0**

Reverend Gretta Vosper – Building a World Beyond Beliefs that Divide

Abstract: As we seek ways to develop a sustainable future for the world, those of us who have engaged in theological conversations and in the practical elements of faith have much to consider. Mainline denominations have played an important role in the struggle for control of the moral and social norms of western society. Shifting beliefs and the refusal of liberal institutions to unleash the post-theistic perspectives that have long languished in the halls of academia has led to a cataclysmic decline in these stabilizing institutions. Can we bear the cost of relinquishing the public square to religious fundamentalists and libertarian relativists and the potentially violent clashes their arguments may precipitate? Or do we still have something of value we can add?

Bio: Gretta Vosper has served West Hill United, a congregation of The United Church of Canada located in Scarborough, Ontario, for over nineteen years. With the leadership of the congregation, she has transitioned West Hill beyond dogma and created a theologically barrier-free community known around the world for its ground-breaking work. West Hill is featured in the documentary *Godless* and the upcoming film, *Losing My Religion*, by Zoot Media.
In an act of solidarity with secular Bangladeshi bloggers identified as atheists, arrested and threatened with execution, Gretta identified as an atheist in 2013. Recently, the United Church has initiated a review of Gretta's effectiveness as a minister based on her atheistic beliefs.

Gretta is the author of the national bestseller, *With or Without God: Why the Way We Live is More Important that What We Believe*, and *Amen: What Prayer Can Mean in a World Beyond Belief*, an exploration of prayer stripped of supernatural expectations. Additionally, she has published three collections of poetry and continues to write new lyrics to traditional hymns. She is working on a lectionary based worship resource for clergy seeking post-theistic resources. Non-exclusive inspirational liturgical and music resources prepared for use at West Hill - where those who hold traditional beliefs share the pews with others who don't - are used internationally.

Gretta founded the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity in 2004. She serves on the Board of The Oasis Network, a growing network of secular communities. In the past she has served as a Director and Officer of The Clergy Project, an international network for clergy who no longer believe. Gretta also serves as a Governor of Centennial College.

You can visit her at www.grettavosper.ca

Dr Geoff Troughton – The Religious State we are in

Abstract: New Zealand's religious landscape is rapidly changing. This talk will survey some of the key features of the current situation, drawing upon analysis of data from the national census as well as the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study. The talk will explore some patterns of belief and identification in contemporary New Zealand, including patterns of 'conversion' and 'de-conversion'. It will also consider issues arising from the strength or otherwise of New Zealanders' religious identification.

Bio: Geoff Troughton is a Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at Victoria University of Wellington where his teaching includes courses on religion and politics, religion in New Zealand and the Pacific, Christianity, and secularisation. His current research focuses on two particular areas: missionary peace activism in nineteenth century New Zealand (a project funded by a Marsden Grant of the Royal Society of New Zealand); and contemporary religious change, in connection with the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study. His main publications include *New Zealand Jesus* (2011) and *The Spirit of the Past* (2011). Victoria UP will publish *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand*, edited with Stuart Lange, in 2016. Two further volumes on Christianity and peace in New Zealand are forthcoming. See: http://www.victoria.ac.nz/sacr/about/staff/geoff-troughton.

Noel Cheer

Well known to all Sea of Faith members as the Newsletter Editor and to Conference participants as the Panel Chairperson, Noel has chaired the now traditional and celebrated Conference Closing Panels since 1997.

Early in his career Noel took an interest in public speaking which paved the way for his involvement in the spoken media. Since his retirement in 1997, Noel has hosted or chaired current affairs and political discussions on regional television in both Wellington and Auckland. Until late 2013 he hosted "In Conversation" on Auckland's Triangle Television where he recorded 289 episodes over 7 years. Noel has a wide general knowledge and an ongoing interest in the changes that take place in the expression of religion. His debating and television interviewing experience ensures that this panel will be both informative and highly entertaining.

Visits and Workshops

Saturday Afternoon Events

Excursions

1) Wellington Events (Shuttle cost $30 return)

- Te Papa (free)
- Museum of the City and Sea (free)
- War Memorial Museum Gallipoli exhibition ($15 entry)
- Tour of Parliament (free)
- City Art Gallery (free)
- Adam Gallery (free)
- Zealandia ($18.50 entry fee)
- Shopping in the Golden Mile
- Walk along the Wellington Waterfront

2) Visit to the Buddhist Monastery or walk the Labyrinth at Lower Hutt Hospital **(transport by private car) $10 (included Koha to the Monastery)**

Workshops (cost $10.00 each)

Scott Kearns – Songs for anyone

Abstract: Over a number of years, West Hill United Church in Toronto, Canada, moved slowly and deliberately to non-exclusive, non-theistic, values-based lyrics in all songs used in its gatherings. In this workshop, their music director Scott Kearns, will, after briefly sharing his personal journey from doctrinally-based evangelicalism to a values-based humanism, relate how West Hill has arrived at their commitment to use theologically barrier-free, natural language to inspire, challenge, comfort, delight, affirm, and encourage one another. He will share some written resources he has developed and invite you to sing some of his compositions as well as some familiar hymn tunes he and his partner gretta vosper have re-cast. Don't worry if you don't sing well; he doesn't either.

Bio: Scott is the director of music at West Hill United Church in Toronto, where he has helped develop resources for the values-based, non-exclusive, non-theistic language that reflects the community's commitment to move "beyond the beliefs that divide" in spoken word and song. In 2005, he compiled 28 pieces he wrote for community gatherings and is soon publishing 30 more of his songs, one of which was the theme song for the 2010 Common Dreams conference. Scott has a Master of Divinity in counseling, a Master of Social Work, and is completing his Ph.D. in the Humanities field of Religion, Culture, and Values. He is a registered social worker on the management team of a long term care facility where his work involves policy development, ethics consultation, team coaching, and individual counseling. He is married to Gretta Vosper.

Tom Hall – The Tao of Jesus: The Way of the Way

Abstract: As the ancient symbol "God" continues to wane in relevance, we might do well to recall that Jesus himself is said to have implied an option: if we cannot bring ourselves to profess love of God, we can instead love others as we do ourselves. Much the same message can be derived from the *Tao Te Ching*, in which the author urges many of the same actions and virtues that we find endorsed by the Jesus of the gospel accounts. This workshop will examine a number of passages from the ancient Chinese text in an attempt to discover parallels suggesting that Jesus and Lao Tse shared a vision of eternal truth that does not require the notion of a divine being.

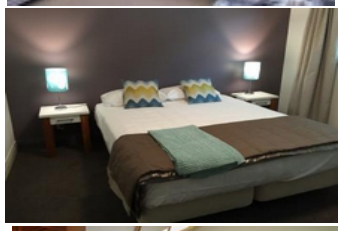
Bio: Tom is a former English teacher and lay pastor from the small, rural town of Foster, Rhode Island. Active since 1996 in the Westar Institute, home of the Jesus Seminar, he was recently made a life member. He has edited more than fifty books for Westar's affiliated Polebridge Press -- including eight for his most admired author, Lloyd Geering -- and is proud to be a member of the New Zealand Sea of Faith Network.

GREAT Accommodation at the Silverstream Retreat Centre

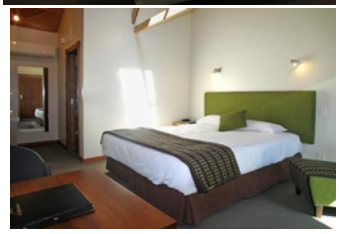
We have reserved some accommodation for you at the retreat if you wish to say in-house. This is **much higher quality** than we have experienced in the past.

Stonewall Lodge has a two kinds of accommodation – Fully serviced with change of towels and sheets etc each day and Studios with en-suite.

12 Twin rooms with shared toilet/shower facilities (all located on the ground floor) I have reserved all of these and all have twin beds so can be used as singles or twins. Cost per night is $61 f**or a single person** and $44 **per person** if shared



11 Studios **with en-suites** on the first floor. - $130 a night **per unit** per night. They are open-plan studio format with King size beds that can be split into two singles upon request. They include tea and coffee making facilities.



4 **Forrest Studios** in a separate block - $130 **per unit** per night. Open plan studio unit with kitchenette, separate shower and toilet facilities, 37" LCD TV, microwave, fridge and heat pump. King size bed can be split into two singles upon request.

5 **Riverview Apartments**

These large open plan two bedroom apartments have a king sized bed in the master bedroom (can be split into two singles), and two single beds in the loft bedroom upstairs. Open plan living area, and separate bathroom and shower facilities. French doors from the lounge open out onto a deck overlooking the Hutt River.. Cost $180 a night – $20 per additional Guest.

Travel Discount

The Steering Committee has been concerned at the large price differential between travel from the main centres to Wellington and travel from smaller centres. As a small contribution towards redressing this imbalance, it decided to give those travelling from centres other than Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch a **$50 discount per person** on the cost of Conference. To claim this on your registration form, subtract $50 from your subtotal.

Directions to the venue

Shuttle
We have organised a shuttle from the Airport but it will be making only three trips to the airport at a cost of $20 per person **(please pay the driver)** **Please let us know what times you planning on flying into Wellington** so we can arrange for the shuttle to be there. There may be some waiting times for others on different flights to arrive. A Sea of Faith members will be there with a sign so everyone can stay together. At this stage we are thinking of having a shuttle depart from the Airport at 10:30am, 12 noon and 1:30pm

We also need to know the **times of departure flights** so we can organise the shuttle for the return trips **(Again $20 per person and please pay the driver)**. We can let you know the departure times at the conference.

Directions to the venue if driving:
If coming **from the north**, over the **Rimutakas,** then follow the motorway until toy see a sign to turn off (left) to Silverstream. Goto RETREAT below

If coming from the North via **Manawatu** you can either come down past Porirua on the motorway, take the Hutt turnoff (left) at the bottom of the Ngauranga Gorge and follow it to the Silverstream turn off (well marked) to the right. Goto Retreat below.

If **coming from the South:** Get on the Motorway going North and keep an eye out for Hutt Valley signs and eventually Silverstream sign. Goto RETREAT below

Retreat
Just over the Silverstream bridge is a round-a-bout – take the second exit which has you heading to Stokes Valley. You go under the railway line and past a huge water tank on your left. The turnoff is just after the Tank and the retreat is well signposted and from there. There is **PLENTY of PARKING** in the centre itself and in front of and behind Stonewall Lodge

The Programme and the Registration Form are on the Website at: [sof.org.nz](sof.org.nz)