

SoF National Steering Committee: Chair's report 2016-17

It has been my privilege to chair the Sea of Faith National Steering Committee this year.

Some of the Steering Committee's earliest decisions were around this very conference: to change the timing from October to November to align with the seminar honouring Lloyd Geering, 'The Courage to Act'; thereby holding it outside school holidays and during the week; and to choose as our topic the 500th anniversary of the start of the Reformation. We were very pleased to find four excellent speakers whose approach to our theme would complement and enhance one other.

During the year we have put significant thought into our annual conference, beginning with a review of the 2016 conference. Although very successful, it was expensive in having Gretta Vosper and her husband travel from Canada, and Michael Benedikt talk to us for an hour, together with the 1½ hour panel discussion, from the USA. The conference committee of Noel Cheer, Norm Ely and Pete Cowley, undertook a major debrief of the conference, and this was assisted by Doug Sellman's analysis of the conference questionnaire which all attendees were invited to complete.

The same analysis will be carried out this year, from which we would hope to find out the reasons for our unexpectedly lower attendance at this conference. Is it because the conference is later in the year? or during the week? Maybe it is the venue? or the topic?

Looking to future conferences, and hearing from several Local Groups who feel unable to put on another conference themselves, we held a referendum regarding holding all or most future conferences here at Silverstream. The results were equivocal – people acknowledge the ease of organization in returning to the same venue, but really enjoy the hospitality of different groups around the country.

In the same mailing we ran a questionnaire looking at Sea of Faith NZ membership. We didn't get a strong response, but Doug Sellman has extracted some items of value and interest, and he will be reporting on these.

It is the National Steering Committee which holds the NZ Sea of Faith together across the country. New members this year include Daniel Phillips (Invercargill), Ian Crumpton (Christchurch), Lynne Tasker (Auckland), and Jan Calvert (Hamilton). Doug Sellman, also of Christchurch, rejoined the committee. Pete Cowley continued to be responsible for Membership reporting through the Treasurer, Norm Ely.

Every year the Steering Committee meets face-to-face twice, once at the close of the conference and once in January/February in Wellington. Apart from that we have met via Skype each month. We have not found this easy – to latch on to the call, to hear one another above the noise, and to identify who is talking. It requires commitment!

Despite my comment above, it is really the actions of the conference committee which hold NZ Sea of Faith together across the country. The ability to meet good friends each year and participate in strong and important discussions, is a real feature of the annual

conference of our small, national organization. The conference committee, Noel, Norm and Pete, undertake this work with remarkable good will, good humour, and a commitment to providing members with a valuable and memorable 48 hours. Those attending often find the final panel discussion, at the end of the conference, sends them away inspired and sated for another year.

Our newsletter and the SoF website also play their part in holding our far-flung organisation together. They are full of information, resources, and interest. Yet we cannot continue to depend on one person – the wonderful and inimitable Noel – to continue to provide these resources for ever, unaided.

In fact our conference organizing committee, and our conference itself, cannot continue forever unaided. It has become apparent to your Steering Committee that we may need to revamp our activities, to 'cut our coat according to our cloth'. Your new committee will have that in mind as they begin their work into the new year.

One change already under way is our Resource Centre. Suzi Thirlwall has this year stepped down from her role looking after the Resource Centre from 1993 to 2017. Books were much used in the first ten years, then CDs and now DVDs have almost entirely taken over. A selection of the books will appear at conference; I will be the resource person for DVDs.

In conclusion I'd like to thank all members of the Steering Committee: Lynne Tasker (Secretary), Norm Ely (Treasurer), Doug Sellman (Local Group Convenor), Noel Cheer (Website/Newsletter Editor, ex officio), Daniel Phillips, Ian Crumpton, Bruce Tasker, Jan Calvert, Adrian Skelton. They have all worked constructively and well for the benefit of Sea of Faith in New Zealand. I thank each one for their work and their support.

Thank you, too, to all those who have helped in the preparations for this conference, to those helping during the conference, and to all those who work within their Local Groups. We are all part of the grand vision of our founder, Lloyd Geering.

Gretchen Kivell
October 2017