

Memories and thoughts re the SOFNZ Resource Centre.

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The Resource Centre started in 1994 and is now being significantly reduced in size and transferred to Wellington. As the outgoing coordinator for the period of its existence up to now I welcome the opportunity to chat about my memories in this role.

The idea of a resource centre came up in 1993 at the first conference. Lloyd Geering and his ad hoc committee of friends at the front were in discussion with all the attendees about how to proceed and what we wanted. At some point I made the offer to host a possible centre of materials Lloyd would provide especially as there was a determined sense at that conference that this was to be a network encompassing all of New Zealand, a core value if you like. My not living in one of the main centres would fit well. I still had quite young children, the last one not yet at school and I was an at home mum so had time to devote to issuing items and space to store everything with room to grow. Lloyd wrote to me to confirm in September 1994 and the first materials arrived pretty soon after.

The feeling of enthusiasm for this new group cannot be over emphasised. Some of us indeed felt 'at sea' in the traditional Christian environment. In the eighties/ nineties there was a fundamentalist revivalist wave (when maybe the epithet 'Fundies' was coined). There were times when deviation from traditional religion tenets could be amusing- how do you respond when a friend asks "Are you saved?" - but also uncomfortable. The Sea of Faith felt like dry land and a place for safe exploration.

This was reflected in the thirst for materials from the centre and there were bursts of time when demand was almost frantic. Initially the centre consisted of a few books and cassette tapes which grew in number. I copied tapes on request (by snail mail in those days) and sent them out to members. Soon videos of the main conference speakers were added on a loan and return basis and the speakers' papers, which I photocopied at a set rate, were added for interested non conference attendees. Some of the St Andrews mini booklets by Lloyd were available on loan.

The centre was financially self supporting with members sending postage payment in stamps or cheque and occasionally money. There was a charge of around \$2 for tapes and about \$3 for the loan of a video the latter being a postal average to factor in the difference between the north and south island. This material grew in size as the years progressed.

Members had the option of sending their own cassettes or including the additional \$2 payment for each tape. Some weeks I was chasing into a retailer more than once to grab packs of cassettes, 90s and 60s. Copying on to the incorrect size meant having to do it twice! I had an expensive flash stereo bank, not unusual for that time, with Kif speakers (anyone remember?) and my double tape deck literally died in the service of all this copying. The easiest way was to fast copy, do a quick check and send them off. Once or twice provided tapes were old and wouldnt record which was inconvenient. Orders were rarely for just one tape; on occasion ten or more would be wanted.

One time someone living in the Mount-Papamoa area ordered about eight cassettes and sent the cost of them but said they would collect them from my house. By that time all my

children were in school, we lived in the centre of town and I was back doing relief teaching. I couldn't guarantee to be home so left the completed tapes in a bag out of sight in my wooden mail box with its hinged door. The tapes were picked up except, an agitated phone call told me a couple of days later, not by the agreed recipient. I wonder if someone got a surprise when these were played expecting perhaps fun music though more likely they were just copied over. It was a nuisance having to recopy and I absorbed the cost as sometimes members sent say a \$5 note in their letter saying they didn't need change when their cost was \$4. So it evened out over the long term.

With the video cassettes I used to suggest a time frame for return which was useful as groups gradually got into the routine of getting a video for their group meeting. I could usually shuffle requests around and everyone, without exception, was always very understanding about this when it was necessary. Sometimes members questioned the calibre of the recording and we did withdraw a few but for most of us these talks were so interesting we could muddle on.

Fast forwarding into the noughties the video cassette joined the dinosaurs and technology offered new options and the furore lessened as we as a group changed in subtle ways. Noel Cheer copied as many videos as were serviceable on to DVDs and a few ready recorded DVDs joined our collection. Later he did the same for cassette recordings to CDs but these have never been popular. We agreed in principle on a few discards and stopped photocopying the handouts as these were put on line and stopped loaning St Andrews Trust booklets. I agreed to discard some tattered and older selections from the book bank.

It has been very difficult to find new material for the centre. Our kind of liberal theology (if any) and kaleidoscope approach doesn't fit into any lucrative market category. The most borrowed and popular DVD ever has been 'Journey of the Universe' with the original Sea of Faith series a close second. When Lloyd donated the 'Living the Questions' series there was enough positive feedback for us to purchase the second edition – but there were individuals and/or a majority in some groups who felt the Progressive Christianity themes reflected in these recordings were too traditional in thinking. I did hear the phrase "Rubbish" from a member once. As someone who drifts into the pleasures of metaphor I found this startling. It shows how different we all are and yet SOFN has united us into a warm and interesting community of ideas and discussion.

Deeper into these post 2000 years demand has greatly fallen off from groups (some defunct where they once flourished) and individuals. Books or CDs are rarely borrowed. We have tried free delivery from the centre but without much success. Libraries have greatly improved in the range of material available and there is the internet and TED talks although groups still seem keen on DVDs if we have any. The Reaper Grim is on the prowl and some resource regulars are no longer here.

Going back through the works in our Resource bank to downsize it has felt emotional. Handling the books, smelling them. A blend of bliss and sadness. At one time I knew all the books and even whether they were in or out; likewise other materials. The final interactions with these old friends is a special memory.

It has been a pleasure to be the co-ordinator, and for so long; I appreciate and won't forget the community friendship, patience and enthusiasm of those to whom I have sent out our materials.