

Sea of Faith Network (NZ) Questionnaire

2007

Analysis of Qualitative Responses

INTRODUCTION

At the 2007 Conference at Kings' College in Auckland, those who attended were asked to complete a questionnaire which stated that "Your National Steering Committee thinks it is important at this time that we discover what you think about your Sea of Faith Network, so we can better plan for the future." Following Conference the questionnaire was also distributed to those in Local Groups who had not attended Conference. In all 238 questionnaires were returned.

The questionnaire included two types of questions; the first quantitative questions required answers along a given scale, and the second more qualitative, required open ended responses. The summary of responses to the first group were presented by Ralph Pannett at the 2008 Conference at Blenheim and at that time Ralph made suggestions for consideration by the Steering Committee about the future activities of the Network. This material appears on the Sea of Faith Web-site.

Since then I have reviewed of the second group of questions and categorized the responses with a view to giving us a summary of members subjective opinions on the subjects which had been introduced.

The aim of this analysis has been to explore at the range of opinion or ideas expressed, to acknowledge all responses, including diverse opinion, and recognise that often innovative ideas are found in minority responses.

The material presented is wide ranging though often repetitive as respondents views or concerns are reiterated in answering succeeding questions. This results from the way in the research was formulated – the intention was that respondents to questions would distinguish between local and national interests and concerns, or likes and dislikes. However often this did not occur and concerns such as membership numbers, or the age of members were reiterated.

Although at times I have indicated the numbers who have made a particular response, and as with the categories I have formulated, these can only be indicative of general ideas, as they are based on my interpretation of what individuals intended in what they wrote.

The opinions expressed are those of a Network made up of people of differing backgrounds and views from both ends of which ever spectrum of opinion is being considered. It is not my role in this analysis to express an opinion about the material but I would like to add that while one may be able to identify a majority opinion in some cases – it is this variety that gives the strength to the Network and the basis for the discussion in its "quest for meaning and fulfilment as a human activity" and the impulse to "provide encouragement, stimulation and support in fellowship with others engaged in the quest".

The material here is intended as a resource of ideas expressed about a range of characteristics of membership, the Network and its future, by Sea of Faith members themselves, which may be used as a basis for discussion about any of the subjects that have been introduced.

Natali Allen
April 2010

THE SUBJECTS EXPLORED ARE:

The Characteristics of the Membership of the Sea of Faith Network

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 1.6 | Do you call yourself a “spiritual person”? | 3 |
| 1.7 | Do you want to elaborate on the meaning of “faith for you | 9 |

The Sea of Faith Network

- | | | |
|-----|---|----|
| 2.6 | If the Sea of faith didn’t exist, where would you go, or what would you do to meet your needs ? | 13 |
| 3.2 | What changes would you like to see in the S of F website or Newsletter? | 18 |
| 3.3 | What other resources or functions of the Network would you most value ? | 20 |
| 3.5 | Do you have a suggestion for a new name for the Network ? | 22 |
| 3.6 | Should the S of F Network chart a direction for its future, or simply respond to changes in the wind? | 25 |
| 3.8 | What changes would most increase your satisfaction with S of F? | |

Local Groups

- | | | |
|-------|--|----|
| 5.1.1 | What is it about programme content you dislike most in your local group? | 35 |
| 5.1.2 | What would you like for your local group? | 38 |

National Conference

- | | | |
|-------|--|----|
| 5.2.1 | What is it about programme content you dislike most about what is offered, in general? | 41 |
| 5.2.2 | What would you like for future Conferences (include new topics) | 44 |

The Place of Ritual

- | | | |
|------|--|----|
| 5. 4 | Forms of ritual or liturgy from part of religious practice in all traditions. In Sea of Faith gatherings, do you see a place for new or experimental forms of ritual ? | 49 |
|------|--|----|

Publicity

- | | | |
|---------|---|----|
| 6.2.1-3 | What do you think is the most effective means of publicity for increasing membership? | 54 |
|---------|---|----|

An Appeal to a Younger Age Group

- | | | |
|-------|---|----|
| 6.2.4 | How might S of F appeal to a younger age group? | 57 |
|-------|---|----|

1.6

SPIRITUALITY

There were 128 generally enthusiastic responses to the questions

Do you call yourself a spiritual person ? If so, can you describe what you mean?

Apart from the small number of people who felt that the word was difficult to define, or had “been used so loosely as to now be meaningless”, respondents gave a range of criteria that they saw as either describing their spirituality, or positive characteristics of themselves as non-spiritual persons.

In summary; 46 people saw themselves as spiritual, 25 said they did not call themselves spiritual and 57, described positive characteristics of their being, but made no claim to being spiritual or otherwise.

Clearly there was a wide range of interpretations of the word spiritual and similar characteristics were described as spiritual or and non-spiritual by different people. For example where one person saw him/herself as spiritual because “I appreciate and am emotionally “moved” by beautiful music, scenery etc”, another clearly had a different definition of spirituality “No. I am a practical person, but still can be ‘moved’ by glorious music, scenery – nature and human friendship,” while a third was saw two possible interpretations – “Yes, if being affected by beauty in people, nature, music, art is spiritual; but no, as soon as that feeling supposes implies or pretends a supernatural influence or origin”

Because this ambiguity was apparent throughout the responses to the question, I have decided to assume an all inclusive ‘spiritual as a characteristics of all human beings’ and present the analysis as a picture of the members of Sea of Faith Network as they themselves described. Given that people gave more than one descriptor of themselves and/or different definitions of spiritual e.g

a) having a world view or b) having a set of ethics, or c) having a sense of being part of a whole, they may have been included in one or more groups, and groups are certainly not mutually exclusive. In all cases numbers are approximate.

The Sea of Faith Members described three factors as the basis for their personal descriptions. These I classed as:

1. Personal Characteristics and Experiences.
2. Relationships.
3. The Inexplicable.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND EXPERIENCES

Personal characteristics or experiences, spiritual or otherwise, by which individuals classified themselves as spiritual included

1. Spirituality as one dimension, of individual humanity (18) (UNITY)
2. Awareness of themselves, their place, or connections (9)
3. Appreciation of beauty, or in awe of life and its experiences (20)
4. Claiming purpose and meaning, or values, as a definitive characteristic in their lives (18)
5. Having social concern (5)

SPIRITUALITY AS A DIMENSION OF HUMANITY

Those who described spirituality as defining, or one dimension of their humanity did so in terms of:

- My concept of spirituality is all that touches/involves includes the depths of reality of what it means to be fully human.
- It is not for me some sort of separate type of feeling. I accept unity of body, mind and emotional life-all interrelated and informed by our perception of the world.
- Can't really describe – just that I always felt I had a spiritual dimension, as well as physical and mental intellectual.
- I want to be a whole person, fully integrated, which for me includes a spiritual side.
- Yes it permeates through me – has done all my life. The changes to beliefs makes little difference to my “spirituality”.
- Yes in a broad sense I place a great value on imagination and creativity as well as intellectual and rational approaches to understanding.
- Yes, I need to look after my spiritual component as much if not more than my physical component. (A seed of the divine for which the physical is a “barc” while alive).
- Yes, Spiritual values can not be compromised. I get physically sick when I do. I make an effort to stay in full health.
- No, but I do recognize a spiritual dimension through which greater levels of contentment, well being and happiness can be found.
- Yes I see life as more than materialistic/ I am more than just a body I have a spirit.
- The spiritual dimension of life is the bedrock of my life/ the very essence of being human. (3)

SPIRITUALITY AS AWARENESS

There was a smaller group who saw awareness as defining of themselves. This awareness included awareness of themselves, their responsibility, place or connectedness.

- Yes, a spiritual person is aware of the spirit of life which she has been gifted with, and is aware that she is able to make choices which influence her life and the lives of those her life touches.
- An engineer used to thinking logically, I believe that that everything we experience originates within ourselves and there is no need to create an other “out there”.
- Only in the sense of Tillich’s “ground of our Being” in that this life is as good as it gets.
- Yes in part at least. I mean that self-awareness, purpose, a sense that life has meaning, and everything else that distinguishes humans from other animals are all important for being fully alive.
- I don't much like the word, but to be understood I must say - Yes. By this I do not mean “Strong on the supernatural or ecclesiastic devotions” but rather “Strong on self awareness, meaning, connections beyond myself.
- Yes I live with the experience of “otherness” inside and around me – notion of connectedness in all that there is.
- Being aware of a dimension greater than myself.
- Yes without any connection to church or religion, its my inner feelings of love, contentment with how I view life and everything in it in a very positive way. To a degree – in the CS Lewis “Surprised by Joy” sense.

SPIRITUALITY AS APPRECIATION

Those who saw themselves as appreciative, or in awe of life and its experiences, in a variety of many forms expressed this as:

- Yes I guess I feel very in touch with nature and so aware of the “gifts” that come to us each day through no effort of our own. Beauty – the majesty of mountains, the sea, whether a sunny calm day or a wild stormy one; the love of, for and from others.

- Yes, but defining spiritual is realizing the awesomeness of life and its great mystery. Awe, wonder are significant in my life.
- Yes In awe of being alive, nature, the planet and part of the universe. Attend church to give thanks with ritual important to celebrate significant events.
- In a unique way to fully experience the wonder of the indefinable quality and value of the relationship of all things, personal and the universe.
- I am connected by every breath I breathe , to the universe which I regard with awe and wonder.
- Only in the entirely secular sense of meaning a thoughtful love of life.
- Yes in a broad sense I place a great value on imagination and creativity as well as intellectual and rational approaches to understanding. Awe, wonder are a significant in my life.
- Yes aware of atmosphere in different places (sometimes awe, sometimes fear) Nature is very close . beauty and peace empathy with people(sense what feelings are in the air).
- Yes without any connection to church or religion, its my inner feelings of love contentment with how I view life and everything in it in a very positive way.
- Yes a spiritual person is one with the ability to stand in awe and wonder, to experience the sacred, and to co –exist in a compassionate relationship with all things without recourse to religious dogma.
- Actions given and received by me that affect my emotions and my deeper feelings about who I am and where I stand.
- I believe in an “inner quality” – gives rise to emotions – love, hate.
- I appreciate and am emotionally “moved” by books/ beautiful music, scenery etc.

SPIRITUALITY AS HAVING MEANING, VALUES OR PURPOSE

Those who saw purpose and meaning or values as a definitive characteristic in their lives made comments such as:

- Yes I think deeply, very interested in meaning and purpose of life.
- Yes I am concerned with the “Big Questions” with how I make my life meaningful, about how I should live my life.
- I find this a very difficult word to define – but I do attach great importance to the non-material values of life.
- My convictions and values, define my spirituality.
- A spiritual person spends time thinking about unseen things e.g. values, images, how we influence our grandchildren.
- Yes - as a Buddhist I guess the path I am on is a spiritual one, but this does not refer to any supernatural spirit.
- An active cultivator of compassion, respect and awe in response to our habitat and all its species.
- Life experience, just as spiritual religious traditions are important to me, help the give meaning and purpose to existence.
- Religious rather than spiritual in that I hope my focus is “ultimate concern”
- We are more than just “stuff” We long for more /for meaning and transcendence.
- It is a dimension of being human that seeks to find meaning and purpose of my own life, and other living beings (people with other creatures).

SPIRITUALITY AS SOCIAL CONCERN

Those who emphasised social concern wrote:

- I have no faith in the traditional understanding – more reaching out and interacting in the community.
- Yes, I do consider myself to have spiritual concerns. This is not easy for me to describe, but I suspect it has something to do with social concerns.
- My place in a society that has values such as concern for each other/ How we influence our grandchildren.
- An inner need to help make a difference in our community.

RELATIONSHIPS

In this group people described a variety of relationships which they saw as “spiritual” or otherwise defining of themselves. These important relationships included those with

With Other People and the World of Nature (14)

Within Life on the Planet or in the Universe (14)

With God, A Divine or Universal Spirit (15)

IN RELATION TO OTHER PEOPLE AND THE WORLD OF NATURE

Respondents here indicated that the relationships they had with, and the way they acted towards others and nature around them was defining for them:

- I try to live by the golden rule “ do unto others, what you would like them to do to you.
- Not in any other-worldly way, but I try to put humanity before myself.
- Yes to some degree. I am very interested in sharing with others the deeper dimensions to life that involve, feeling, emotions, intellect, spirit, life purpose etc.
- Yes, a person who has empathy with people and all living things.
- Yes, I think deeply, very concerned about our relationship to each other and the world we live in.
- Yes the human mind has the capacity to soar and reach beyond the material world to touch one another and the rest of creation.
- Living life fully and generously.
- I think of myself with a strong spiritual emphasis i.e. the intuitive imaginative creative transcendental aspects of my humanity in relation to others.
- Reflective, consider life force in people, loving, rejoicing amongst people.
- Believe bond between all peoples and it is love, respect, value – this to me is spiritual.
- A spiritual person is one with the ability to co –exist in a compassionate relationship with all things without recourse to religious dogma.
- As a spiritual person I look for the truth and beauty in other people and the world of nature.
- Yes without any connection to church or religion, its my inner feelings of love contentment with how I view life and everything in it in a very positive way.

IN RELATION TO, OR WITHIN LIFE ON THE PLANET OR IN THE UNIVERSE

People who saw themselves in primarily in relation to the universe as a whole emphasised their connections with, and place within it. Their statements included:

- I am awareness of a place in the universe, in the world in history – not in a religious sense.
- Yes a feeling that I am part of creation.
- I am connected by every breath I breathe , to the universe which I regard with awe and wonder.

- Yes, being at one with my environment, especially the natural world – hence with the divine.
- No, except in so far as I like to think, read, to discuss, speculate about matters relating to the nature of intelligent life- for it should be lived – how it should be lived – if there is an underlying meaningful pattern in the universe.
- Appreciative of nature and the other Yes I live with the experience of “otherness” inside and around me – notion of connectedness in all that there is.
- A growing awareness of the contingency of everything.
- Yes to some extent on a philosophical level, not a religious or faith based experience level - my spirituality encompasses nature, the environment in its widest sense.
- In a unique way to fully experience the wonder of the indefinable quality and value of the relationship of all things, personal and the universe.

IN RELATION TO GOD, A DIVINE OR UNIVERSAL SPIRIT/ENERGY

There were a variety of words used to describe the mystery, origin or spirit power which the respondents in the group acknowledged. They wrote:

- I am aware of the fundamental mystery of our existence and for me the word “God” still stands for the best and most important of our human values.
- I believe there is a higher power and I am comfortable in calling this power God.
- Yes, I follow the precepts of my Christianity and listen to God’s guidance.
- Yes in that I believe in a greater force, God or whatever you might call it.
- Yes I believe in “God” – a continuing life experience.
- I have spiritual encounters with God and experience glimpses of the Almighty. I have been filled with the Holy Spirit in the past.
- Yes rather than no. I don’t think that you can contain ‘God’ in a single personage yet there has to be an origin to the scheme of things – to the wonder and order of all things natural.
- I do not believe in a “God out there” but I do believe that there is a force guiding my life that is entirely loving, creative and nurturing – an inner voice that is worth listening to when in doubt.
- Seeking to relate a religious view of life to both my inward self or spirit to the divine or universal spirit.
- Believe in a supreme being.
- There exists and we can aspire to a higher forum of being, a unifying state, beyond the bounds of common rational thought.
- Yes I think Marcus Borg’s definition “being conscious and intentional about our relationship with the “more” (the “more” is from William James). The latter phrase could be replaced “by what we do with the desire (or longing or ache)at the centre of our being” (This comes from Anthony Nobbs workshop at Conference)
- More to life than materialism (2)– a mystery beyond our understanding – I stand before it in awe and wonder.
- Yes being intuitively aware of something bigger than I am, that is in me and through me and of which I am a part. I cannot intellectually explain it.
- Because I pursue contact with what is beyond in a secular (but not secularist) way. It has to do with human spirit, that “essential intangible invisible immeasurable reality we need to live fully human lives” and help us to feel we belong to something larger than ourselves I’d say transcendence but some may misunderstand that.
- Yes The cosmic “energy” of the universe flows through (overfuses) all living creatures. This cosmic energy in the form of positive human values I try to cultivate and express.

SPIRITUALITY: THE INEXPLICABLE

There were several people who described their understanding in terms of something unknown or inexplicable

- Yes, I believe that being human includes accepting that there is “something” about reality that cannot be explained rationally.
- I believe there is a spiritual aspect to life - that which is linked to the unknown or the unknowable.
- Yes – an awareness of there being “more” than the mere physical world.
- Yes I believe there are a lot of “unknowns”
- No, but, I do believe there is another dimension out there which scientists have yet to pin down and give a name.
- Yes, I am interested in more than the material, non conscious elements of life.
- Yes, Always been interested/drawn to the ultimate yet unseen dimension of life.
- Spiritual to the extent that I think life has meaning beyond understanding and the quest for some understanding is in the spiritual realm.

1.7

FAITH

The Question

What does the word “faith” (e.g. as in our name) signify for you? to which respondents were asked to classify themselves along a 1-5 continuum on which 1 represented trust/life attitude and 5 represented belief/commitment.¹ Was followed by

Do you want to elaborate on the meaning of ‘faith’ for you?

Ninety seven (40% of total respondents) people responded to this invitation, and introduced a wide range of ideas as to what the word “faith” conveyed for them.

Responses suggested that amongst Sea of Faith members there are some who do not wish to use the word and a greater number for whom the word has some significance.

THOSE WHO DO NOT WISH TO USE THE WORD

Approximately 10% percent of those who elaborated, stated that for them the word was difficult, ambiguous or meaningless. This group made comments such as:

- The word faith is meaningless and needs to be defined.
- A humpty dumpty word – not useful.
- The word today is so ambiguous that it is a liability.
- In the title of the Sea of Faith it has religious overtones that are not desirable.
- Difficult for me to elaborate on “faith” on a personal level because I don’t really comprehend it, for me it is more intellectual/rational /philosophical than a belief to commit myself to

And/or gave reasons as to why they do not use the word:

- It should mean “trust” but the problem with the word is that to most people it means “belief” – acceptance of propositions about religious matters.
- In so many of the context it is used it seems to me to mean “believe or else” even if your rational mind can’t swallow it.
- Faith is the word used for prejudices we want to retain or other thoughts and actions we don’t want to take intellectual responsibility for.

THOSE FOR WHOM THE WORD FAITH HAS SOME SIGNIFICANCE

Those who defined or explained the word fell into three main groups: There were those who:

1. Described a relationship between faith and belief, or proof.
2. Defined faith as trust, and introduced the object of their trust as life, self, others or “Other” or
3. Accepted faith as directive of a way of life.

FAITH AS RELATED TO BELIEF OR PROOF

While some people (7) defined faith as belief, or identified a relationship between faith and proof (11) what was to be believed or proven varied. For example:

- It is also a future hope of an eternity with God. To me it means “of the faith” i.e. adherence to a religious belief, a follower of a belief system
- Faith is a belief in what is known and realistically possible.
- I associate faith with the phrase “leap of faith” something one has to accept without proof, often against our knowledge of processes of nature and society.

¹ Just over 40% of the respondents classified themselves as 1 with the remaining 60% in decreasing numbers in groups 2-5.

- The capacity to accept an idea that we feel is right but cannot be proven in scientific terms. In the Sea of Faith I am stimulated by the ideas and discussions which challenge "Faith"
- Hoping that most of what I take to be reliable information is correct.
- When one has not enough facts, information or truth and one has to rely on what comes from the mind or sub conscious. I have no faith in the traditional understanding.
- Certain knowledge of Absolute truth. For me this is in flashes rather than constant, but if I pause a while it is my constant.
- My hope is that someday we will put our faith in facts and make evolutionary leaps to a sound system of belief i.e. religion. A philosophy that uses the claim to gain wisdom from knowledge

FAITH AS TRUST

By far the greatest number of respondents (41) allied faith to trust, hope or confidence, and agreed with the idea which was introduced that year in discussion at Conference. While some made general statements:

- Faith is about trust. If I have faith in something or someone, I trust them.
- Like Abraham going out not knowing what will happen but trusting.
- Faith involves the attitude of trust, but it also implies some commitment of belief that life has some depth and spiritual challenge for our lives

The majority introduced the object of their trust. Again the objects of that trust varied and included Life, Truth, Aspects of Self, Other People or an "Other".

In more detail:

Trust in Life - either personal or universal

The largest group of respondents stated that they put their trust (or confidence) in "life" or the value of life (13)

- Faith is affirming and trusting life in spite of the worst it throws at you.
- The optimistic trust that life is worthwhile - is to be lived to the full and enjoyed.
- Intuitive confidence in the "Universe" in humanity nature and life.
- Faith in life – faith in the goodness, and in the fragility of humanity.
- Faith denotes for me a positive trusting attitude – once I would have said "in God" now I would say "towards life and its possibilities"
- Faith to me is believing in the fact that life is mysterious but still there does seem to be a point to it no matter how occluded.
- Faith for me is the understanding of being and belonging to this world and trusting in the process of life beyond.

Trust in Truth

- I am not comfortable with the word faith but I suppose I do have faith in the truth (if there is such a thing) coming to the fore eventually
- I trust truth/fidelity

Trust in Oneself

Others referred to personal characteristics, values or action as a basis of faith and wrote

- Faith is equal to fidelity – for me I have faith in myself – my own integrity morals etc (2)
- A confidence that my deepest feelings about who I am and where I stand are real and have meaning and value for me.
- Trust that accepting responsibility for my life and action is moral and meaningful.

- A probably unrealistic belief that things will turn out “for the best” in the end. An attitude of hope for me and for the world.
- Faith is not so much a firm belief in a set of parameters as it is a learning towards a personal assessment of things spiritual and beyond concrete definition.

Trust in Community or an “Other/God”

Trust or faith was also placed in other people, the world or the universe as a whole:

- Faith has a strong element of trust, loyalty and commitment to others.
- A total response of trust towards the world in general, towards people and towards the future.
- Faith for me means that I am not alone in the universe, that the universe has meaning, and that I as well as the community of others who share that universe are part of that meaning, even if we don’t understand it fully.
- Confidence that there is “other” and that it is good.
- Faith/trust in God, given as a gift, responded to, growing deeper fuller over years.
- A trust in that “other” in my life (I don’t name it God) as I’ve aged I’ve pondered that much comes from “within” and I’ve been committed to Jesus journey since my late teens always pursuing justice and peace

FAITH OR TRUST AS DIRECTIVE OF A WAY OF LIFE

For many (18) the word “faith” signified a commitment to, or a particular way of life or values.

For these people faith meant:

- Values or beliefs from which one’s actions and ethics are derived.
- Faith is choosing to “be” and to act a life in a certain way not dependent on a certainty of outcome..
- A world view in which the individual relates in a caring way to other living creatures in the environment.
- To try to keep an optimistic life attitude and help others when I can. I keep an open mind and do not have blind ‘faith’ in any teaching.
- That by attitude and example my life can be useful towards making our world a better place for those (our grandchildren) to inherit.
- Faith as an essential life/ attitude/ commitment to essential moral standards/ customs/ traditions/legal systems/memberships (4)
- Trust that loving kindness and compassion, working for justice, honest endeavor and truth seeking are always worthwhile whether they achieve their out ward goals or not. They need no other justification.
- A trust and commitment to the ultimate goodness of human beings as in the example of Jesus Christ, as the ultimate model for our lives.
- Faith is confidently living life in the belief that it is good, accepting fulfilling to the belief that we all contribute to a harmonious society of mutual support and participation.
- Faith is the acceptance of a way of life as being the best for giving life meaning. I have chosen Jesus teaching, I can envisage in a different time/setting if I had been alive choosing Zaratustra or Buddha. It is about the best good wisdom of the age
- Faith - closely linked to hope – living as closely as I can to the values I have committed to, these have come to me through the Christian tradition.
- Unthinking obedience
- Faith denotes a reaching out for the highest aspirations possible for us to reach.

And in this group I have included three who allied faith with courage

- For me faith is virtually a synonym for “courage” – the courage to explore what has been to easily assumed or accepted
- I have Tillich’s articulation of faith as courage to be, We all have some convictions or values we do not acquiesce in reality as it is, but have a conviction of what ought to be.

2.6

ALTERNATIVES TO THE SEA OF FAITH

155 people responded to the question

If Sea of Faith (NZ) didn't exist, where would you go, or what would you do, to meet your needs?

In responding, some felt that there was no alternative to the Sea of Faith. However, most gave more than one alternative when considering what they would do if the Sea of Faith did not exist, and recognized that the community in which they lived offered a variety of, though some considered limited, alternatives. For example one person wrote:

“Because I live in Auckland I can choose to – be part of a liberal ‘progressive church community, attend lectures etc at U3A, Continuing Education Auckland University etc”,

At the same time 30 people believed that they had no, or limited alternatives.

I have classified the answers in two major groups

1. Those who saw no alternative to the Sea of Faith and/or would choose to “go it alone” or form a new group.
2. Those who were able to suggest alternative groups or activities.

WHERE THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE TO THE SEA OF FAITH

Those who felt there was no alternative to the Sea of Faith, fell into three groups

1. Those who accepted that there was no other alternative.
2. Those who felt they would “go it alone”
3. Those who hoped to form a new group.

ACCEPT THAT THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE

There were 21 people who believed that they had no alternative to the SOF . They commented in terms such as:

- I don't know, I am really grateful that the SOF exists
- SOF is an extra that would not be replaced.
- It would be a problem –I would have much more difficulty meeting my needs.
- At present I know of no group offering free open and intelligent discussion and explanation of life's meaning and purpose.
- I really have no idea - SOF is my support and stimulation I would be the poorer spiritually without it.
- I don't know , I haven't come across another group that offers similar interest, tolerance etc.
- There doesn't seem to be anywhere else. It took me (Buddhist) years to find SOF and I am perfectly happy. Long may it last.

“GO IT ALONE”

A smaller group suggested that they would “go it alone” with some acknowledging that while the SOF was helpful to them, they were able to continue their study or practice independently:

- Keep searching for meaning and purpose.
- Be the only pebble on the beach except with friends of long standing who have travelled the road.
- The same as I do now, helping people when I can, and educating myself. I certainly don't need church or religion.
- My needs change. The needs of today are the same but different. We need to recognize our spiritual perspectives in a more open general sense.

- Sea of Faith supplements, personal study and reflection. I am not reliant in SOF. It's a nice extra.
- Meditation/Reflection. (2)

FORM A NEW GROUP

A further, significant group (15) of respondents who felt that their needs would more likely be met by a new group which they themselves would set up, though some recognized that this may not be easy.

- I would have to find a small group that met to talk about things that matter, very much as SOF does.
- Try to establish a group that incorporates SOF aims and objects.
- I would want some connection with similar open-minded people maybe try to find other like minded people – this would be hard to do.
- I would join (or form) a sympathetic house group to explore faith ideas/practice with others.
- Look for like minded people to meet with me – set up new opportunities for exchange of ideas and experience.
- Seek a similar body of like minds, openness, intellect stimulation mind expanding topics.
- I would find or create something like a house group where we could talk and explore with no holes barred.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES OR GROUPS

Interestingly, the majority of those who saw that there could be an alternative to the Sea of Faith for them, suggested participation in education of some kind, though this was not necessarily oriented to religion or philosophy.

They gave alternatives in two major areas:

1. Activities They Would Undertake as Individuals.
2. Participation within Churches and Other Groups, which included:
 - Churches
 - The Ephesus Group
 - Groups Oriented to the Study of Religion/Philosophy
 - Other Community Groups

ACTIVITIES TO BE UNDERTAKEN AS INDIVIDUALS

There were three areas of activity that individuals would undertake or initiate. They were

1. Reading and Research
2. Communicating with Others
3. Using Media/Internet Resources

Reading and Research

By far the largest number of responses (43) referred to reading - including personal research, either as the only alternative they saw or in combination with other activities. Many of these indicated interest in particular areas, as follows:

- Continue to meet others who are exploring exchange books.
- Continue to read and explore as widely as possible as an individual.
- Continue to read or search for ideas to make the world as good as possible to pass onto our descendents.
- Read the works of modern scholars whose ideas don't filter down from the pulpit or find some small groups.

- I would read literature that would help me develop my interest in how the Cosmos works and what made sense of an ever changing world.
Of particular interest were books written by Lloyd Geering, Don Cupitt, Robert Funk, Richard Holloway, John Spong; material from the Jesus Seminar, or that “tackles the right”

Communicating with Others

“Others” were predominately “like-minded” friends/family (some yet to be found) and 28 people saw this as an alternative – though not always as a complete alternative to the SOF. They wrote comments such as:

- Maybe go with, or try to find other like minded people – this would be hard to do.
- Would want some connection with similar open-minded people.
- Discussion with some friend concerned with “spiritual Issues”.
- Talk to acquaintances who had similar questions.
- Life Coach.

Using Media Resources

In this group there were those who would use

- The Internet (6) – one of whom stated that he/she belonged to the UK SOF and another who would use the site.
- The Radio (3) – specifically National Radio 9am-12pm 1-5pm Sat and Sun morning, and
- Appropriate Television Programmes, DVD’s or CD’s (4)

PARTICIPATION WITHIN CHURCHES AND OTHER GROUPS

Responses to this question indicated that current members of the SOF had a wide range of interests and saw the Network as meeting a wide range of needs. These ranged from academic study, through both intellectual and experiential religious and philosophical interests, to those who would replace their SOF membership with membership of apparently more social or service oriented groups.

There were six main areas which respondents saw as offering them alternatives to the SOF. They were

1. Churches
2. The Ephesus Group
3. Groups Oriented to the Study of Religion/Philosophy
4. Further Education
5. Other Community Groups or Activities

Churches

Just over 20 people stated that if the SOF ceased to exist they would rejoin, continue with, or look for a particular type of church community. However, while some found their current church membership positive, not all were certain that a church would meet their needs, and some felt that they would need to limit participation or seek to influence within the church.

- Try and find a similar forum within my church
- Back to church in an endeavour to improve attitudes opinions and systems with it.
- I would continue to explore with the church.
- Stay with the church – with reservations.
- Encourage more discussion groups in my own church.
- I am happy to attend. I don’t need to “belong”.

- From time to time to more liberal church, to courses, events of a ‘spiritual nature’.
- Go to church meetings where people like John Spong speak.
- Maybe listen on line or attend St Mathews in the City in Auckland.
- Go to St Andrew’s Wellington lectures.
- But Would probably be unhappy in a church/ Do not find it satisfying.

Respondents who did so, specified the following church groups or activities, to which they belonged or would seek to attend:

- Unitarian 4
- Quakers 3
- Libertarian 3
- Catholic 1
- Christian meditation group
- Events in a Presbyterian church
- While one person suggested attending summer school run by the Presbyterian parish in Wanaka each summer

The Ephesus Group

This was seen as distinct from, and offering an alternative to the SOF. Nine people stated that they already belonged or would join one of these groups.

- Before I knew of the SOF I had joined Ephesus group. The latter meets my needs.
- I find the Ephesus group in Wellington much more useful for what I believe to be important, - especially in expressing same.

Groups Oriented to the Study of Religion/Philosophy/Psychology

In the event of not being able to attend the SOF, respondents would continue with groups to which they belonged or seek a new group which had interests similar to the SOF or of particular interest to the Sea of Faith.

Amongst these were

- Humanist Groups 3
- SOF (UK) 1
- Interfaith Groups 3
- Progressive Christianity 1
- Philosophical Society 1
- Rationalist Group 2
- Skeptics Society 1
- U3A Philosophy Group 2
- Jung Study Group 3

(We were part of a group studying psychology along the concepts of Carl Jung for many years – very valuable in understanding ourselves (warts and all) as much as people generally respecting the differences)

- Gestalt or psychodrama course or group (2)
- Spirit Awareness Group 1
- Women’s Spirituality Group 1
- Independent Study Group 1

(The independent group I belong to has met most of my needs for 15 years but SOF offers a wider encounter which I would miss)

Further Education

Six people saw university education, and a further eleven noted that U3a was able to opportunity to further their interest in religion or other subjects. The latter group were particularly attracted by the fact that "U3A would provide a group where similar discussion/ debate can occur"

Community Groups and Activities

Groups here included Unspecified Community Groups (7), Probus (1) Rotary (1) and more specifically activities such as:

- Musical events with friends i.e. the theatre, NZSO. Groups such as Aero club yacht club. Would really miss the opportunities to discuss ideas though.
- Continue with a long list of hobbies outdoor pursuits cultural activities /theatre/ opera/ ballet/ photography tramping/ travel.

3.2 WEB SITE AND NEWSLETTER - CHANGE

Here the question was ***What changes would you like to see in the S of F website or Newsletter?***

Not all respondents distinguished between Newsletter and website when responding to this question, though a high level of satisfaction with the newsletter in particular was conveyed. I have not therefore been able to identify comments about newsletter or website unless respondents have specified this. Three people stated that they did not use the web site, but may in future.

Respondents fell into two groups

1. Those who expressed general satisfaction with the Newsletter and the web-site
2. Those who offered suggestions for change

EXPRESSING SATISFACTION

There was a high level of satisfaction with the newsletter and the web-site 34 of the 77 who responded to this question commented on the newsletter/ web site in positive terms, or sought "more of the same"

GENERALLY SATISFIED

Several people expressed their satisfaction with the newsletter and web site, and/or offered support for them Comments included:

- I just welcome the Newsletter arriving in my mailbox – the result of others' work and ideas.
- Well done. First class. Now excellent. Keep expanding.
- Keep up challenging articles.
- No suggestions. Newsletter is informative and giving differing views which I like to read.
- The Newsletter is stimulating and helps create a network.

SEEKING MORE OF THE SAME

Support for the current direction of the newsletter and the web–site was reiterated in the fact that the largest group (22) of those who had suggestions about what they would like to see wished for more of the same. In particular the "same" was summarized by several as "more contributions from members" (8) More specifically others asked for an increase in Book Reviews (7) and Letters to the Editor (6)

MAKING SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

Those who had ideas about what they would like to see in the newsletter and the web-site fell into four main groups. Those who would like:

1. Ongoing Reiteration of the Purpose of the Sea of Faith.
2. Greater Opportunity for Communication amongst Members and Groups.
3. An Increase in Material from a Wide Range of Sources.
4. Particular Areas or Topics of Discussion.

ONGOING REITERATION OF THE PURPOSE OF THE SEA OF FAITH

Three people saw the newsletter and the web site as means to keeping members in touch with the purpose of the Sea of Faith and suggested that they include:

- An over view of what SOF is.

- The relevant verse of Arnold's poem printed in every edition as it used to be. It explains our title.
- Perhaps (an account of) the SOF (New Zealand) rationale by Lloyd or Noel.

GREATER OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMUNICATION AMONGST MEMBERS AND GROUPS

Ten people saw the newsletter and website as a means to increase communication and discussion between members and groups.

A general wish, particularly from members of smaller rural groups was an opportunity to contact others and they wrote comments such as:

- To receive feedback from local groups about activities.
- I would like the newsletter and web-site to act as a link between members and groups.
- You might consider a chat room format for the web site.

A further opportunity was seen in the newsletter and website providing information that would enable greater access to resources etc

- I would like notice of major relevant, regional activities e.g. St Andrew's lectures, Auckland group workshops etc which others could attend.
- To receive feedback from local groups for interest, and to offer attendance at events by members of smaller groups within the region.
- A list of people willing to travel out of Auckland to speak on suitable topics would be helpful.

AN INCREASE IN MATERIAL FROM A WIDE RANGE OF SOURCES

Here again members wished for more information and/or a wider contact. They recognized specific groups with similar purpose which could provide material of interest to them and noted that they would like:

- News of what SOF, Snow star, Sofia are/may be up to.
- Additional articles contributed both locally (NZ) and perhaps with permission from SOF (UK), the Fourth R, Jesus Seminar etc.
- Comments from global thinkers, writers and researchers and more news of relevant happenings here and overseas.
- More commissioned articles of the sort of weight and substance of Conference papers.
- Some input from selected people outside the SOF.
- An upgraded web-site to link with other sites.

PARTICULAR AREAS OR TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Then some respondents introduced specific topics or areas for discussion particularly examination of any controversy about:

- Cross cultural/religious/ecumenical material – discussion of latest theologies and book releases.
- More picking up and responding to issues and questions raised rather than stand alone items.
- More “building blocks” for spirituality and intellectual analysis.
- Serious attempt to engage with Cupitt's and Geering's ideas – even genuine critique – of which there's little.
- Perhaps some articles on secular issues which have moral implications such as, stem cell research, cloning, legislation of prostitution.
- Biblical “errors”.

3.3

RESOURCES

Respondents apparently read the question *What other resources or functions of the Network would you most value ?* in two different ways:

1. As an adjunct to the previous question (What changes would you like to see in the SoF website or Newsletter?) and introduced material they had not included in responses there, or
2. As an opportunity to suggest innovations to the network and its resources

Because analysis which recognized these approaches was not possible, I have not distinguished between them and have summarized the material as content or processes that members value or would value

The difficulty in the question, or the satisfaction with the SOF may have been indicated in the low number of responses (52) However of these, seven people again commented that they were happy with the SOF. These people wrote comments such as

- The newsletter and conference are sufficient I think plus the activities of the local branch.
- SOF provides a ready forum and wider range of ideas.
- The resource library is very helpful for our group.

The remaining 44 responses were classified as:

1. Appreciation of the membership of the SOF.
2. Relationships Beyond the SOF Membership.
3. Support for Individuals and Local Groups which included.
 - Support for Local Groups.
 - Extending the Activities of the Newsletter and the Web-site.
 - Material for the Resource Centre.

APPRECIATION OF THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE SOF

Here respondents appeared to take the opportunity to show their appreciation of those they met within the SOF rather than anything else they would value. Comments included:

- Meeting with people of similar minds and now friends.
- Meeting individuals locally and nationally.
- The wide range of characters and talent in the membership.
- The people you meet.
- Encouragement from like minded people gives the courage and ability to share my liberal faith.

RELATIONSHIPS AND ACTIVITY BEYOND THE SOF MEMBERSHIP

Here comments reiterated others throughout the questionnaire, which indicated a wish for higher visibility of the SOF and/or a wider range of activities beyond the SOF. Examples of these were:

- Effective public relations so the community knows we exist.
- Possibly more effort to contact people who want to explore the ideas SOF explains, but are unaware of any venue to do so.
- More reaching out and interacting out in the community. I'd like to see a media spokesperson. Need to advertise a bit, how else other people find out.
- I see the ideas being explored in the SOF as reinterpreting faith in the modern world
- The SOF is established to think not do. Someday there could be action, perhaps led by others who may be SOF members.

- Learning to help steer the needs of our community in the right direction.
- S of F could perhaps offer comment on the above subjects (stem cell research, cloning, legislation of prostitution) to select committees, as it would not be coming from a “Mother Kirk” point of view.
- I would like the Network to make statements on ethical/religious questions such as beating children and homosexuality.

SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUALS AND LOCAL GROUPS

The largest number of responses to this question appeared to be making suggestions for further development of resources within the SOF. They included reference to:

LOCAL GROUP SUPPORT

The need for strengthening local groups was reiterated here. Members made suggestions (16) such as:

- Accessibility.
- Positive leadership.
- More “programmed “educational” sessions.
- Ideas, available speakers for local groups.
- Group participation.
- More local branch members.
- Ideas available speakers for local groups.
- Availability of speakers to outlying areas. List of people who would be available and willing to travel.
- House group sort of function for deeper sharing and discussion and real engagement
- Knowing phone numbers addresses of local groups.

Included here was significant group that saw regional conferences or activities as a positive adjunct to local groups.

- Regional Conferences.
- I would attend accessible regional activities.
- Support of visitors to smaller cities e.g. Whangarei, New Plymouth etc

EXTENDING THE ROLE OF THE NEWSLETTER AND THE WEB-SITE

Here respondents (14) introduced a wide range of material they valued and/or in which they saw potential for strengthening the website and newsletter or the content within them

- Provide a basic guide to SOF-style thinking on the web-site to give newcomers a feel for what we are about.
- Some links with universities and institutions where people learn to think.
- A web discussion site.
- News from other/overseas network groups e.g SOF UK, Snowstar, Jesus Seminar.
- Access to SOF archives on the Internet.
- Information on socio-political events.
- Referrals to articles, books, films TV etc.
- Notices of good speakers, writers.

RESOURCE CENTRE

Six people also commented on the potential in the Resource centre and indicated that they would like to see more Videos/ DVDs. With one person suggesting that worksheets to accompany these would be helpful.

3.5

THE NAME

The Question asked was – ***“Do you have a suggestion for a new name for the Network?”***

The responses to the preceding question

“How do you feel about the Sea of Faith as a descriptive name of our Network?” were given on a scale of 1-5 (1 being “poor” and 5 representing those who felt the title was excellent) and resulted in an almost normal distribution.

There were 109 fuller written responses to the request which introduced a wide range of suggestions with many respondents giving several alternatives. (The prize goes to the person who gave eleven alternative names.)

Respondents who offered choices and comments on the name fell into two groups

1. Those who wished to retain the name.
2. Those who offered alternative titles.

FOR RETAINING THE NAME

Thirty five respondents said they did not have a suggestion for a new name for the Network. Some of these went on to

1. Explain their reasons for retaining the present name.
2. Offer an explanatory extension of the name, or
3. Make suggestions about enhancing the name.

REASONS FOR RETAINING THE PRESENT TITLE

These were given by those who felt the title was positive both in terms of its “roots” and the opportunity for explaining it to others. To quote:

- Change of name would cause confusion (2) and loss of identity (like changing the flag)
- The word sea has deep mythical significance. The network needs to stand by Arnold’s definition of faith.
- It is important to recognize and celebrate our “roots” Knowing the source and reason for the Network and being able to explain this, is positive and affirming.
- Some of the criticism of the title, I think arises from a desire to be “all things to all people (which the network cannot be) or not having seen the series, or read the book which “grounds” the network’s existence.
- Retaining the Sea of Faith aspect to the name retains the heritage that has been developed
- I describe SoF as a group of people interested in spirituality – like minded souls who present viewpoints – some I accept others I do not, we can choose, and I find it mentally stimulating – to elaborate briefly to others.
- After the discussion I feel pretty happy about the name in spite of Lloyd’s reservations.

(Interestingly no-one commented on links with international Sea of Faith Groups as a reason for retaining the title)

USING A METAPHOR

A second small group had introduced their own metaphor as an explanation for the title. For example:

- The “sea” metaphor depicts a journey, a faith journey for some, and cast as wide as the membership itself. I still like Cupitt’s link with Mathew Arnold’s poem. I am suggesting we retain the name Sea of Faith.
- Sound and movement and God - for me, walking by the sea nourishes the soul. The sea is constantly changing as we are. Earth begins with oceans and land – came first. The ocean/sea flows freely extends to all corners – is affected by the moon universe. Can be smooth, rough, calm, still but flows on regardless. I love the term sea expressed in the broadest way and of course faith – o ye of little faith I don’t think the alternatives are any better.
- I love the sea image. I joined the SOF to get insights on a wider range of faiths present and past.

EXPANDING THE TITLE

Then there were respondents who offered an explanatory expansion of the title and to quote their suggestions

- Sea of Faith Network – Exploring Beyond Religion. I think we risk too much loss of identity if we change our name at this stage, but an additional statement might help to clarify our vision for those who have difficulty with the current name.
- Sea of Faiths Network - Add an S to the word faith. . The imagery of faith as an up and down – letting go as in floating in water but with the potentiality of discovering unexpected buoyancy and occasionally moments of fear as waves splash over one, is apt for life experience. The dogmatic meaning of “faith” isn’t necessarily dominant. There is faith in oneself, in one’s community in the reality of the seasons etc are all evoked by the word faith.
- Sea of Faith : A forum for exploring spirituality (3)
- Expand title to include such as – a Forum Exploring Spirituality
- Add a short explanation phase which could be changed periodically as the situation changes e.g. a Forum for exploring spirituality/ for discussion of human spirituality/ for religious discussion or a network for exploring spirituality etc.
- Sea of Faith : A forum for exploring spirituality (3)
- Expand title to include such as – a Forum Exploring Spirituality

FOR CHANGING THE NAME

In the second group, while there was enthusiasm for a change of name and 49 new alternative names were offered, some were hesitant, it was apparent that the choice of a new title was more difficult and many were also influenced by a desire to retain the SOF initials.

THOUGH HESITANT

Some who considered a new name were also hesitant –

- We must be careful not to choose a name too similar to other groups which may be church or crank oriented. Changing the name is not as easy as it sounds.
- The rub will come in an attempt to find a name which accurately meets everyone’s expectations. The name does not need to explain it all”. The membership is spread across a very wide spectrum of religious faith and experience and non faith.

REASONS FOR CHANGING

Reasons for introducing a new title included:

- Relying on one image of Mathew Arnold’s poem is not a strong foundation for being meaningful

- Something that means something to outsiders and is drawn from the statement of purposes e.g. from religious thought and practice.
- It doesn't accurately explain to outsiders what the network exists for. My friends and relations imagine it as a church based organisation – a long explanation is necessary to explain.
- I think it does, or may arouse misleading expectations for people who don't know the provenance.

THE SUGGESTED TITLES

In summary, only three suggested titles appeared more than twice and respondents indicated that these had arisen in the previous discussion at Conference.

The seven titles which were most acceptable, and the times they were suggested were

- Forum of Seekers 6
- Seekers Forum 6
- Seabed of Faith 5
- Open Forum 2
- Searchers for Truth 2
- Seekers Open Forum 2
- Faith at Sea 2 (In that it is still growing and learning)

In view of the wide range of suggested titles and some of the comments I then went on to look at the words used in these alternative titles.

The words introduced most often were Forum (24) Seekers (17) Faith (12) Open (9) and Spiritual/Spirituality (8)

Clearly the discussion at Conference, and in particular the comments about the word faith had stimulated interest and thought. Here the use of the word faith possibly indicated that for many it did not necessarily have negative connotations.

However, apart from positive comments about the word "forum", comments about specific words used were without exception comments about the word "faith" and included:

- The word Faith could suggest that the Network has a particularly strong Faith i.e. Credo, which they would pre judge as something they didn't want to become involved with.
- The word faith has too much baggage for normal people.
- If you incorporate the word "faith" you need to acknowledge "faith" across the spectrum of religion, including the fundamental Christians and not denigrate them.

3.7

RESPONSIVENESS

When asked ***Should the Sea of Faith chart a direction for its future or simply respond to changes in the wind?*** respondents interpreted this question in a variety of ways. Analysis of the question was difficult because:

- Most people did not respond to the dualism suggested
- Others did not see a contradiction between a direction and being responsive – if not to the “changes in the wind” at least to changes within religion, society as a whole, and issues that arose within it.
- Some took the opportunity to reiterate concerns expressed in answering other questions e.g Membership, Youth, Relationships with Church groups etc.

Analysis provided three main groups:

1. Those who were happy with the current activities of the Sea of Faith, or recalled that there was SOF Statement of Purpose² and saw this as providing an appropriate direction,
2. Those who made general comments about reconsidering the direction of the Network
3. Those who read this as a completely open question, and
 - a) offered criteria for a direction, or -
 - b) suggestions related to the continuation of the Network.

THE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

A significant number of members indicated that they were happy with the present direction and/or Statement of Purpose, which they saw as providing direction for the Sea of Faith. They commented:

- The statement of purpose already charts its general direction. Anything more specific could restrict future possible activities and turn away some potential supporters.
- SOF needs to refer to its statement of purpose and no loose sight of its goals. It is not for deciding correct or incorrect. I see it as a journey of sharing.
- The admonition that the SOF should carry out its “statement of purpose” at the highest level.
- We can only be “active” in relation to our statement of purpose. Therefore I would protest any limitation imposed on “religious thought and practice.
- SOF should take up no “official position” on any group association or belief system, But it should explore or provide information (around its statement of purpose) on past, present and future issues that reflect our contemporary world – SOF should not be safe or a refuge from the real world.
- The beauty of the SOF is that it is a free and open discussion forum for everyone and I don’t want to see this limited in any way.
- It is an exercise in futility expecting SOF to be pro-active. It can only offer intellectual stimulation/information.
- It arose as a reaction and should perhaps continue in this way.

² **Statement of Purpose**

The Sea of Faith Network (NZ) is an association of people who have a common interest in exploring religious thought and expression from a non-dogmatic and human oriented standpoint.

The SOF Network itself has no creed. We draw our members from people of all faiths and also from those with no attachment to religious institutions.

GENERAL COMMENTS

A large group of respondents commented generally often without taking one or other position:

- If on the sea without some purpose or direction, will finish up going round in circles.
- Very difficult to sell a non package i.e. is no creed dogma or rules.
- The danger of charting the direction for SOF future is then becoming too rigid and spoiling its present merit of being open.
- We can only legitimately take action or chart a direction as far as we can see ourselves involved.
- There is a lot of misinformation from the past which has to be dealt with – but we must go forward.
- Unless SOF members express some clear and productive ideas, there will be little drive to change.
- The network (especially Conference) should not avoid exploration/ discussion of a wide range of issues. Action can then be left to individuals or groups.
- I feel we should reflect/review like this and then move on in response to feedback – maybe continuing as now.
- If there is a SOF Position we are no longer totally open.
- Responding to changes in the wind (going with the flow etc.) should be enough
- If an organisation becomes very proactive it often loses most of its long term members who are needed for balance.
- I would like it to be more proactive – but that comes the risk of becoming dogmatic – knowing the answers.
- SOF should continue to meet the needs of those belonging – too much structure/organisation will be like church.
- We will as a group eventually sink without trace leaving nothing of use to our community, to what extent should we become proactive ? That's the question

CRITERIA FOR A DIRECTION FOR THE SEA OF FAITH

Rather than take one or other of the positions offered, many respondents attempted to describe the criteria for any direction the Sea of Faith Network should pursue, and on the whole agreed that any direction determined should be:

1. Balanced,
2. Flexible, and
3. Responsive

BALANCE

Here people were clear that “this is a both/and situation, not either/or” (3) and suggested a balance between the two positions offered in the question. They made comments such as:

- There is just so much change in our environment today that something approaching “balance” between the two is to be sought (reactive and proactive)
- The mission is not well defined. If the mission was to put man on the moon, we keep talking about the spaceship – should be both – set a course and adjust for mixed wind shifts
- I'm always in favour of pro-activity but it does involve response as well as invitation, and its possible to be proactive in doing what you do.
- As a talk shop I would like to see a balance between being both proactive and reactive.
- I like Lloyd's comment on “finding its own level”.
- I think we should let the “body” follow its natural path of growth and attrition.

FLEXIBILITY

Recognizing that both direction and responsiveness could be positive, some people noted that within the life of the Network this required “us to remain free to be flexible” (4) “while within certain bounds” and added comments such as:

- Each group has its own life and changes according to that. Ours is pretty flexible.
- It seems different groups look and feel and meet quite differently. I don’t think a straight jacket would be good.
- There will be times to be proactive – just remain sensitive and respond where needed.
- Knowledge and opinion is always evolving.
- Stay as a network. Don’t organize. Don’t worry about goals. Don’t worry about survival.

RESPONSIVENESS

While many people acknowledged the Statement of Purpose, they also saw being responsive and involvement beyond the Network as positive and added comments such as:

- We could test the waters to get a consensus for social action or on social issues.
- Commit to a more active role in debate on significant issues of theological social and ethical concern.
- Remain open to questioning of what gives meaning to life.
- Continually work with the issues of what we want to be and how.
- We seem to be expressing more of a social conscience and less religious or spiritual values – this is not a bad idea.
- It would be nice if the SOF could find some way of expressing whatever faith it thinks it holds in ways that grow out of our shared integrity.
- Could help in finding things common to the “faiths” and how they could work closer together.
- Beware political and social action and other interest groups who may try to use SOF as a platform for their enterprise.
- Every conference should have this or similar questionnaire so we can chart changes in where numbers are headed.
- Ideas forum, clearing house vs -place for non religious to explore spirituality that is not “wacko” (crystals, astrology, mediums)

CONTINUING THE SEA OF FAITH

Finally there was a group who responded to this question with ideas about what they saw as opportunities for, or factors necessary for the strengthening or continuation of the Sea of Faith, and reiterated some of the concerns raised in other questions. Here their concerns were with:

1. Membership, (particularly in relation to age) and
2. Relationships with Traditional Churches and Their Members

MEMBERSHIP

Those who commented on membership introduced concern for new and potential younger members:

- We meet primarily to meet our own needs, but there must be many others out there whose needs may be met by SOF.
- We should welcome new membership but not go out searching for them.
- Be proactive in the sense of making its Statement of purpose more public. This is not ‘evangelism as such.
- The SOF has something to offer those on life’s journey who don’t know anything about the SOF.

- I believe people (and young people) will be interested to talk about what interests them to someone who will listen.
- Somehow younger people have to find the network worth investigating (5)

How this might be done:

- Understanding of outsiders needed not just to listen to existing members
- More up front – proactive locally – many folk still unaware of the organisation
- Reactive and issues of the day – media spokespeople
- I think we should make ourselves more known t the public but in a low key way. Not intense or pushy
- Without campaigning - advertising
- Sea of faith should promote itself through newspapers media etc as a faith talk-quest
- Remain a network. Do not become a proselytizing movement

RELATIONSHIPS WITH TRADITIONAL CHURCHES AND/OR THEIR MEMBERS

Here respondents wrote comments such as:

- Can 'Sea of Faith' help to make changes with the problems caused by main stream and fundamental churches.
- I would like SOF to input more on society and the largely entrenched position of the church.
- I would like the "bigwigs" in the SOF (and there seems to be hierarchy) to get over their disgruntled stance with traditional church experiences. It spoils some discussions and comes across as "I am superior" from some people.
- Ideally I would like the SOF to be the organisation that saves the world from traditional religion.
- It is hard to counter the destructive influence of fundamentalist type "religious" beliefs.
- I believe there will continue to be people coming out of conservative churches and backgrounds who would appreciate this type of forum.

3.8

SATISFACTION***What changes would most increase your satisfaction with the Sea of Faith? (State when you mean local or national level)***

The openness of this question gave respondents opportunity to emphasise areas that particularly concerned them and again in many cases they reiterated responses given to other questions. This led to a wide range of ideas with little consensus.

Of the 88 who responded to this question

Approximately 10% stated that they were happy with the status quo. They made comments such as:

- The use of Conference in providing a platform for philosophy thinking and development is excellent
- Nationally going well from my point of view – conferences, newsletter, concern re direction

Only six made specific comments about the national body and 14 made reference to their local group. Accordingly I have assumed the comments refer to the SOF in general unless specifically stated.

Respondents gave ideas as to what each saw as personally, and potentially positive in the future direction of the Sea of Faith. Comments indicated a range of understandings, belief and expectations and were classified as comments about:

1. The direction or purpose of the Sea of Faith.
2. The resources and support for local groups.
3. The material presented at National Conference and local meetings.
4. The perception and presentation of the Sea of Faith.

THE DIRECTION OR PURPOSE OF THE SEA OF FAITH

The greatest number of responses to this question (16) introduced ideas about the relevance, or to a lesser extent the direction of the Sea of Faith. They included:

1. Those who felt that any direction was inconsistent with the SOF purpose, and
2. Those who wished for more relevance in terms of the issues debated

THOSE WHO FELT THAT ANY ONE DIRECTION WAS INCONSISTENT WITH THE SOF PURPOSE.

These people appeared to accept that the Sea of Faith Network “has no creed” and thus offered opportunity for exploration and ongoing change.

Comments included:

- There is, and should be NO recognized SOF position.
- SOF can never satisfy emotional spiritual communal needs because it has no coherent set of beliefs, no ritual, no trained leaders, no history, no art, no purpose except to provide a venue for discussion of interesting topics.
- (The need) to resist the urge to become institutionalized.
- We must remain relevant – otherwise we fail like the churches from which we have come

THOSE WHO LOOKED FOR MORE RELEVANCE OR DIRECTION – particularly in relation to the SOF becoming more involved in debate about issues in a) in society, and b) religion.

While none of the responses in this group suggested that individuals looked for a new Statement of Purpose – the comments perhaps indicated a wish for broadening of the “expression” of religious thought and the quality of discussion in:

Debate about Issues in Society

Respondents appreciated and wished for greater opportunity to engage in debate about issues of concern in society today. Here too, all comments indicated an appreciation of the quality of discussion. For example comments included:

- I would like to see more intellectual rigour – in analyzing what is/has been happening in our world looking at consequences, and considering possible future directions
- As a forum for wiser discussion on ethical,/political/moral and spiritual issues
- More rigorous involvement in real issues. What is radical religion attitude to current issues- this needs research, study and debate.

Debate about Religion

Suggestions about debate here reflected individuals’ wish to broaden understanding of Christianity, other religions and the relationships between them.

- Without changing the statement of purpose, I think we could develop a common “creed” or statement of our position on religion/spirituality, and be more proactive in offering an alternative to traditional religion.
- Keen to see openness to new ideas, exploration of these (probably already do this) and a lot ,more cross cultural engagement – i.e. discussions about faith and spirituality across different religious traditions, ethnicity, country of origin, age, gender help to stimulate broad thinking and debate about the concepts and practice in today’s world.
- Having deliberately not ditched the Christian heritage, I would like to see SOF engaging with questions of how to interpret its central understandings about life and its purposes for our secular worlds. This would be part of the mix, not the sole focus. There is enough expertise and interest for this to happen, while others who do not wish to participate get on with questions that are more meaningful to them.
- As I move further away from any kind of religious belief or practice, it is hard to suggest changes that would satisfy me without dissatisfying others who are still believers and practitioners. I’m already church alumnus; I’ll probably become SOF alumnus also. Some people use SOF as a decompression chamber and pass through.

Amongst those who saw the SOF as offering opportunity to debate issues around Christianity were those who also saw a need for tolerance – some wished for respect for their continuing relationship with the Church, while one wanted less allegiance to traditional Christianity amongst SOF members. Respondents made statements such as:

- I still need my church life. I interpret the liturgy and practices in a way that suits me. It does not stop me from appreciating other ways Whenever a survey/show of hands is taken most people at a meeting still have a church life This needs to be acknowledged better. The disgruntled with church seem to have the most to say and it is awkward to express anything positive about satisfaction with a church home.
- I hear dogmatic comments being made about other “Spiritual” Christians which belie your statement of Purpose – be careful on that one because you close them off from joining – unless that is what you want.
- A little less bigotry against conservative Christianity.
- More members more willing to let go of the views and values into which they were born – SOF is still too timid and conservative.

THE RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FOR GROUPS WITHIN THE SEA OF FAITH

In rural areas travel to local meetings was a problem for some, with one person stating that he/she travelled over 200kms to each meeting. Isolation (geographical or otherwise) was a factor that some members experienced and expressed as a need for more support or communication with others, the national or larger bodies.

In the way of a solutions, one person suggested “increased feedback from local to the national body, with regular input from local groups re planning and direction”; while another said that he/she would appreciate the “opportunity to create or maintain relationships with other SOF members.

- Even on line would be good. Maybe SOF blog facility?”

A greater number wished for more contact between larger and smaller groups, and where possible consideration of visits /activities/ speakers (including overseas speakers) in smaller cities/ local towns/ regions. Here one person recognized that this would have a cost and felt that the local group may not be able to afford it.

The Newsletter was also mentioned. In reflecting some of the comments about issues to be addressed the possibility of expanding the newsletter content and distribution were suggested;

- We might explore increasing the Newsletter by taking adverts so we can put it out free in selective public places. The newsletter would have to include articles to attract people who were not active seekers but could be with encouragement.

While another introduced confusion around local/national bodies in that he/she looked to:

- Sorting out the newsletter issue – to ensure all members whether just local or national get the national newsletter

THE MATERIAL PRESENTED AT NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND LOCAL MEETINGS

Here there were a wide range of suggestions around what SOF members would like to see as

1. Topics for discussion, and
2. The processes used in Conference and meetings

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

These reflected comments about the direction of the Sea of Faith and gave a wide range of topics for discussion at both local and national level. Again they fell clearly into topics related to religion, and society.

About religion were:

- Religious “vision” How do we improve churches so they align with modern scientific and society knowledge.
- Cupitt and Geering’s main themes, and leading theological thinkers at conference.
- More work on reconstructing biblical stories to more realistically meet today’s understanding of life together with stories from other sources that can give direction and meaning to our lives.
- An exploration of the concept of God and Jesus, and their relationship.
- The various major faiths and what they have to offer each other, with input from people from these.
- ‘Feminist’ issues and gender issues and how these currently influence and have influenced theology, philosophy etc.

Societal Issues

- Expanding discussions to include issues which impact on a moral life e.g. resource use, global warming, conservation etc
- Engagement in discussion about topical issues e.g. repeal of section 59, homosexuality in the church ,

THE PROCESSES USED IN CONFERENCE AND LOCAL MEETINGS

Apart from one person who introduced “Experimenting with ritual, meditation, liturgy”, most comments in this area demonstrated a wish for “more opportunity to discuss topics with, and get to know others”. While no one saw small groups as a means to this, a small number did emphasise that they wished more input from, and involvement with others. They made comments about what they would like to have considered:

- Personal stories or experience rather than disembodied ideas.
- Greater sharing of what is personally existentially important.
- More dialogue between members rather than a presentation by one person.
- More group involvement locally – i.e members more contributing rather than spectators/audience for invited speakers.
- More lay language please. Despite being involved in church all our lives we are NOT theologians (as large number of our group are) and we get lost on much of the terminology, thus can lose track of the theme under discussion. Our own difficulty rather than the planners.

Conference in Particular:

- Conference to allow plenty informal times as well as structured sessions
- I think some discussion would be good e.g. excellent speakers and then time to discuss issues raised
- I have enjoyed conference formats – leaving out core groups and second workshop but feel we need to look at other ways to get to know people now (apart from meal queues, walking to and from etc
- To leave structure and purpose of SOF intact, but modify format for more varied input – visual, personal testimony etc

THE PUBLIC PRESENTATION OF THE SEA OF FAITH

Here I included comments that related to how the SOF and the membership were perceived, and how members thought this could be enhanced. These generally introduced areas that were reiterated in responses to other questions and here were classified in groups that commented on:

1. The Name of the Network
2. The Age of Members
3. The Public Perception of the Sea of Faith

THE NAME OF THE NETWORK

Five responses addressed the Network name. These suggested a change in name – (“keep key functions – newsletter, annual conference”) and gave two reasons for this as

Responses from others:

- A more acceptable name so that hearers do not assume we are a slightly odd and credulous group.
- Sadly the word faith now inspires negative reaction.
- If not changing name, most definitely a sub title that is more relevant and appealing to wider community e.g. A network /forum for exploring/discussing human spirituality.

The difficulty in explaining its “meaning” to others:

- Hard to explain to outsiders what the Sea of Faith is
- A title that didn’t involve having to explain to enquirers that we are not a fundamentalist movement.

THE AGE OF THE MEMBERS

Respondents saw the age of the majority of Sea of Faith members as limiting, particularly in relation to the breadth of discussion, and commented on possible benefits here (and at greater length in the final question):

- We’re all getting old – new blood.
- Encourage younger members so we don’t die out. At both levels would be delighted to see an influx of younger people.
- Younger members and members with differing viewpoints that could add up to the richness already present.
- Locally - we have a much wider membership than attendance and I would like to see younger members attending more or for us to discover whether there is more we could do for the “fellow travelers”.
- Personally I am completely satisfied with the present local group but I would like to see more active participation by members and more young people encouraged to join. The comment that today’s young folks do not have a church background to draw upon is worth serious consideration and must influence attempts to attract young people to S.O.F.

THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE SEA OF FAITH

Here respondents offered suggestions of how their satisfaction within the Network could be increased, in two main groups

1. By increasing understanding of the interests/ needs of members or potential members, and
2. Various ways of increasing visibility within and beyond the Network (also reiterated in the final question)

Increasing understanding of the interests/needs of members or potential members

Comments made included:

- Encouraging groups to become active within their communities, expressing an opinion on important moral and political issues which become public issues i.e letters to the Editor, provocative and intelligent discourse and debating; encouraging people to think and read for themselves; combating the dumbing down process that is occurring at all levels in the western world
- Becoming educative of where we are at could assist folk who have reached the stage we were at 20 years ago.
- Overcoming the stratification of society and isolation of peer groups is vital to continued growth. Present members like myself have church background – if disgruntled! But outreach and empathy must happen locally as a personal matter
- Encourage those fundamentalists that are walking out the back door of their churches.
- Advertise , which doesn’t mean evangelize – have a wider view of topics for discussion (we’re a bit stuck in Presbyterian angst).
- Many fundamentalists need to be made aware of those of us still in a church need our “needs” met.

Increasing visibility within and beyond the Network (also reiterated in the final question)

Knowledge of the Sea of Faith outside the Network was of concern to some:

- Keep everyone informed of the national group activities – conferences newsletters etc.
- Become more visible to the general public. We have a lot of talent and experience – tell the world about it.
- Publish in the media a simplified statement of purpose with contact details.
- Perhaps a small team of “officials” or promoters could work around some of the forums – seminar schools (i.e. Wanaka’s Inspiring Summer School) promoting SOF and wider interests.
- Having an active lobbyist would give us a higher profile so we can help make good changes and will encourage new members.
- If new ideas are required then advertising is the only way to get new members.
- Locally groups should seek ways to advertise their programmes so we can help people looking for such a group.

5.1.1

LOCAL GROUPS

Not all those who responded to the question *What is it about programme content you dislike most in your local group?* noted that it asked about programme content. Thus answers tended to introduce factors about the group generally.

Of the 80 who responded, there were two who stated that they chose not to belong to a group - and three who found they were limited or had difficulty, participating in a group because of distance required to travel, or the fact that the group met only once every two or three months

A high level of satisfaction with local groups was indicated by the 30 out of the remaining 75 respondents who recorded that they were happy with the group to which they belonged – despite the question asking what it was they disliked. One might also be left to assume that 156 who did not answer the question, if they belonged to a local group, were also generally happy in it.

Without a means to correlate this, the impression I gained was that satisfaction amongst those who responded was higher amongst those in smaller more informal groups. At the same time although given the overall satisfaction, approximately 42 of the 75 respondents were able to report something they were dissatisfied with.

The summary below is of the two main groups – those who reported that they were happy – or happy with some minor reservations, and those who listed features they disliked

THOSE WHO INDICATED THEY WERE HAPPY WITH THE GROUP TO WHICH THEY BELONGED

These people wrote comments such as:

- I continue to appreciate the variety and interest provided.
- There is always something to learn.
- My purpose of understanding religion has been filled.
- Always interesting and thought provoking.
- We change anything we do not like.
- We are a small group that works harmoniously.
- Sometimes ad hoc but always interesting.
- Nothing – programme content varies but then that's life.

THOSE WHO INTRODUCED FACTORS THEY DISLIKED

The factors that folk disliked in their local group fell into three main areas which were:

1. Leadership and Organisation
2. Membership
3. Programme Content

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATION

Some people felt they carried too much responsibility while others felt membership was not as involved as they might wish -

Seven respondents found the leadership their main “dislike” –

- Because they were the leader (3) e.g. It doesn't function unless I organise it.
- Because leadership was limited (4) e.g.
 - Lack of leadership will eventually see the group disbanding

- Content is provided by a few willing people whilst others do nothing The membership seem to have little input into what the committee chooses as topics.
- Too few of us do the organizing.

MEMBERSHIP PARTICIPATION

Apart from comments about static membership and the narrow age range of members comments here were about participation:

- We tend to expect to be entertained by a good speaker.
- Input lacking from members.
- A lack of strong dissent.
- People pushing personal agendas – not prepared to discuss – though doesn't happen often.
- Wandering off the topic in discussion time.
- Too much talk – not enough input.
- Occasionally they get onto “church” stuff – not often.
- I still feel reticent about speaking out.
- Not enough acknowledgement and study of feminist issues - people appear afraid of them I think.

PROGRAMME CONTENT

This group responded directly to the question and the factors they disliked were in three areas

1. The Formality of Local Group Sessions
2. Limited Input
3. Content

The Formality of Group Sessions

Here members felt their group relied too much on formal lectures and guest speakers (who did not always “turn up”) and associated lack of, or limited discussion (10) which could “enable people to have their say and get to know each other better” These comments appeared to come mainly from members of larger groups.

Limited Input

A smaller group noted limited input from external speakers e.g“ we scratch sometimes to provide a really stimulating speaker or activity “ (3) Understandably these reports appeared to be from members of small discussion groups.

Content

Those who made comments about the actual content of the local group programme included

- Three who felt content tended to be too “intellectual” and there was a “need to keep discussion on a simple basis that all can understand”
- Two who noted a lack of structure e.g. Seeming arbitrariness - very varied, no set format.
- A larger group who felt content was not necessarily relevant and made comments such as:
 - Speakers/content not particularly relevant to SOF purpose.
 - Topics which are more suited to Probus/Rotary like groups.
 - Nothing I can't access in Continuing Education or University.
 - Discussion which could be discussed in any church group.
 - Meetings which are not about religion.
 - Bias towards Christianity.

- Often lack of relevance to my life, lack of inspiration.

Included in this group were those that found meetings could be too “Introspective” reflected in comments such as:

- Too many meetings resolving Presbyterian angst.
- Endless navel gazing about our purpose.

5.1.2

LOCAL GROUPS: CHANGE ?

The question **What would you like for your local group ?** again indicated that there was a high level of satisfaction with local groups. Of the 85 who answered, 24 stated that they were happy, and/or would like the group, or aspects of it to continue. These people made statements such as:

- Nothing more.
- To carry on in the same way.
- Considering the ever changing numbers in the group – the programme is very good.
- We have frank open discussion.
- We are happy to choose and appreciate that no programme will suit everyone all the time.

The changes suggested by respondents were classified in three groups. Those who would like:

1. Changes in Membership.
2. Different Leadership Style.
3. Changes to Meetings

CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP:

These fell into three groups:

- Those who wanted more members (7) though it was recognized that groups did try to recruit more members, and that there were limits to the extent their group wanted or was able to grow.
- Those who wished for younger members (2)
- Those who hoped for members with particular qualities – those mentioned were – a “better mix of minds” and gender balance.

DIFFERENT LEADERSHIP STYLE

All comments (6) in this area were related to participation within the group, and the wish for more shared leadership:

- More active participation in the leadership role – too much is left to one person and it is just not fair.
- A local organizing committee – I haven't the Oomph at my age to organize properly.
- More active participation in/sharing of leadership by more members of the group.
- A shared responsibility for programme content – to widen the study.

CHANGES TO MEETINGS

By far the greatest numbers of responses to this question were about the meetings and included comments about regularity, resources, structure, ethos, and conduct or content of meetings. I have grouped them as:

1. The Structure of Meetings.
2. The Ethos of Meetings.
3. The Conduct and Content of Meetings.

THE STRUCTURE OF MEETINGS

Here I included regularity, the resources for and planning of meetings:

The regularity of meetings:

Four people who were in areas which did not hold monthly meetings wished for more/monthly or regular meetings.

More resources for meetings - comments included:

- \$200 a year to import an outside speaker.
- More speakers from away – but that costs money and we'd have to fund raise.
- More support from the Steering Committee.
- Source /access to possible programme sources at the local level (The web site is one good source) Sharing ideas around the country.

Better planned/structured meetings

Comments here included more membership involvement in planning:

- Regular planning by the group is essential and should be an expected part of the programme including planned discussion.
- A better planned programme – e.g. we knew 10months ago, the date for John Spong's visit to our area.
- A theme for meetings – perhaps continuing for three months/ a year.
- A more structured set up /More structured study.
- Provision for smaller "special interest" encounters.

THE ETHOS OF MEETINGS

There were those who felt their group could be more inclusive/mutually supportive and enable members to be "comfortable in a challenging environment" Comments included:

- A greater sense of "belonging" in the group e.g. social support group support.
- Sense of community/opportunity for real engagement and getting to know each other.
- To maintain the open, all accepting environment typical of the SOF.

THE CONTENT/CONDUCT OF MEETINGS

A large number again made comment about the content or conduct of the meetings, and included comments about:

1. The Content of Meetings
2. The Quality of Discussion and Participation
3. Participation

The Content of Meetings

Respondents wished for discussion about a variety of subjects and approaches in meetings. These included:

- Philosophy/Theology/ Religion including for example
 - An occasional expert speaker on historical faiths and the influence in the life of people in the age. The symbols used and "why" – then the impact on Christian tradition.
 - More subjects in keeping when the statement of purpose.
- Reflection/contemplation
 - One to one sharing and more "emotional" meetings.
 - Personal stories or experience rather than disembodied ideas.
 - Monthly spiritual conversation.
- Experimentation with ritual/meditation/liturgy
- The use of Audio-visual material.

The Quality of Discussion and Participation

By far the greatest number of responses to this question related to two characteristics of discussion in their group

- At the local level I see discussion and interaction at the centre of a SOF group – we are not primarily a group to be entertained by good but not necessarily relevant speakers
- Acknowledgement and inclusiveness – opportunity for all to participate in discussion and debate. Maybe even some humour and good coffee.
- Voice – this would sharpen discussion.
- I would like to have plenty of time to talk /share /discuss /debate /interact socialise with others.

5.2.1 NATIONAL CONFERENCE: SATISFACTION

The question ***What is it about programme content you dislike most about what is offered, in general?*** followed a question about satisfaction with National Conference. Responses to this previous question were heavily weighted towards “*perfectly satisfied*” with no responses to “*dissatisfied*”

Possibly because of the high level of satisfaction indicated in the previous question, only 64 people responded. Of these 9% again reiterated that they were satisfied and qualified their statement with comments such as:

- There is nothing to dislike – always an interesting mix. I like it all (4)
- Fairly happy with this year’s Conference.
- I’m pretty satisfied (2)
- SoF conference is the highlight of my year.
- Thought it was great and very stimulating.
- I’m happy with typical format/content.
- The general standard is good (2)
- Continue the fun, variety and also deeper thinking included. Well done this time as always.
- Usually come away with a new reading direction and heaps to think through.

The remaining fifty responses some were influenced by the Conference they had just attended. I classified them according to the area of conference they addressed. These were:

1. Organisation.
2. General Content.
3. Speakers.
4. Workshops.
5. Core Groups.
6. Workshops.

ORGANISATION

Those who made comments about the organisation of Conference addressed timing – either too much or too little for one activity or another:

- Conference is very short for a range of valuable and important topics - if it was every 2 years the conference would become irrelevant because of insufficient time to hear about things AND time to meet informally and talk about them.
- In some instances background material on the views and topics of speakers could be presented before attending talks.
- Too much for time available. Keep Sat afternoon after 1.30 AGM for local outings.
- More discussion and debate rather than being preached at.
- Too much without break.
- Some are too long concentration goes.
- At my age I have difficulty staying alert.
- What about trips at Conference.
- Length of time dining rooms take to feed people and to provide morning and afternoon teas.

GENERAL CONTENT

Few noted that the question asked for general comments about what was offered. Those who did were often in agreement:

- I suggest that there is too much emphasis on big-name/high fliers.
- Some of it seems a bit “intellectual” for me (2)
- There seems to have been a tendency to move towards more intellectual/academic papers. I would like:
 - more “interfaith” discussion (Pushpa and Reihana excellent) to increase understanding of historical and current relationships between religions
 - b) more presentations by leaders in areas such as ecology, other scientific areas which have possible implications for understanding personal moral responsibility
 - c) new thoughtful views on local and worlds issues which can contribute to individual thought and action
- Complete lack of Maori or Pacific input.
- Talks in which religion is regarded as a mystique.
- When there is an assumption we’re all Christians or that not being Christian involves some want of imagination.
- Lacking an artistic dimension Need more art music drama etc.
- I am not a liturgical person so am not that comfortable with candles and banners (only a slight discomfort).
- Waffling about non essential personal events.
- Talk about who we are.
- Any formal tedium.
- I’m sick of myths, lets get on with reality in today’s world.

SPEAKERS

Only two made specific comment about speakers and they were both recalling a particular presentation.

- Never seems to be enough of keynote speakers. I would like more of Spong for example, than a workshop I found unstimulating by comparison.
- I did not appreciate the last ¾ hour of Spong’s address as it felt like a sermon on a subject of minor interest to me. But others (from small towns) wanted him to go on – it was new to them.

WORKSHOPS

- Only being able to attend one workshop due to time constraints.
- I would have liked to do several workshops which were on offer.
- In the past some workshops were of little interest to me – specific unusual subjects. I did not like.

SMALL GROUPS

Although three people saw core groups as something they disliked,

- Don’t like core groups.
 - Groups when you cannot hear each other or the leader.
 - Small group discussions – when there has been no chance to prepare
- Others indicated that they were supportive, particularly of the social opportunities in small groups:
- Sorry group discussion after “key note speakers has been decreased/ discontinued (3)
 - I feel that we need to reintroduce some way of getting to know the other attendees, This was a good outcome of the old post presentation discussion groups.
 - I would like the return of small discussion groups.

- Not enough opportunities to discuss in smaller groups and get to know people and their ideas e.g. core groups.

5.2.2 NATIONAL CONFERENCE: THE FUTURE

When asked *What would you like for future Conferences? (include new topics)*, of the one hundred people who responded, 10% took the opportunity to express their appreciation of the National Conference in terms such as:

- Generally speaking I think the Steering Committee do an excellent job in selecting topical themes and speakers, with interactive workshops included.
- Continue using excellent thought provoking speakers and workshops. The present format is excellent.
- At Ngatarawa I liked the debate between the three main speakers. In this Conference I value the breadth and depth of the range of speakers. Both Conferences – full marks.
- Keep on exploring. Be open to any new issues that may arise.

Others commented in suggestions for the future and these were classified as suggestions for

1. The General Format and Content of National Conference.
2. Small/Core Groups
3. Workshops
4. Speakers
5. Topics

THE GENERAL FORMAT AND CONTENT OF NATIONAL CONFERENCE

All responses here were individual and suggested factors such as:

- Length: Perhaps it could run a bit longer but I realize this impacts on people traveling.
- Attendees: Where are the thinking non-religious people.
- Theme: Conference might be more structured around a theme, which . could be (less theoretical) - more “application- based”
- Bookshop: The book shop is a valuable asset which should be strengthened.
- Trips: It is disappointing that trips/activities have not continued, These were generally relevant, educative and often a stimulus to thought, discussion and socialization.
- Audio Visual material: Play recording of film followed by discussion.
- Feedback: Keep to talk shop format but have regular attendees surveyed to see what they really want.

SMALL/CORE GROUPS

Many members introduced their support for core/small groups as “a valuable activity in the conference” and there were three main reasons given for their wish to retain small or core groups. They were in order to:

1. Socialize and get to know others better (11)
2. Give an opportunity for “input from members” (3) and
3. Increase discussion (5)

TO GET TO KNOW OTHERS BETTER

Amongst those who wished to get to know others better were those who referred to the: “creation of friendships and ways to sustain these” It was very clear that people wished to have more time to socialize and to get to know others better, for some particularly to know how others “journeyed” to the Sea of Faith.

This wish to spend more time on social activity appeared to be regardless of the size of local group to which they belonged. They wrote:

- Conference is a great opportunity for this that seems to slip through our fingers(2)
- I wish to know about the experiences of others

- To share life experiences
- To hear about members' journeys
- Include more smaller interactive groups which encourage personal testimony
- Perhaps more varied format – personal testimonies
- More focus on sharing of individual's personal spiritualities and spiritual practices
- Information/ reflection on activities of individuals and groups
- Strategies for encouraging the development of the network between individuals.

TO HAVE MORE "INPUT"

Here the input referred to was input into the discussion and comments in this group were summarized in:

I like the core groups – people talking together where all have the opportunity to speak

TO INCREASE DISCUSSION

Here all respondents wished to explore topics more fully and saw small groups as a means to do this following and in response to the speakers

WORKSHOPS

Although one person wrote (I am) not so keen on "workshops", members (5) who commented on workshops expressed appreciation of these and looked for further consideration of them. For example:

- Extra time to attend more workshops/presentations. We by no means manage to cover the conference themes adequately, we not only get a fraction of "retelling the story – the familiar and the unfamiliar
- Conference time is so precious and limited I would rather have the chance of going to a second workshop (i.e. they are presented twice) than spend Sat evening on (usually very enjoyable) entertainment

SPEAKERS

Those who answered the question in terms of the type of speakers they would like to hear in future conferences offered general comments and a long list of speakers they would like considered. I have classified these in two groups

1. General Comments on The Choice of Speakers.
2. Speakers for Consideration

GENERAL COMMENTS ON CHOICE OF SPEAKERS

Here appreciation of previous speakers, and the interest, stimulation and challenge they offered was apparent.(7):

- Keep challenging and seeking on the edge, debate and discussion.
- Have appreciated the diverse content at the conferences I have so far attended.
 - the continual effort to engage the most stimulating and interesting speakers available
 - stimulating addresses and discussions.
- Continue with controversial speakers/conflicting opinions as they give food for thought .
- The transition in the Marton Conference to discussion on both sides of a topic (polarity) has given impetus to dialogue and continued in the multi faith presentations at 2007 conference.

Along with these comments there were three suggestions:

- An opportunity to hear speakers who would not generally be able to speak at local groups cost, distance etc.

- Bring in some young people, get their views on spirituality in today's world – and get dialogue happening across the generations.
- Witness to a conversation and discussion between 2 or 3 knowledgeable people about chosen topic of interest – say written about by one of the people.

TOPICS

Conference attendees were able to give a great variety of topics and speakers they would like to hear in the future. These were grouped as follows:

1. The Sea of Faith.
2. Social and Political Issues.
3. The Environment.
4. Philosophy and Ethics.
5. Christianity.
6. Other Faiths.
7. Health.
8. Art and Ceremony.

THE SEA OF FAITH

Here a small group indicated that the Network itself provided opportunity for consideration:-

- The statement of purpose is what attracts me most.
- More on ' Where do we want to progress to.
- We are not just about religious issues – we like some history philosophy rationalism anthropology art literature.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES

Ideas about the range of interest /discussion within the Sea of Faith was continued and expressed in the range of social and political topics that individuals (14) suggested as topics for future Conferences: which included

- Deeper understanding of current social issues.
- Look at a few more commentaries on political/social issues e.g. Chris Trotter, Rosemary McLeod, Bill Bennett.
- Challenges of the modern western world for SOF.
- Peace.
- Racism.

THE ENVIRONMENT:

- Scientific developments that help the balance of nature on our planet
- Carolyn King of Waikato University speaking on Christianity and the environment – she did a second doctorate at Cambridge or Oxford on this and speaks well.
- Global warming/Climate Change – Is it a man made or natural phenomenon.
- Over population.
- Our grandchildren's world.

PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS

Here respondents were generally less specific about topics related to Philosophy (2) and Ethics (6) Morals (1) though some did have specific ideas:

- What basis is there for having values.
- A code of living.
- Ethics and imagination (topic of Margaret Sommerville Massey lecturer (Australian) at Mc Gill Uni. Could we try to get her ?)

- Selfishness without religion what are moral ethics.
- Genetic engineering as per recent radio one lectures on Sunday afternoons.

CHRISTIANITY (9)

Respondents who looked for topics/discussion about religion had generally specific ideas about speakers who could address issues within Christianity. These included:

- What remains for religion after all the myths have been explained.
- More reconstruction of our stories (Bible and other) now that we have largely deconstructed traditional ideas.
- Would like you to show your non-bigotry by inviting an Evangelical Christian to speak – after all many of your members are from “mainline” churches so they haven’t experienced much of Pentecost, as it were.
- Jesus Seminar Speaker.
- Aristotle web-site speaker – Life coaching vs religion.
- Keep bringing speakers of the intellectual quality of Cupitt, Geering, Spong, Gibson.
- More provocative talks from Raymond Bradley.

OTHER FAITHS (11)

There was a high level of interest in other faiths/beliefs and their understandings. Respondents suggested “conferences to be more inclusive of other faiths” and requested

- Interfaith discussion: I like the spread of representatives from other faiths – e.g. Muslim and Hindu, Buddhist etc
- Progressive action reflection among adherents of other faiths, atheists, environmentalists
- To continue a balanced programme - rationalism to faith based which caters for those the wide spectrum in spirituality among members
- Sustaining life on this front and faith models that enhance this
- Jewish scholars’ approach to liberal theology\ Something about Judaism today – more on Islam in all its variety
- More on faiths that have influenced Christianity – Zoroastrianism, Mithras, Judaism, Canaanite cults Egypt
- Creation stories of other cultures.
- As well as the kind of things already covered – the ‘old religions and today’s revival i.e. Druidism, Wicon etc and how and why they measure up. Are they so different from Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism etc.
- Maori spirituality Rev Brent Swann – Gisborne - as possible key speaker.
- Revisit old ideas by astronomy

HEALTH

- Neuroscience of consciousness and identity
- Aging / Attitudes to aging – from the point of view that we start doing it the day we are born- accepting the process, the inevitability and that it is the price of life.
- The wholeness of the body – inc. health (mental and physical) and sexual health and happiness – fringes on the spiritual

ART AND CEREMONY

A small group reiterated their appreciation for art and ceremony in the comments:

- Dance art and music to be included.

- Sande Ramage and Colin Gibson used music and visuals – that went down well with me.
- More exploration of ceremony/rites/liturgy.
- Opening and closing ceremonies – one or two songs we could sing together.

5.4

RITUAL AND LITURGY

Following the statement **“Forms of ritual or liturgy form part of religious practice in all traditions.”** Members were asked **“In the Sea of faith gatherings, do you see a place for new or experimental forms of ritual ?”**

There were 70 responses to the invitation to comment further, which supplemented responses given to statement in the previous two questions which asked for responses on the scale of 1(never) – 5 (every-gathering) in relation to Local Group Meetings and National Conference.

Most took the opportunity to make general comments about ritual and liturgy in the Sea of Faith rather than consider National conference of local groups, and only a couple noted that the statement included the word experimental. While few distinguished between liturgy or ritual, most members responded subjectively and raised questions which would extend the discussion into areas such as:

What is the role of the Sea of Faith in the lives of its members ?

What is the source of liturgy and what form would it take ?

I classified respondents in five groups: Those who:

1. Made general comments about liturgy or ritual.
2. Did not see a place for ritual or liturgy.
3. Supported having some form of ritual or liturgy.
4. Felt that the use of liturgy or ritual should be optional
5. Qualified their responses and described what they saw as suitable at Sea of Faith gatherings and/or the circumstances in which it might be used.

GENERAL COMMENTS

People in this group did not give a preference for or against ritual or liturgy, but commented about the source , or expression of liturgy:

THE SOURCE OF LITURGY/RITUAL

- Ritual is more important than many believe. Each group will have its own ritual, whether perceived or not. However a little intentional ritual can add depth to a meeting.
- Tradition evolves over time – ritual arises from this.
- I believe ritual and liturgy should “emerge” from belief and not be an “add on”.

THE EXPRESSION OF LITURGY

- Ritual gives expression to emotion, feeling or spirituality.
- Ritual or liturgy must of necessity be brief, simple and harmless.
 - Ritual can easily become dogma and this is both unnecessary and unwanted.
 - Needs to be well done – otherwise it can be disastrous – off putting – irrelevant or insincere.
 - Needs experiment and persevering.
 - Worth exploring this even though some people are resistant.

THOSE WHO DID NOT SEE A PLACE FOR RITUAL OR LITURGY

There was a range of feeling about whether or not ritual or liturgy, experimental or otherwise, was appropriate in the Sea of Faith gatherings and while some (7) did not elaborate, the reasons given by most respondents fell into three groups with reasons summarised as :

1. Personal responses.
2. Ritual in diversity is difficult.
3. Sea of Faith is not a church organisation.

PERSONAL REASONS

- Some don't agree with me but having left most church services, I feel freer not to indulge in rituals that remind me of structured services.
- I still attend the Anglican Church and enjoy the liturgy having been enabled from SOF experience to understand the mythology for what it is.
- Doesn't do a lot for me. Not my thing – too much like church.
- I do not belong to the SOF to be involved with ritual!!! It would be most off putting.
- Personally I do not go to the SOF to experiment with rituals.
- I think the symbolic functions are rather apologetic and self conscious – lighting a candle/ unveiling the banner.

RITUAL IN DIVERSITY IS DIFFICULT

Many felt that the Sea of Faith encompassed such a diversity of views, that finding a ritual which encompassed this would be difficult:

- The members of Sea of Faith are too diverse to be able to embrace any meaningful form of ritual - it could not be inclusive of all.
- I suspect it would be VERY difficult to find/invent forms of ritual that are fully inclusive and don't offend.
- We are too diverse for ritual to encompass us satisfyingly (2)
- Ritual needs to be done in an inclusive non threatening way. If it makes people feel awkward it is better not to do it.
- It is easy to alienate some people if ritual is introduced.
- It would be too preclusive and final.
- I regard ritual or liturgy as summaries of belief. It will vary from individual to individual and could be divisive.
- Hard to please everybody. I remember the Harris's liturgy at the end of a conference was very appropriate but not all appreciated it.

THE SEA OF FAITH IS NOT A CHURCH

The largest group here reiterated that they did not see the Sea of Faith as a religious organisation or church. Some expressed personal sentiments encompassed in the statement "Outside a tradition/church ritual is ineffective/artificial/hollow/inappropriate/meaningless/alienating/offensive".

Others gave their perceptions of the role of the Sea of Faith as:

- I see the SOF as a forum for discussion rather than doing ritual or liturgy.
- Sea of Faith is not a "para" church – it is a discussion group.
- I do not think that the SOF should have any ritual – it is not a movement or alternate religion for us.
- Basically, I think providing ritual/liturgy is the function of a different sort of group. SOF is not and should not try to be a para church.

- There is certainly a place for discussion of liturgies – but SOF is not a para Church and should be careful not to become one – not a substitute for a religious organisation.
- I see no place for any ritual at SOF meetings (but acknowledge that ritual has a place at such functions as weddings and funerals)
- Cannot be as we are not a religious institution (2)
- We have moved past this sort of activity.
- SOF cannot compete with the church. Its rituals (SOF) would be empty of content. They would not connect with the past or the future. They would be empty as communist rituals were or are.
- Arts and music can be enjoyed and experienced in other places such as church and theatre. Leave SOF to dialogue.

THOSE WHO FELT THERE WAS A PLACE FOR RITUAL

Those who commented, apparently in support of the use of ritual or liturgy tended to elaborate on the kind of liturgy that could be used or give examples of where they felt it was used effectively.

I have given these in two groups: Those who

1. Supported the use of ritual or liturgy in Sea of faith gatherings
2. Clarified what would be for them appropriate ritual or liturgy.

SUPPORT FOR THE USE OF LITURGY OR RITUAL

- We are like musicians gathering for a concert but never playing music, only talking about it.
- Indeed ritual and liturgy form part of the practices in all traditions. So, how is it that we are leaving them out entirely? Have we then, completely separated from tradition.
- If we can't include some liturgical activity in a group that's supposedly based around spirituality (isn't it) then we might as well be board members at a meeting or parliament in the debating chamber.
- Sea of Faith has no tradition and needs to build this - ritual is part of all traditions – without it SOF is a talk fest.
- I see a place for a spiritual but non religious (non sectarian) ritual in keeping with the “creed” offering an alternative to traditional religion.
- This is where non-verbal can come into its own. My experience of ritual outside churches is that they so often seem artificial or parody because it is so hard to strike the right note for a group of strangers or people of different temperaments and expectations. Quiet music and silence offer most.
- More ceremony is required.

CLARIFICATION OF APPROPRIATE LITURGY/RITUAL

- It would need to be respectful of others-all/Inclusive/non threatening/able to express passion
- There is still a persuasiveness from Christian tradition of salvation from sin. A liturgy which rejoiced in love and light, sharing wonder at the world
- Something which involves the whole person – sight, sound heart and mind, individual community
- Not only speech but music, art, drama could be included at meetings
- I like one minute of silence
- To gather together before dispersing – for a final short reading followed by a three minute silence – then goodbye (grasping the hands of the person on either side of you

- Informality is the modern way We have a small farewell “mantra” that we may say to wind up meetings and embodies “Go in Peace”
- I think ritual’s practice should include more attention to the arts, liturgy and ritual of innovative kinds
- I could accept some small forms of ritual if wanted by the majority but am generally uncomfortable with made-up forms of ritual.
- I’d be comfortable with some form of meditation
- Some people may take a brief devotional ‘service’ at the chapel each morning – would be appreciated – inclusive non threatening.
- The Wgton Ephesus group incorporates liturgies several times a year.
- I belong to a women’s’ spirituality group at every meeting someone leads a liturgy she has formed – long or short- inspiring or reflective – nourishing.
- I found the closing liturgy at the (????) Auckland Conference uplifting

THE OPTIONAL USE OF RITUAL OR LITURGY

In this group respondents suggested that the use of liturgy or ritual was a choice to be made by the individual or the local group – for Conference a decision appeared more difficult:

AN INDIVIDUAL CHOICE

- Most of us are wrestling with change/versus tradition if we still take part in church life – ritual becomes less important to individuals but we may need to respect others need for it.
- I see a need for ritual for others, but I am not sure about it for myself.
- I am no enthusiast of ritual but don’t want to cramp other people’s style.
- Not officially – privately as per choice.
- Not for everyone – but a topic for those who choose it.

A LOCAL GROUP CHOICE

- It would be OK in local groups if members discussed it and decided to try some ritual.
- For those local groups who wished it – and forms of ritual could be discussed on the web for others to consider
- Have a go if and when a need arises naturally and there is plenty of support from among the group
- Ritual does not seem to be important to our local group.
- Perhaps work being done by groups like Ephesus could be made available on the web site

AT CONFERENCE ?

- If from within either the steering group or participants there is the passion to develop a ritual then an initial has relevancy and value
- Could organizers be sensitive to the wishes of participants ? that’s what this question is all about of course.
- Not in a national conference where some people are atheists, or humanists or ???? and could feel left out.
- For those who have opted out of religious practice a liturgy may not be appropriate – except where experimentation might be offered as an optional workshop.
- Religious practice is inappropriate for the SOF network as a whole, though it may be appropriate for some of its members – thus any ritual/liturgy should be a separate workshop for members to opt in if they wish.

- How about opening with a common prayer ?
- I'm not in need of liturgy - a little ritual – SOF hanging and candle lighting etc is nice/OK (3)
- I don't think it is necessary but particularly at the National Conference I think it can have a useful place if it is original and well done, even if it is just lighting a candle
- In separate workshops/electives at Conference for those who wished to attend

6.2.1-3

PUBLICITY

With reference to publicity, respondents were asked to give:

Ideas for publicity for the Sea of Faith at the local level.

Ideas for publicity for the Sea of Faith at the national level.

Ideas for publicity for national Conference.

There were 145 suggestions for publicity at the local level, 107 for National level and 76 in relation to National Conference. However responses to the three questions varied little, with many people giving the same response to each question. I have therefore summarized them together. Where there has been specificity in relation to one or other area I have noted this.

The three questions

1. Assumed that publicity was appropriate or desirable for the Sea of Faith at local and national levels, and for the National Conference. However some respondents questioned this with comments such as:
 - I don't know much about publicity but does the Sea of Faith need to be publicized?
 - What is the purpose of publicity ? Is it to increase membership / influence?
 - The nature of the publicity depends on what you want to achieve and whom you see as your target audience.
 - Did Jesus, Buddha or Mohammed need to employ a team of marketing professionals?
 - I'm not really concerned if we grow or not. Lukewarm, somewhat negative.
 - Don't really want National Conference to be much bigger ?
 - Too easy to get fundamentalists spoiling the atmosphere of the group.
2. Led to two or three respondents questioning the costs and resources necessary for publicity

With regard to publicity for National Conference, some again questioned the assumption that National Conference should grow: e.g

- Presumably you mean in a bid to entice more interest from local groups ... can we cope with more attendees ?

Then apart from the one person who suggested:

- The best publicity in my view is to highlight each year the theme and keynote speakers and their titles for the national conference. Much more effective than explaining promoting the network and its title. We are what we do best. Taste and see.

most people assumed a target group and/or made suggestions as to how such groups might be approached:

- This should be promoted at the local level as well as nationally – with promotional material supplied from Nat. Committee to achieve some uniformity.
- Publicity only for lectures where non-members would be interested – Nat. Conf. is for members – not for publicity.
- Bringing locals to keynote speakers.
- Invitations to university students, especially those taking related courses.
- Radio interviews with main speakers – overseas phone if necessary, Invite church leaders to discuss theology issues.

Beyond these groups, there were large numbers of suggestions about publicity with many people making multiple suggestions. I have classified these as publicity through

1. Personal Invitaitaion
2. Professional Publicity and Branding
3. Print Media
4. Target groups or locations
5. Audio Visual material

PERSONAL INVITATION

In response to the questions about local and national level publicity the greatest number of members were clear that personal invitations, “one to one” communication or word of mouth would be most effective means of publicizing the Network and Conference (locally and Nationally). While some suggested personal invitation to “special” speakers or occasions would be ideal. Comments were generally not elaborated:

- Personal word of mouth - every member endeavor to recruit one new member.
- Concentrate on the personal approach – No proselytizing or PR.
- Newsletter is good for passing onto a friend.

PROFESSIONAL PUBLICITY AND BRANDING

A small group had clear ideas about professional publicity:

- Take every opportunity to stamp a brand image in local media and events, and (at national level in) appropriate opinion statements through the national media.
- Seek help from marketers and brand makers.
- Publicity Agent or Spokesperson.
- Have a programme for raising profile.

PRINT MEDIA

By far the greatest number of responses suggested some form of print media and there was little differentiation in terms of the level at which this might be used. In summary suggestions were:

NOTICES in the form of:

- Posters and flyers.
- Advertisements for the Sea of Faith – its purpose etc.
- Notices of local, regional national and conference meetings in particular featuring speakers.
- Occasional articles in local and free papers indicating topics of interest

It was suggested that such material should be

- Distributed by leaflet drop, be placed in libraries, art galleries, museums, local community notice boards, community houses, Citizen Advice Bureaus.
- Sent to appropriate groups such as:
U3A, Rotary, Probus, Toast masters. National Council of Women. U3a was seen as most appropriate, in particular as “a means to reach thinkers” or
- Published in local (particularly free local papers) and national newspapers and magazines as appropriate.

FEATURE ARTICLES, Editorials and reports of meetings and addresses to local and National Newspapers and magazines

Those suggested were

The Listener

This was suggested by the greatest number of people for articles etc but particularly in relation to The purpose of Sea of Faith at national level, and National conference:

- The Listener notice has brought people to the SOF. This could be expanded to give notice of conferences, local seminars etc.
- Even though paid ads in the Listener and Church papers seemed to produce little result, perhaps we should persist with them from time to time (But they do need a healthy bank balance)
- Listener advertising with a little more explanation.

Other magazines

Those suggested included :

- AA Directions and Heritage Magazine which have “notice boards”
- Literary magazines that appeal to better educated people e.g, NZ Listener, Historic Places Trust environmentally minded magazines
- Denominational and secular papers.
- North and South.
- The Investigator.
- Arts magazines.
- Environmentally focused publications.

TARGET GROUPS

Apart from “Brainy” “intelligent” “as target groups a small group suggested more approaches to:

- “Progressive” congregations to inform of (SOF) existence and contacts.
- Organizations not too dissimilar from ours.
- Churches and places of worship” Most of the large group who suggested churches or other places of worship as targets for publicity suggested that this could be done;
 - through denominational and secular papers,
 - using notices in church newsletters posters, pew sheets, notice boards, flyers brochures etc left in foyers etc, or handing to members of congregations If the churches could see us as people wanting to add to, rather than destroy – it seems we need to have the hierarchy/ministry more open minded- perhaps some significant questions and inviting them to speak at our meetings
- Students of University and high schools (after exams) asked to present “the world” they would like to live in – film word collage model etc

6.2.4

YOUNG PEOPLE

The final question was **How might The Sea of Faith appeal to a younger age group?**

Despite the fact that this was the final question, it was the subject that most exercised respondents. It elicited 127 generally complex responses which included a wide range of ideas, questions; and perceptions of the membership of the Sea of Faith and of "Youth".

The question and therefore responses, did not specify whether reference was to the National Network, Conference or local groups, and no attempt has been made to explore this here, though sometimes the reference is clear.

When considering "a younger age group" respondents had in mind a range of ages from school age to 55, which also influences the breadth of ideas introduced. Given a general feeling that activities of the Sea of Faith are of interest to "older" people, perhaps the most pragmatic of answers was "Wait for them to get older"

Although some people felt they were unable to answer to this question, and many gave specific suggestions about things that might be introduced to appeal to a younger age group, the largest proportion of respondents contrasted the characteristics and interests of the Sea of Faith members with those of "younger people". This then provided a basis for consideration of the appropriateness of such an appeal, or factors to be considered in thinking about approaching younger people. I have therefore classified the responses to this question in four groups.

1. I Don't Know - Ask Them
Those who stated that they didn't know and/or suggested we ask young people themselves.
2. Contrasting the Two Groups
Those who contrasted the characteristics of the members of the Sea of Faith and younger people and made suggestions about whether the Sea of Faith could, or should attempt to appeal to the latter group.
3. Appealing to a "Younger" Group
Here people introduced ideas of how to appeal to a younger age group, or ways in which Sea of Faith could be introduced to them.
4. Introducing the Sea of Faith to Younger People.

I DON'T KNOW - ASK THEM

Those who stated in various terms that they didn't know (8) wrote comments such as:

- I have no idea / Can't imagine / I'd love to know.
- I really don't know. (2)

However, a large group of respondents saw the most direct way of finding out how we might appeal to younger people was to ask them, or those close to them:

- We need to ask the younger people (6).
- Need to consult some younger people who are interested.
- Understand what they want need and deliver it.
- It is for them to determine that. If we want to attract younger people we should be talking to them.
- Perhaps establishing a youth (not a good word) an "under fifty fives" or such, to discuss questions such as "Why do we view this as important?" If this is no longer relevant, is there something else needed to expand or meet this previous need or idea or another maybe related to C21 need ?

- When I was young the SCM appealed to me and opened my mind to questions of faith. Maybe discussion with current SCM members might produce some worthwhile approaches to a younger age group (2).
- Find some young people (friends of family or people we know) and ask them what they would find appealing (I mean young people on a similar journey).
- Maybe ask younger people to answer this. Anthony Dodds may be helpful.
- Talk to youth clubs and ask the young what they think about SOF – what are they interested in?
- They must say what appeals to them.
- First consult with people in touch with youth and their interests and questions.
- Conduct some research i.e. ask them, invite some to a meeting, talk to schools etc.

CONTRASTING THE TWO GROUPS

Responses from those who contrasted the characteristics of the members of the Sea of Faith and younger people and made suggestions about whether the Sea of Faith could or should attempt to appeal to the latter group, have been summarized as:

1. The Characteristics of the Members of the Sea of Faith.
2. Perceptions of Younger People.
3. The Appropriateness of an Appeal to “Youth”
4. Establishing the Needs of Younger People.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE SEA OF FAITH

In considering an appeal to younger people a significant number of respondents gave their perceptions of the Sea of Faith and its members – generally as reasons for not considering such an appeal. These arose from the perception of individual and age related experience rather than recognition of the source of the Sea of Faith or its Statement of Purpose. Thus I have classified two groups:

1. Those that felt that a particular experience leads to membership of the Sea of Faith.
2. Those that saw membership of the Sea of Faith as an age related developmental experience.

Particular experience leads to membership of the Sea of Faith

Respondents in this group did not recall the source of the Sea of Faith in BBC series, but often more as a group for meeting the needs of a particular group of church “alumni” and thus, perhaps with a limited life and purpose. For example:

- I see the SOF as a network which was set up to cater for the needs of our age group who have grown up in the church but needed somewhere to rethink our theology – younger people probably do not fit in to that category.
- It doesn’t appeal because at the moment, most members have been through a “Church” experience, become dissatisfied and are seeking new groups – to explore their spiritual needs with like minded people – the young having not reached this point.
- May never appeal . It seems to suit those who have taken a journey of faith.
- The younger age group often has no church background to question.
- (It is necessary) Only if a younger group feel the need to explore as our age group did.
- Groups arise as a response to a contemporary need. They are organic. They fulfill a need and then they die. Think about Masons, RSA, Probus, Racing Clubs- without a purpose they die. Even churches die.

Membership of the Sea of Faith as an age related developmental experience:

Others believed that interest in the Sea of Faith were of interest or relevance to older or retired people.

- I'm not worried about this. (A younger membership) I feel that it is late middle age that the "Big Questions" become part of one's active consciousness – and this is the constituency of the Sea of Faith.
- Doubt it will. We seem to believe in a conservative way until reaching 40 plus and thinking how odd the 'supernatural' is and how impossible are some Christian claims.
- What do you mean by younger age groups? I don't think it would appeal to those under 50 years.
- We are not cast in the post modern mould.
- Is it not that we who have retired have time for exploring new ideas? - I think its suited better to retirement.
- We need to accept that religious issues are not so relevant to younger generations.
- My own observation would be that many younger folk may have 'discarded ' religion in their 20's but seek "something" again mid-life (often via a crisis in their lives) and sometimes rejoin the church ranks.
- Don't forget the aged body of supporters.

PERCEPTIONS OF YOUNGER PEOPLE

Here respondents introduced their perception of younger people into the discussion:

- Young people have a different understanding of "consciousness" because of their 'experiential" new age literature, music etc. The young philosopher on the street operates out of a new paradigm (cf Bradley's archaic logic) For them life is holistic not just intellectual.
- They have to have an enquiring mind, and the urge to explore and research current thinking on matters they are interested in.
- Still pondering this. Perhaps we should try to understand how and why the charismatic churches attract young folk and manage to keep so many young families. Then, we could consider how to present an alternative.
- Yes, if they aren't too busy confused, work oriented. Do they have the time?
- The wisdom of the young may not be so apparent, or scholastic at their stage.
- What faith options do young people have – church- alternative spiritual fringe- astrology/crystals vs secular reading (Dawkins) life coach, psychologist behavioural, mentoring, self improvement ?

THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THE SEA OF FAITH FOR YOUNGER PEOPLE

For many in the above groups these views seemed to lead to the questioning of the appropriateness of the Sea of Faith for younger people.

While one person appeared to feel that all efforts had been made –

- There is no other way.

and a second suggested that age was not necessarily a factor in to be considered -

- Good question - Religious doubt, I suspect, is dealt with by different age groups in different ways . 14 year olds are often sure there's nothing in religion. People who feel betrayed after life in a church, may also throw the whole things away. I think SOF has something to offer people for whom the important existential questions remain.

there were those who questioned whether attempting to appeal to a younger age group was appropriate or worthwhile:

- Should it ? Is it worth trying?

- Maybe the young don't need this - have other priorities.
- It won't. They'll come to it when they are ready.
- Perhaps establishing a youth (not a good word) an "under fifty fives" group or such, to discuss questions such as "Why do we view this as important?" If this is no longer relevant is there something else needed to expand or meet this previous need or idea or another maybe related to C21 need.
- Not worried about younger age group. Stop thinking we need to have eternal life and trying to achieve it by roping in younger members.
- Once the SOF becomes obsessed with this question it is in the same boat as the Church. The SOF aims and programme will attract the people who are ready to think at that level – it is not necessarily a matter of age.
- I'm not sure as I am not young anymore. I have to go with an old philosophy – seek and you shall find. If someone of any age is looking for answers and we have them then we shall always have new members.

APPEALING TO A YOUNGER AGE GROUP.

Here respondents considered the characteristics of the Sea of Faith network as a basis for an appeal to the latter group. These I classified as

1. The Ethos of the Sea of Faith
2. How Sea of Faith is Presented
3. The Breadth of Interest in the Sea of Faith

THE ETHOS OF THE SEA OF FAITH

While one person felt that the Sea of Faith has appeal

- I don't think that SOF needs to alter in any way to appeal to younger people – they just need to know about it .

others considered perceptions of the Sea of Faith, and what it might need to offer to attract younger people.

- I am in the younger age group. The people leaving churches today do so because of spiritual abuse, disillusionment, not being "used" in church - the needs are different. Can SOF meet those needs today? These folk are not "intellectual" but have social needs/where they don't feel threatened. They are still wanting prayer, though I would say.
- We would draw them like magnets if we were seen to be living enthusiastic, joyful, caring, compassionate fulfilled lives! We need to make ourselves irresistible Then there would be no need for "protocols for appealing to the young.
- We can teach only by example, the young will come only if they have already concluded that we have something worthwhile to offer.
- All are welcome. Your voice will be heard and your ideas respected. We are not grey haired fuddy duddies.
- Stressing our tolerance for other faiths and beliefs.
- Promote the therefores of our statement of purpose – they talk about what we do more than what we are – experience appeals.
- Promote our openness to all in the exploring of life issues.
- Look after the members you have got.
- Be more open and less stoggy.

HOW THE SEA OF FAITH IS PRESENTED

Here people thought about the activities and presentation of the Network, and made suggestions about how these could be extended. Their responses included:

- By promoting the network as a Quest.
- If we invite younger thinking people we must encourage them and give them quality materials to stimulate them – we should aim to recruit the best minds in the country.
- Publicise when a young speaker is engaged.
- Activities which engage body mind and spirit. Music of an appropriate age group.
- Work shopping style as in youth group at St Lukes – type of programme to be included in meetings in future. But the style of SOF.
- Be active in telling young people about our aims and to try and encourage a group of young people to come to the conference.
- A more proactive role for SOF would raise our profile and attract more members.
- Have Young SOF or Youth SOF.
- It may need a new name – faith conjures up church or other traditional religious practices. SOF as a group exploring all spiritual ideas.
- A new title that is not threatening.
- New groups possibly sponsored by an existing group. Self governing with the venue topics etc determined by the group i.e. fulfilling the needs of the group.
- Provide a forum for young folk to discuss things that really interest them.
- Find young leaders to form their own groups and support them with speakers and other resources if asked.
- Possibly by using young SOFers approach somehow – specific weekend or one day in bigger centres so not so expensive Alternate with w/end residential bi annual.

THE BREADTH OF INTEREST IN THE SEA OF FAITH

Several people considered that the breadth of interest and discussion in the Net work would hold more appeal if it was extended. The areas suggested were:

- The content needs to tap into the youth imagination.
- More challenging presentations from atheists/agnostics. Also looking at some of the scientific issues as they affect religious belief.
- Give them a venue for intellectual discussion.
- Younger people are more interested in current affairs and values reflected in current issues - the real world as they see it. We could well provide a discussion opportunity to back up their practical activities.
- More emphasis on progressive/radical theology and especially on interfaith issues – young people are interested in these topics.
- By discussing new ideas about religious subjects.
- Exploration of spiritual and mystical experiences.
- Better understanding of Christianity or need for the future of mankind and recognizing climate change and the world we live in or are likely to live in.
- Engage in social issues.
- Ways and means of “problem” solving – different attitudes.
- Get away from giving “old” words “new” meanings. The old ideas stink no matter what
- Arranging some form of interfaith dialogue and activity for young people might be a start.

INTRODUCING THE SEA OF FAITH

Many people made suggestions about how the Sea of Faith members might approach young people.

These included

1. Approaches by Network Members or Groups, or at Conference.
2. Approaches Through Advertising, Other Groups or the Use of Technology.

APPROACHES BY NETWORK MEMBERS OR GROUPS OR AT CONFERENCE.

Here respondents made suggestions that I have classified in three groups:

1. Personal Approaches
2. Approaches From Sea of Faith Groups
3. Conference
4. Approaches through Advertising, Other Groups or the Use of Technology

Personal Approaches

- By encouraging discourse with our children and grand-children and inviting them to join or perhaps setting up their own discussion – peer groups where they will feel comfortable.
- Publicity should attract the middle-aged and hopefully when they join they'll encourage their children. I personally joined through hearing about SOF through my mother.
- Again word of mouth particularly from younger members.
- Challenge to youth to bring others. Listen to their views and concerns.
- Once more word of mouth and knowing who we are, especially through Prof. Lloyd Geering's publications.
- Share what the SOF is about.
- Offering reading notes and reports from those who have attended.

Approaches From Sea of Faith Groups

Some people thought about how their local group might approach younger people:

- Raise topic at monthly local meetings and implement a plan.
- We could form a task group to make contact with disgruntled/ ex members of charismatic churches.
- Take opportunities to talk to clubs and groups about us our philosophies and music clubs sports clubs etc.
- By inviting groups of younger people to "visit" local SOF meetings.
- Local group could advertise that they are there for those going through questioning faith, disillusionment, rebound from fundamentalism etc. As a sympathetic forum – NOT another religious group.
- Provide low cost creche (3) (use host church)

Conference

A small number made comments about Conference

- Invite them to debate at Conference. SOF would have been a natural extension of SCM if it still existed. So perhaps a "scholarship" could be offered annually to each Religious Studies, World Religions Department for a student to attend Conference.
- Try to engage at least one young speaker.
- Lower costs (2)
- Broader range of accommodation.
- Accommodation perhaps on different levels.

Approaches Through Advertising, Other Groups or the Use of Technology

A considerable group made suggestions about how the Sea of Faith might first make contact with interested young people. They suggested approaching young people through

1. Advertising
2. Other Bodies.
3. Technology.

Advertising

- By adverts – stressing that the younger element would be made welcome and explain fully what SOF is all about and that there is no hard binding commitment.
- Clearly state our aims but in suitable language for younger people – perhaps more “hip” brochure.
- Advertise – local newspapers – some “what’s on “ are free.
- Often advert agencies will do freeby consultation for a worthwhile (to them) cause. Are any of our members in advertising?
- Use cartoons in newspapers and TV.
- Advertise and get some focus groups going. Reihana and young members could help find others to join a focus group Could found a focus group (or several 20-30, 30-40 etc) from children of SOF members.

Other Bodies Included

- i. Universities
- ii. Schools
- iii. Churches

Universities

- Needs to be more public awareness – polytechs, university – wherever there are younger people who want to think about things that make life meaningful – that there’s more to life than rugby.
- Advertising aimed at aim universities and polytechs- notice boards, debating clubs, student newspapers, SCM (2)
- Work with SCM groups at Universities.
- Invitations to university students, especially those taking related courses.
- Publishing at tertiary education level.
- Invite the younger groups in the organisation to submit articles to Newsletter. Uni Students. Polytech students, church youth Sports Clubs schools.

Schools

- Could the organisation participate in the religion in schools programme (2) (alternative to doctrinaire religious instruction.
- If younger people do not have a background/stepping off point – maybe social studies or history – building comparative religion and study of other cultures in our social curriculum would be useful – for teachers more skills.
- Also we should be proactive in requiring religious studies (as taught in the UK) in schools. Follow along the lines of the Rev. Sande Ramage has been using at her boys’ school.
- Maybe through school programmes, café forums.
- SoF people or lecture notes to be used in schools - possibly top classes (2)
- Offer interesting speakers to schools bible classes.

- High school debates with other schools over radio and within SOF.
- Target younger age group with copies of SOF Newsletter supplied to school libraries or National Library System

Churches

- The post Fundamentalist church younger family people would be a natural catchment.
- Use (liberal) churches as vehicle for publicity.

The Use of Media and Technology

- Get SOF web site set up to interest young people to give access to our archive.
- Use facebook (20-30) or even Bebo (teens to early 20s)
- Use of internet for chat rooms.
- Information about literature and web sites re a range of activities local and international – including activities of a social action nature.
- The younger group (mainly) will not know the literalistic bible stories – we should compile a set of reconstructed stories from a wide selection of faiths and publish them in a bright format and/or put them on DVD or tapes.
- Local channel TV
- Local radio

