



Living Spirituality Connections
Resources for the spiritual journey

Winter Newsletter 2017-18

This newsletter

Our first three items all relate to the need for a new shared story and the resources that can help us in this search. Two theologians then reflect on the meaning of Advent and the experience of Mary in participating in Christ's coming to our world.

Items follow on art responding to the refugee crisis; music and spirituality; and projects promoting peace-making and engaging children with ecological matters in church. The newsletter ends with a request for views on accrediting spiritual direction, and a new rendering of the Lord's Prayer which may stimulate new understandings.

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A contemporary rendering of the Lord's Prayer. New Zealand Prayer Book

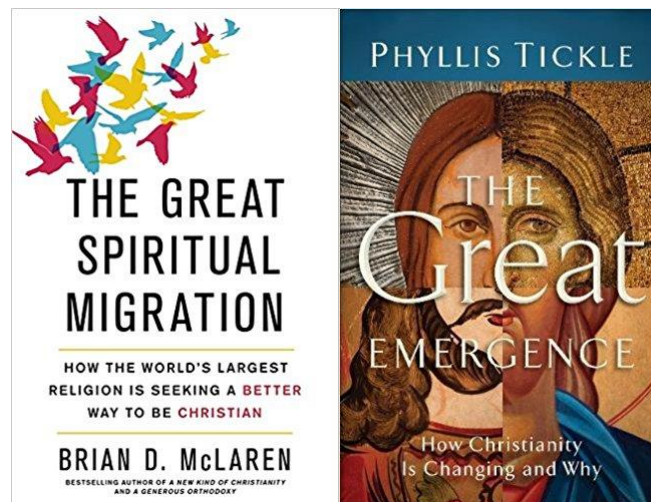
The Need for a New Shared Story – What resources can help us?

By **Petra Griffiths**

Introduction

At Living Spirituality Connections we have been considering the question of whether in practice there is an emerging church. In searching for indicators about this, much broader questions have come into view concerning our need within society for larger stories that work as unifying forces. Here we explore some resources that may be useful for those engaged in similar searches.

There are a number of books on the topic of the topic of emerging church, and leaders such as **Brian McLaren** and **Phyllis Tickle** in the USA are considered leaders in this field.



The overview book **Emerging Churches. Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures** by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger is considered one of most authoritative on the phenomenon of emerging church. In practice, we find this is very much a moveable feast, and many of the initiatives that have earlier on had a strong presence are no longer there when we seek them out online. However we have included recent pointers by Franciscan writer **Richard Rohr** on what he considers the essential aspects of **Emerging Church** as an article following on from this one. We should like to know what experience readers of this newsletter have of these questions.

On a broader front, there is much recognition of the need for a new shared story that can hold us together as a society, making the community strong – in the words of **Neil McGregor's** Radio 4 series **Living with the Gods**. You can't separate religion from life, he says: how people organise beliefs strengthens community. **"We need to**

construct a story that gives us all a shared place, in which we enact something together that shows we share a story.”

The full article on this topic touches on the work of Ursula King, the new universe story, Diarmuid O’Murchu, George Monbiot’s Restoration Story, and the ways in which Living Spirituality Connections is engaging with these themes through work on human flourishing in the context of earth flourishing, and through developing spiritual journeying groups. Click here to read the full article:

http://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/the_need_for_a_new_shared_story.pdf

Petra Griffiths is Coordinator of Living Spirituality Connections and the Journeying Together Group.

What is Conscious Evolution all About?

By Diarmuid O’Murchu



*“Homo sapiens, the first truly free species, is about to decommission natural selection, ... **Soon we must look deep within ourselves and decide what we wish to become.**”* Edward O. Wilson

Barbara Marx Hubbard, American futurist and visionary, was the first to coin the phrase *Conscious Evolution*. The word *evolution* is defined as a process of movement and continuous change, a period of growth or development in a certain direction, usually from a simpler state to one that is more complex and functional. Behind the complexities of Darwinian evolution is a simple process consisting of *growth, change and development*. We observe this process all around us in the natural world and also within ourselves as individual people.

Increasingly humans inhabit a planet saturated with information, generating a new quality of awareness, which in scientific and spiritual terms is described as *consciousness*. Evolution today (material and human) is driven by a hyper sense of awareness – hence the phrase, *conscious evolution*. It feels like we are in the process of outgrowing – or desiring to outgrow – the mechanistic power of what the Darwinians call *natural selection*. Where once we were at the mercy of our environment, now our environment is at our disposal to re-configure as we wish. Conscious evolution suggests that **humanity can choose advancement through co-operation and co-creation rather than self-destruction through separateness and competition.**

A New Evolutionary Threshold

Mankind is on the verge of an evolutionary leap in consciousness, to a whole new way of thinking and being that – for weal or for woe – **is changing our self-understanding and posing whole new questions on our inter-relationship with the web of life.** Up to this point, the forces of evolution were understood to be external to mankind, with humans as passive recipients rather than conscious participants.

In terms of self-perception, for long we have viewed ourselves as isolated individuals battling for survival, competing with alien forces from within and without, eking out identity through a specific family, ethnicity, religion, nation-state, over-against all others who also took their identity from the same foundational configuration. Individuality (ego-identity) defined the person, the tribe, the religion, the nation state. And the dominant paradigm was neatly encapsulated in the scientific dogma: “The whole equals the sum of the parts.”

Along came Quantum Physics, and the evolutionary consciousness of the 20th century, and seismic shifts not merely disturbed, but actually shattered, our ego-identity. Now we are being moved along by a new consciousness – subconsciously for the greater part – in a universe where: “The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.” It evokes a radically different set of perceptions and substantially new understandings of everything in our world. The “parts” are awakening to the power of the whole. Simply put, **we are now living through the birth pains of the planetary mind!**

See www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/d_o_murchu.pdf for the rest of this article, with sections on the kind of choices we need to make in order to evolve collectively towards a culture that is oriented to co-creative growth, the complexity of the choices that will be needed, and for suggestions for further reading on this topic.

Diarmuid O'Murchu, a member of the Sacred Heart Missionary Order, is a social psychologist most of whose working life has been in social ministry, predominantly in London, UK. In that capacity he has worked as a couple's counsellor, in bereavement work, AIDS-HIV counselling, and, in more recent times, with homeless people and refugees. He has worked worldwide, facilitating programmes on Adult Faith Development. Visit his website <http://www.diarmuid13.com/> to see the range of books Diarmuid has written.

What is the emerging church?

By **Richard Rohr OFM**

1. Reformation is the perpetual process of conversion that is needed by all individuals and institutions.
2. I believe the “emerging church” is a movement of the Holy Spirit. Movements are the energy-building stages of things, before they become monuments, museums, or machines.
3. The emerging church, a convergence of hopeful and liberating Christian themes, is happening on all continents, in all denominations, at all levels—and at a rather quick pace.
4. Emerging Christianity is both longing for and moving toward a way of following Jesus that has much more to do with *lifestyle* than with *belief*.
5. We cannot keep avoiding what Jesus actually emphasized and mandated. In this most urgent time, “it is the very love of Christ that now urges us” (2 Corinthians 5:14).
6. “If Christianity’s prime contribution to humanity can be shifted from teaching correct beliefs to practicing the way of love as Jesus taught, then our whole understanding and experience of the church could be transformed . . . [into] **a school of love.**” —Brian McLaren

The above points are Richard Rohr’s summary of the messages about the emerging church sent daily over the week 26 November - 1 December 2017 from the Center for Action and Contemplation. Many people find these email messages helpful in their daily lives.

You can subscribe for free at <https://cac.org/> and donations to CAC are welcome.

Richard Rohr OFM is a globally recognised ecumenical teacher bearing witness to the universal awakening within Christian mysticism and the Perennial Tradition. He is a Franciscan priest of the New Mexico Province and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Fr. Richard's teaching is grounded in the Franciscan alternative orthodoxy—practices of contemplation and self-emptying, expressing itself in radical compassion, particularly for the socially marginalised.

Was there a choice for Mary in the incarnation of Jesus?

by Rev Dr **Ivan Khovacs**



Luke's Gospel tells us that – in response to the angel's visit – Mary was “perplexed and wondered what sort of greeting this was?” Clearly, there's a lot that goes unsaid in this account of the virgin birth. And it's always raised the question for me: does Mary really have a choice?

When I read that “The angel said to Mary, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you’ ...” I can't help reading into it a power dynamic. Is this, as some modern scholars have argued, God forcing himself on the unsuspecting young Mary?

There are stories like that in Greek mythology. For example, when the god Zeus – disguised in the form of a bull or a swan – overpowers and impregnates young maidens. And they give birth to semi-divine offspring like Hercules or Perseus.

Is the incarnation and virgin birth Mary's #metoo moment, her “solidarity with the many women who have voiced in a hashtag their experiences of position and power wielded for sexual gratification against their dignity as women, their bodies, their being?”

The problem really is with that word overshadow: "... the power of the Most High will overshadow you." That's the part that bring me to ask whether there is choice for Mary in the story of incarnation? But is this what Jesus' virgin birth and incarnation are about? Are we looking at a Christian re-working of Greek mythology?

Well, thank God for the Church Times. And for the theologian and priest, Angela Tilby. She helps us put to rest any concerns that the story of the Virgin Birth is the story of a young woman overpowered and ravished into a divine sexual union as in the myths.

Tilby turns to Medieval art representing the angel's message to Mary in this passage. Specifically, Tilby directs our attention to the tradition of paintings portraying "an inscribed scroll, or a dove, or a beam of light pointing to Mary's head — and sometimes, directly to her ear." This was supposed to illustrate Christ's conception as the perfect union between God's spoken Word and Mary's gracious reception of that Word. Tilby writes: (in these traditional depictions) "Through Mary's ear, the divine Word entered, and dwelt secretly in her womb." And she adds that the idea of Christ's conception taking place — firstly — in Mary's hearing wasn't simply a case of early Christian squeamishness about sex and female bodies. It was, Tilby says, a deliberate attempt to put a clear distance between the story of Christ and ancient beliefs about gods producing offspring with humans.

Let's be absolutely clear about one thing: Jesus' birth is not the birth of a mythological figure, a hybrid, half human and half divine. The Gospel writers and early Christians claim something far more radical and unique about Jesus. They claim that Jesus is both/and, fully human and fully divine. But how they do this is striking, as today's reading in Luke's Gospel shows: they insist that God makes the birth of the Saviour wholly dependent on Mary's consent. To put it another way, they insist that Mary's hospitality, her Yes, becomes the condition of communion with the divine. So the mystery of the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth is exactly the opposite of the sexually-charged Greek god overpowering a young woman.

God does not coerce Mary, because love does not coerce! Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast. Love is not self-seeking. It does not dishonor others. It always protects, always trusts. (1 Cor 13).

We're familiar with that passage. And we might add: Love makes room for the other. Because it is in Mary's making room for the divine other — in her hearing and in her speaking her consent that she receives, conceives, and the Word becomes flesh! Love fully human and fully divine comes to dwell among us.

If this is a story of power, it must be the power of love, a love that constellates in Mary a fearless spirit that says YES in a dearth of certainty. Mary, staring into the abyss of the unknown, gives her everything: “let it be unto me according to God’s word.”

.... now we’re worlds away from sexualised Greek mythologies. We’re in the realm of grace: we’re in the realm of God’s favour, compassion and faith for humanity. We’re in the sphere of Mary’s yes, of her consent championing the cause of all humanity.

I wonder if we can see it as Mary’s womb, or perhaps, Mary’s heart, where God’s saving promise was first formed.

More to the point, can we see it as the heart of this church? Can we see it as the promises of God and the freedom of our YES to God coming together and forming in this church a destiny fully human and fully divine?

This article is an extract from the sermon on Luke 1.26-38, given on 24 December 2017 at St James’s Church Piccadilly.

Rev Dr **Ivan Khovacs**, is Senior Lecturer at the School of Humanities, Canterbury Christ Church University, teaching in the areas of Christian Doctrine, Systematic Theology and Theology & Literature, and overseeing teaching in Pastoral Theology. He is curate at St James’s Church Piccadilly.

Advent: A God who Becomes

By **Lisa Isherwood**



What are we to make of this time of year, Advent, when traditionally we are awaiting the birth of a child who will free us from sin, being the incarnation of God? Does it become a redundant story?

I would suggest not, under the weight of new theological thinking arising from feminist and cosmological thought it has a powerful but altered message. Catherine Keller wishes us to take our cosmic beginnings in the void and the deep as starting points and from there to realise that our true home is not some metaphysical heaven but rather this earthy material of which we are made, the very dust of the cosmos itself. This is the pre-existent material over which Elohim (one of the words used for God in the Hebrew scriptures) breathed and from which everything, all life, became enlivened and entered into dialogue with all else including Elohim. **There is no removed, all powerful God commanding creation** in Keller's telling or in fact in the new cosmology AND significantly not in the 'P'/Elohim (priestly) strand of Genesis.

Elohim can be read as totally eco-centric, as part of the energy that is All in All as we also read in 1 Corinthians. This is not a God of distance and separation but of 'being within being', a God who 'becomes' along with the created order itself. This for Keller shows how incarnation is not a singular event attached only to the body of Jesus but rather the rule of creation, the ever unfolding and risky business of living abundant life. Yes, this is a god of process theology but I would argue that the new cosmology demands such a god if Christianity is to remain relevant. For those who would say the truth should not be sacrificed to science the answer seems to be that process is within both testaments and therefore can be understood as relevant and embedded in our guiding myth.

Why do I say myth? Because for me much more is offered to us as people of the story than people of dualistic fixed metaphysics.

So **Advent within this theology** should perhaps not be a waiting for the birth of one person but rather **a celebration of all life, carrying as it does the divine image**, an image that wishes to be glorious and vivid, varied and magnificent. So why not be risky and embody the Christ you believe in and are waiting for? And of course celebrate it too in all animate and inanimate subjects with which you also share this season.

First published December 2017 in the newsletter of the Institute for Theological Partnerships.

Professor **Lisa Isherwood**, FRSA, is Director, Institute for Theological Partnerships, University of Winchester.

SUSPENDED

An art installation by **Arabella Dorman**



This new installation sitting high above the nave invites the viewer to embark upon their own spiritual journey, while a suspended interplay of light, form and shadows reflects the uncertain, rootless and volatile experience of life as a refugee.

Fragmenting from the centre out in a carefully conceived installation, hundreds of salvaged items of clothing (adult and infant, male and female) are suspended by wire and invisible thread from a light scaffold structure. This artwork which provokes many different responses from visitors, has received worldwide media coverage.

Ivan Khovacs (see item 4) commented “I’ve been spending a bit of time with Arabella Dorman’s installation ... SUSPENDED ... these pieces of clothing discarded by refugees fleeing for their lives; recovered from people who’ve had to leave everything behind. I’ve been trying to see it from different angles. Trying to imagine how other people will see it; what others would make of it as a focus of prayer in our church. Someone described it as a chandelier: you can see that, something shedding light on refugees and asylum seekers.”

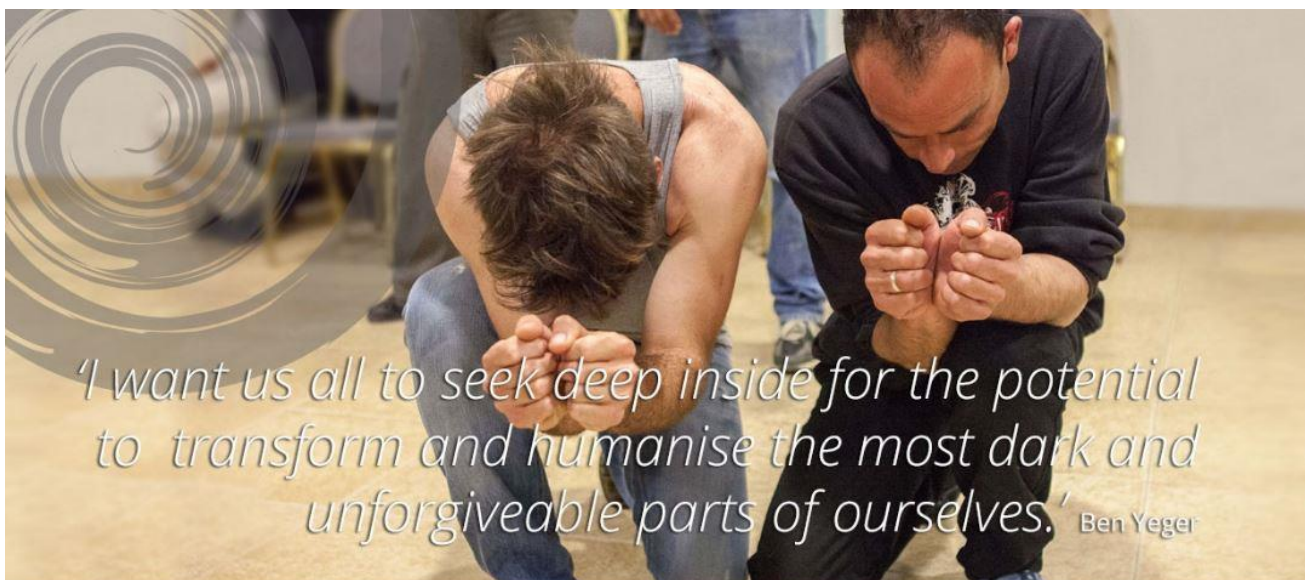
All the clothes used in this installation have been collected from the beaches and roadsides of Lesbos, by volunteers working with The Starfish Foundation <http://www.asterias-starfish.org/en>, a grassroots group formed in response to the growing need for coordinated refugee support in Lesbos. SUSPENDED will be raising funds to support the ongoing but often forgotten work that Starfish carries out in the face of what Pope Francis has called the “globalisation of indifference”.

To see details of events connected to this installation, ending on 8 February, go to: <http://www.sjp.org.uk/suspended-events.html>

Arabella Dorman, is an internationally renowned British portrait painter and war artist whose work hangs in high profile institutions and collections around the world. Arabella’s conflict art is drawn from first-hand experience of working with British forces in Southern Iraq (2006), Afghanistan (2009 – 2014) and more recently, with refugees in Lesbos, Calais & Dunkirk (2015 - 2016). <http://www.arabelladorman.com/>

Ben Yeger’s approach to peace-making in the Middle East

By Judy Clinton



I always gain so much from the Spirit of Peace evenings at the Friendship Cafe in Gloucester. Over the years that this event has run, a fraternity has built amongst those who attend (a shifting population though it is) which carries an energy of great hope and possibility.

As well as eating wonderful food provided through a shared meal, and catching up with others on a similar wavelength, we were blessed by a most profound talk by a former Israeli soldier, Ben Yeger. He told the moving story of how he came to see that **there are no 'Us and Them', no 'Enemy', but simply, US**. The epiphany for him was when he found himself pointing his gun, at point-blank range, at a Palestinian prisoner whom he was guarding in a transit vehicle. He was instructed to shoot this man dead if he were to try to escape or became violent. Seeing the terrified state of this fellow human being, Ben knew that if he were to shoot him, he would also kill his own humanity. Mercifully, he did not have to shoot him and it led to Ben leaving the army and to him becoming a Combatant for Peace (now the European representative for the organisation), along with other Israeli former soldiers *and*, even more impressively, with Palestinians of the same persuasion.

The talk was about Ben's personal journey and the work that is going on in Israel and Palestine in the direction of peace. It is painstaking, difficult, risky and slow work. I was filled with admiration for the courage and determination of those involved.

The focus was on Israel and Palestine, but the message was more universal than that. Who are our personal 'them'? Ben was keen to stress the importance of our own inner work in recognising how we all make 'them' out of other people. We need to become aware of this dynamic, question it, and work to overcome it. He was also keen to say that everyone is at the particular stage that they are in this regard and that we are in a process of change that cannot happen overnight.

It is daunting to know what an enormous and profound work this is. But it is also inspiring to see such wonderful efforts being made in the direction of peace and to know that we can make a significant contribution by who we become in our own lives, day by day.

Judy Clinton is a freelance writer and supporter of Spirit of Peace
<http://www.spiritofpeace.co.uk>

Ben Yeger is Director of Moving Conflicts, Israeli ex combatant, UK Rep of Combatant for Peace, State registered Drama Therapist, Group facilitator and Movement Medicine facilitator. His website is: <http://movingconflicts.org/>

Eco Church: engaging children

Streetly Methodist Church (Sutton Coldfield)

Over 700 churches from all denominations across the UK have signed up to be part of the Eco Church scheme. One example is this project involving children at Streetly Methodist Church, whose mission is: "*Faithful Friends to the Community. Caring for God's Creation.*"

They write in their newsletter: "As often as possible all the children will spend some time in our award-winning Eco Garden. Our older children help plan the garden with the adults and can be seen sowing and watering during the week too. They write the diary which contributes to our entry into the RHS 'It's your Neighbourhood Scheme'.



There is great potential for bible teaching based on watching plants grow and learning about caring for our planet and the people who live on it. At the end of most Sunday services we are treated to children's tales of time spent in the Eco Garden, Sometimes we're shown wonderful crops of yellow courgettes, or purple beans. Other days we hear about their examination of slugs and snails under the magnifying glass." This year's Eco Festival focuses on trees and is sponsored by <https://treecharter.uk/>. We are gathering 500 signatures to promote their ideals of protecting and cherishing UK woodlands – for every signature a tree will be planted.



Grow forests of opportunity and innovation

To get in touch with Eco Church go to: <https://ecochurch.arochoa.org.uk/>

Music and Spirituality

Tavener Centre for Music and Spirituality



The second Music and Spirituality Study Day at the Tavener Centre was held on November 10th at the University of Winchester. It started with a remembrance service, in which his anthem *Mother of God here I stand* was sung. Rev Professor June Boyce-Tillman talked about **The interface between spirituality and music – the musical journey of Sir John Tavener**. This performative lecture explored the spiritual journey of John Tavener in his own words, exploring how his theology interfaced with the construction of his compositions.

Amongst many interesting contributions, Dr Helena Kettleborough's talk *Exploring a sacred cosmos through music*, looked at how latest research into the populations of species of vertebrates reveals an alarming decline in numbers, and suggested that humanity only has a window of twenty to thirty years to take meaningful action on biodiversity loss. She noted how it is seemingly hard for humanity to take action, however, as the ever increasing number of challenges hides the species which are fading away in far-off places not in our increasingly urban environments. American philosopher Thomas Berry suggests that we see the Universe or Cosmos as Sacred and that we have a duty to protect and cherish Planet Earth as a sacred place. Such notions of sacredness and spirituality offer a sense of hope that humanity can change our thinking, but how do we see the world anew as sacred?

Her paper explored this question through examining how music can help us get closer to the idea of a sacred universe. In the presentation, Thomas Berry's ideas of a sacred universe were examined from some of his writings, followed by reflections on how such ideas can be conveyed through music. The medium of two pieces of music were used as a spark for discussion and reflection.

Participants were asked to reflect on and share with each other how the idea of a sacred universe or cosmos can be better understood through music. Two pieces of music and visual inspiration were proposed as the sources of reflection, and videos of these were played.

1. Carl Sagan's Pale Blue Dot: www.youtube.com/watch?v=wupToqz1e2g
2. The Hooded Grebe Courtship Dance:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hoL93tEkrM

The Living Spirituality Connections special interest area on Music and Spirituality, coordinated by June Boyce-Tillman, can be joined at:
<http://www.livingspirit.org.uk/sia/music-and-spirituality/>

For information on the **Tavener Centre for Music and Spirituality**, email holly.pye@winchester.ac.uk. This year's Tavener Centre study day is on Friday 18 November.

Spiritual Direction – a Question of Accreditation?

A new project has been launched exploring a possible pathway for accreditation of spiritual directors in England, Scotland and Wales. We welcome views, comments and suggestions in the coming months from both directors and directees.

Bringing together Lynette Harborne's doctoral research into spiritual direction, supervision and best practice and Elizabeth White's interest in accountability, how practice develops following training, stewarding the gifts of the Spirit, and the ways people find a suitable spiritual director, we are inviting people to explore accreditation by coming to a consultation meeting. A national accreditation pathway may be a development alongside existing regional codes of conduct and could include a move towards a new organisation to support best practice. Whatever your viewpoint, be part of the discussion!

Consultation meetings are being held in various regions in 2018, including **York** on 3 February, **Edinburgh** on 3 March and **London** on 28 April (please check the website for updates to the details) to which all practising directors are invited. Events are free but please book early to secure a seat! An online survey will also be available for those giving *or receiving* spiritual direction.

For more background and information about the project visit www.reflectivespaces.org.uk/consultation where you can sign up for ongoing news.

Email and phone contacts:

Elizabeth reflectivespaces@yahoo.co.uk and Lynette 01844 343 442.

Contemporary rendering of the Lord's Prayer

New Zealand Prayer Book

Eternal Spirit

Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be.

Father and Mother of us all.

Loving God, in whom is heaven,
The hallowing of your name echoes through the universe.

The way of your justice be followed by the peoples
Of the Earth!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

Your commonwealth of peace and freedom
Sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and rest, spare us
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
Now and forever.