

Are you in Regular Fellowship with a Faith Community? Genevieve Milnes

Post-modernism has impacted the way that people meet or don't meet in traditional church and fellowship structures. One of the prerequisites for CCAA is that counsellors applying for membership be in regular fellowship with a faith community. In thinking about this I have pondered on my own experience in churches and faith groups and wondered whether this is a realistic requirement?

I grew up as an Anglican in country Western Australia and well remember my confirmation as a twelve year old by the Bishop of Bunbury in the little community church where I also attended Christian Endeavour, Youth Group and Sunday School. Attending church was a straightforward thing in those days. Every Sunday come rain or shine we would be there kneeling in the front row and listening to organ 'preludes' on the manual organ which sounded more like an ancient Chinese blowing machine due to the pedal action of the organ and the arthritic fingers of the faithful organist!

Times have changed. I returned from the mission field in 1992 depressed and exhausted from spiritual and physical warfare with the demons over Latin America and with the leadership of our mission agency. Seated once again in a safe little church in Belmont Western Australia I had a revelation that the same type of demonic forces were also at work in that little church! I observed the subjugation of women and the physical warfare waging in the leadership, all the control issues I had identified in a far-away country were here in my church and I was appalled and disillusioned. I stepped back. I had to. By attending a church like this, my local church, I was silently agreeing to the abuses that raged. I was exhausted and overwhelmed. I didn't want to stand up and renounce the abuses – I wanted to go home and lie down. So I did.

Every Sunday morning for the next two years I slept in or got up at the break of day and went to the markets. Slowly I began to recuperate, slowly I formed a new relationship with my God who was no longer male or spoke in King James English. It was refreshing and exciting. Everything I had believed in was up for re-assessment. In those two years I learned more about being Jesus to others, more about faith - believing despite the fact that I could not see or feel God at all. I didn't have to stretch out my hands above my head or listen to circular bland 'musical' compositions to induce me into a compliant state. I grew strong. I realised that I had left Christian City and that God had taken me on a lonely pilgrimage in which he/she was saying, 'Genevieve you are unique. I want you out there – don't be sucked in to mediocrity and passivity. I want you to love me with all your heart, your mind, your soul and your strength'. When I looked at the church structures I realised I couldn't do what God wanted me to do while staying in the mainstream.

So what did I do? After two years of doing nothing with church I attached myself to a little fellowship close to my suburb that was in need ofeverything! A pastoral team of five was formed to give some direction to the other 15 members. After a year the temptation was there for the little old ladies in the fellowship to 'call a man'(!) which we resisted at all costs. Our Sunday morning 'services' became a wonderful opportunity to express ourselves artistically in response to God's word. Albeit, I was back in fellowship. All was right with the world. I could now speak more audibly at CCAA meetings about my 'fellowship' with other Christians.

But what about those who don't 'belong' to a fellowship? Whose journey with Christ had led them to remote and lonely places away from other Christians, whose stomachs churn at the thought of attending so-called 'worship' services or supporting the empires of men or women pastors and ministers? What does all this mean in terms of membership with CCAA? I can't sit in judgement on you. I don't know how God is leading you or how you are responding unless you tell me. Maybe an account of your journeying in fellowship with others would help the committee understand your faith viewpoint. So when it comes to getting a reference from a church leader we are open to understanding your walk with God and the particular, personal way God is leading you. Just communicate and tell us if you have a dilemma. Hopefully we can put 'fellowship' into a wider understanding in terms of Kingdom availability.