**New Religious Movements (NRMs) and Alternative Spiritualities**

**General Features of NRMs**

* 4,000-5,000 currently active in the UK
* Huge rise in religious groups, networks, affiliations, practices and therapies
* Driven and spread by online ease of access
* Problems in knowing what is happening at any one moment – fast change, adaptable
* Identification of niches opening up in decline
* Established NRMs, reinvention of old narratives, money
* Fake religion

**Aspects of Contemporary Spirituality:** **what do people want?**

* control
* meaning; happiness
* feeling good about self and body
* purchasing; short termism
* pick and mix

**Drivers in Contemporary Society**

* Individualisation
* Post-materialism
* Globalisation
* Conceptual diversity

**Some common themes in the search for Alternative Spirituality**

* Anxiety – need for calm, ASMR, mindfulness etc
* Theodicy questions – why do bad things happen to good people – who is in charge?
* Demons and deliverance ministry
* Popular culture – zombies, heaven and hell, angels, superheroes etc
* Eco-spirituality – caring for creation



**Our response**

* Knowledge and information – being ahead of the game.
* Pastoral care, safeguarding, theological robustness
* Mechanisms for engaging with alternative spirituality
* Alternatives: people DO come with ‘what have you got?’

**Some principles for engagement with NRMs**

* *Clarity*: Be clear about your own faith and the teachings and practice of your faith.
* *Knowledge*: obtain up to date accurate information about the groups you engage with and be ready to hear people’s own stories about their beliefs and practices
* *Confidence*: confidence in your faith enables friendship, engagement and faith sharing as well as any necessary challenge.
* *Honesty*: be honest about your own spiritual journey and any gaps or confusions in your own theological understanding.
* *Humility*: remember that your faith was once ‘new’ and may have been tested in the same way as NRMs are tested today.
* *Empathy*: Christians and other world faiths have often been persecuted, misunderstood and vilified as some NRMs are today.
* *Reserve outright judgement*: look for evidence of God’s work in others. Do not try to second guess what God is doing.
* *Vigilance*: be aware of false claims which could harm others. Be cautious and wary but not hostile.
* *Charity*: provide care and help for those who may have suffered through contact with NRMs, including families who have other family members in NRMs.
* *Discernment*: use discretion to find out what a group wants and how it behaves.

**Resources:**

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Information on major groups and movements

Information on use of Christian space (halls, chapels)

Information on nrms and canon law

Information on nrm policy in the Church of England

Guidance for families where someone has joined a movement

Guidance on advertisements

Engaging with spiritualities outside the Church: *Sense Making Faith, body, spirit, journey* CTBI 2007

Contact Anne Richards if you want to talk to a diocesan nrm adviser or expert in a particular nrm

**INFORM**

inform@kcl.ac.uk

Website [www.inform.ac](http://www.inform.ac)

Up to date information on groups in the UK and abroad

Eileen Barker *New Religious Movements, a general introduction* HMSO books

David V Barrett, *The New Believers:* *Sects, Cults and New Religions*, Cassell 2001

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