



Warning signs of spiritual abuse

Faith communities can also hinder or negatively impact our faith. Sometimes, the beliefs or practices of a community can cause hurt and anxiety, or are used to control. This is called spiritual abuse.

Warning signs to look out for:

- Does the community discourage living and interacting with people outside their particular faith community?
- Does the community discourage asking questions and expressing doubts?
- Are you feeling guilty if you have to miss a meeting to take care of other obligations?
- Is the group claiming to be the only one with the "right" answers?
- Is the community putting down other churches, social or political groups?
- Is the community insisting on obedience to the leadership?
- Are you feeling pressured to give money or time beyond your means?
- Are you hiding parts of your identity or being told you need to change parts of your identity to be fully welcomed?

If you suspect you might be in a situation that is unsafe spiritually, physically, emotionally or mentally and are unsure what to do you can contact the chaplains.

University: chaplains@otago.ac.nz

Polytechnic: chaplain@op.ac.nz

Finding Christian community

Belonging to community is at the heart of Christian faith. Through community we meet God, find a sense of belonging, receive support and encouragement in our faith, and are challenged to look beyond ourselves.

It can be hard to know where to begin when looking for a faith community. There are many different communities representing all sorts of flavours, styles, demographics, and theological positions. Some of them can be found here:

<https://otago-ccg.nz/>

Looking for good signs

No faith community is perfect, but you can look for signs that the community you are a part of is nurturing your spiritual growth, such as:

- You're finding connection with new people
- You're encountering God in new ways
- You're learning new things and new perspectives from the Bible and conversation with people
- You feel comfortable engaging in conversation even if you're unsure or disagree with what someone is saying
- You're excited to invite a friend to join you
- The leaders are interested in other areas of your life outside of your involvement with the community
- You're being encouraged to engage your faith in new ways (ie. social justice issues, opportunities to serve etc.)

Looking for community?

Some things to consider

- **What is important to you?**

Music? Preaching? Community? Other people your age? Coming up with a list of important factors can be helpful. You may not find a community that ticks all the boxes, but you may clarify what's really important to you.

- **What might you have to offer to a community?**

Often our first question is, what's in it for me? Instead, it is worth asking, what do I have to offer in this community? Sometimes we may choose to belong to a place that is less comfortable because we want to help a community to grow.

- **Is there room for you to be challenged and to grow in your faith?** Finding a community that simply reflects what we already believe can be comfortable and affirming. But it is also important to be challenged and deepened in our faith.

- **How well does the community align with your own personal faith?** It can help to sit down the minister/pastor/leader to ask where the community sits on particular issues that are important to you.

- **What level of commitment are you looking for?**

Some communities expect a high level of commitment. Others will be very hands-off and allow you to take initiative. Both have their pros and cons. On the one hand, it can be good to be challenged. On the other hand, it's important to protect your time and wellbeing.

Visit otago.ac.nz/chaplain for more information.

For many Christians, finding lifegiving community is vital. But it can be hard to know where to begin to look. The chaplains at Otago are available to help and can work with you to find community that nourishes you on your faith journey.

Contact us:

University: chaplains@otago.ac.nz

Polytechnic: chaplain@op.ac.nz



campus chaplains

Finding lifegiving community

What to consider when looking for Christian community during your time at Otago

otago.ac.nz/chaplain