



Centre Membership



THE CENTRE

The Independent Church
of Australia

The Independent Church
in New Zealand

Het Esoterisch Christelijk
Centrum

This brochure has been prepared for people who are attracted to the life of The Centre and interested in becoming members. The Centre is known as The Independent Church of Australia, The Independent Church in New Zealand and Het Esoterisch Christelijk Centrum in The Netherlands.

Membership is open to people over the age of fourteen whose applications are approved by the Meriti. Those seeking membership require a willingness to live in accordance with the ideals of The Centre and to be part of The Centre community, both locally and globally.

Generally speaking, a person attends The Centre for some time before the decision to become a

member is inwardly confirmed. In this time, prospective members have an opportunity to come to know our style of teaching, our worship and liturgies and our philosophy and approach to life, and to develop a realistic appreciation of The Centre and its people.

At The Centre we value thoughtful and clear decision-making, so we encourage you to think carefully about your response to what is presented in this brochure. If after reading this you decide that you want to become a part of our Centre community, please contact the leader of your local community or Centre headquarters.

BECOMING A MEMBER of The Centre is not a decision to be taken lightly. It indicates a willingness to enter into a covenant with God and The Centre, to follow the teachings of The Centre and through those teachings become an enlightened person who can perceive Christ within self, others and in the universe.

Membership is a dynamic commitment and responsibility for the individual who accepts it. It is expressed wherever a member is and in whatever situation they face, moment by moment.

It is living and vital, unconfined by space and time. It is lived out in response to the local Centre community, other Centre groups and individual Centre members, as they too express themselves in their life and work.

From this it is clear that much is required of individuals who become members, with a clear starting point being an understanding of and commitment to the philosophy and purposes of The Centre.

The Centre's Philosophy and Purposes

The Centre was founded in Australia in 1969. Our message is 'Christ is in you, the hope of glory!' and our purpose is to set people free.

This purpose is worked out through a dedication to bringing the spiritual teachings alive within us; through praying, meditating and working so that the life of Christ, which exists as a seed within us, is nurtured and grows into maturity.

We believe that the final goal of humanity is perfection and wholeness and that the fulfilled, balanced human being is the most potent, free being in the universe. To become free is a process which involves the whole person and the whole of their life; the heart, the head and the hands; the body, the soul and the spirit; the heavens and the earth.

In our Centre we seek to harmonise and unify all these areas in order to create a lifestyle which is in accord with the vision of what human beings can be. We call this our healing ministry and it

is expressed through four key areas:

- ◆ Worship and devotion
- ◆ Study and learning
- ◆ Fellowship and working with others
- ◆ Creative self-expression

These are the cornerstones of our spiritual community and the means by which we come to know ourselves as evolving spiritual beings with a unique destiny to fulfill.

STUDY AND LEARNING

Left: A workshop at the Centre community, Melbourne, Australia

Right: Active engagement in learning, Esoterisch Christelijk Centrum, the Netherlands





Left: Founders, Rev Mario Schoenmaker 1929-1997 (L) and Rev Colin Read 1944-1999 (R). Mario held the office of Meritus 1975-1997, and Colin 1986-1999.

Right: Current Meriti (The Centre's spiritual leaders), Rev Robert John (L) and Rev Antoinette Schoenmaker (R). Antoinette was elevated to the office of Meritus 6 August 1995, and Robert 25 February 2006.

Our Affirmation

The principles underlying our philosophy are embodied in our Affirmation, which every member holds in common. This Affirmation is said at every Cosmic Mass and by it we affirm the spiritual basis on which our lives are built.

*We know
that the dweller
in the innermost spiritual sanctum
of a human being,
which is the real self,
is of the same essence
as that spiritual reality
which we call God,
which is within, beyond
and behind the universe.
We know
that the nature of this ultimate
reality,
unknowable to the intellect
but knowable to the heart, is love;
We know
that perfect justice rules the world;
that all God's children will one day
reach his feet;
We know
that God was manifest
in the Lord Jesus Christ
reconciling the world unto himself.*

There are five major principles inherent within our Affirmation.

1. Our Real Self is divine.

We know that the dweller in the innermost spiritual sanctum of a human being which is the real self, is of the same essence as that spiritual reality which we call God.

We recognise that we are created in the image and likeness of God, that our origin is in God and our real self is therefore divine. We also acknowledge that at this stage of our journey we are imperfect and incomplete and that the image of God is only dimly seen within us. Nevertheless we recognise that the reality of that image of God is always there and we actively work toward the time when Christ will be perfectly manifested in us.

We recognise that the spirit in us is immortal and although we live now in a particular body under particular circumstances, our spirit has existed from eternity and will exist to eternity. As we journey through time, our soul is able to take within itself more and more of that immortality and express more and more of that divinity.

2. God's nature is revealed to us as love.

We know that the nature of this ultimate reality is love.

This is to know that whatever the outer circumstances of our lives or the lives of others may be, these are the results of love. This may mean that we have to change our view of what love is, for God's love is not sentimental. It is a strong love that wills only our ultimate good and therefore does not protect us from those experiences that we need in order to grow and for which we came into incarnation. To know this is a revelation to the heart rather than to the mind.

Since we are made in the image and likeness of God, since Christ dwells within us, it follows that we too are love beings. As we recognise this love within the universe, we recognise it within ourselves and can express it to others. The outcome of the divine life in us is this: 'Love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God' (1 John 4:7).

3. What happens in the world is the result of the unchanging laws of the universe.

We know that perfect justice rules the world.

If we were able to see from the viewpoint of eternity, we would see the chain of cause and effect that has brought certain things to pass

in our lives and the lives of others, and we would see that justice and love go hand in hand. What we now reap is the result of what we have done in this life and in previous lives. This is sometimes referred to as the law of karma or, in the words of St Paul, 'Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap' (Gal 6:7).

The whole movement of the universe is towards the perfect expression of the divine in humanity ...

The effect of this realisation is to view the experiences that now come to us as essential for our balancing and growth in spiritual development. It is to know that all things work together for good. It is to know that nothing is ever lost. It is to know that our thoughts, words and actions in the present are the seeds of future lives. In short it is to take responsibility for all that we now are and will be.

4. Evolution is the process by which we progress until we emerge into the fullness of our destiny as children of God.

All God's children will one day reach his feet.

The whole movement of the universe is towards the perfect expression of the divine in humanity. We choose to work actively with this movement of life by becoming aware of what is progressive, forward-moving and uniting. The goal of our development is to fully express our divine nature, the Christ in us. At different times in world evolution this has meant different things, as our capacity evolves and grows. At this stage of our evolution, to express the I AMness (the spiritual individuality) of Christ means:

- ◆ Being in control of our emotions and using our feelings for the benefit of others.
- ◆ Becoming conscious and responsible for our thinking and using it creatively.
- ◆ Discerning negative, sentimental and stultifying forces and transforming them into good.
- ◆ An awareness that we are co-creators and co-redeemers of this earth, responsible for the spiritualising of this earth and the kingdoms of nature below us.
- ◆ An awareness that we are citizens of the heavens as well as citizens of the earth, that we are surrounded by a host of spiritual beings, and that what we do 'below' has an effect 'above'.

5. In Jesus Christ, we see the divine fully expressed within human life.

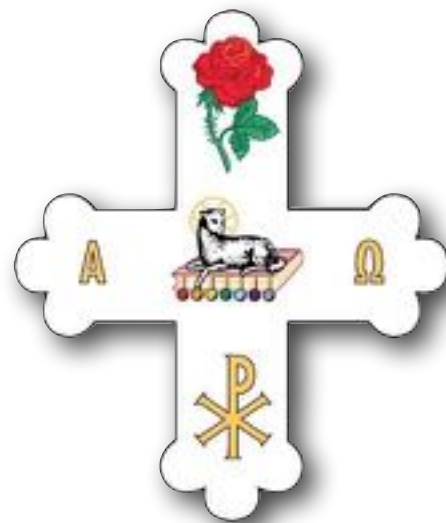
We know that God was manifest in the Lord Jesus Christ reconciling the world unto himself.

The Centre is Christ-oriented. In Jesus Christ we see a picture of the Son of God in human form and the power to realise this sonship in ourselves. We know that through

his death the course of world evolution altered irrevocably.

We recognise the validity of all religions as spiritual paths and philosophies. We see also that through Jesus Christ a new force entered into the earth which gave us the power to realise our spiritual identity and so walk a spiritual path.

Therefore we seek by many means to know Christ, to love him and to honour his presence within ourselves and each other. One way in which this relationship with the inner and outer Christ is developed is through the celebration of the Mass – the sacrament given by Christ for remembrance. Each member is encouraged to attend the Cosmic Mass and also to celebrate a private Eucharist for themselves.



The Centre Symbol

This path of self transformation is embodied in our symbol, the mystic cross. This symbolises victory and spiritual beauty, so it does not include a crucifix or calvary cross.

The vertical column represents the world of spirit, infinity and eternity, and the horizontal column the world of matter, time and

space, as we are beings who belong to both dimensions.

The ancient Greek symbol PX at the foot of the cross represents our first step towards transformation. It stands for our realisation that 'Christ is King'.

The sealed book represents our body. It is sealed with seven seals which are our potential powers, as yet dormant or unfulfilled. Esoteric tradition speaks of them as the seven spiritual centres which on the physical level are linked with the glands of the endocrine system. Only when these centres are fully opened will we transform our physical bodies.

The lamb seated on the book represents the Christ within us who is the guardian of the seven seals. It is only through his power within us that the book can be opened and we can understand and express our true nature and place within creation.

The alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the ancient Greek alphabet. Placed on the horizontal bar of the cross, they symbolise that it is within the span of our earthly life that this work must be carried out, so that we may live not only in the dimension of time and space but also in eternity.

The rose represents the perfected, fully realised human being. It is the result of the process of moving from acknowledgement of the supremacy of Christ within, through the opening of the spiritual centres, to the point where the real self is revealed like a rose.



**FELLOWSHIP
& WORKING
WITH
OTHERS**

**Priests' and
members'
lunch during
the annual
Priest
Conclave**

Responsibilities of Membership

A member is someone who chooses to be actively involved in living out this philosophy and who makes a public commitment to the life and work of The Centre. Members can be likened to the physical body of The Centre; wherever a member is, he or she is a visible expression of the power of Christ to set people free.

All members are required to uphold the philosophy of The Centre and are asked to wear a Centre cross, embodying this philosophy.

A member is actively involved in living out the teachings of The Centre and in enlarging their knowledge through devotion, participation in the sacraments, study and creative activity. Wherever possible the spirit of fellowship will be demonstrated through active participation and co-operative interchange with other Centre members in the Mass and other Centre activities. Thoughtfulness and awareness are marks of a Centrite, and this applies to other members as well as to all those we meet in our everyday lives.

A member pledges to share in the work of maintaining and

building the life of The Centre. This is done through their presence at services and other activities, as well as upholding The Centre in their prayers and private devotions.

Members are also required to support The Centre financially as well as making time to help in practical ways.

The responsibilities of membership also involve:

- ◆ developing a living relationship with the leaders of The Centre, particularly the Meriti, through whom teaching and guidance are given;
- ◆ participation in teaching and the sacraments given by those so appointed;
- ◆ attendance at the Agape Ecclesia service and membership meetings;
- ◆ willingness to serve on Boards or Councils of The Centre, as required;
- ◆ assisting with administration and practical tasks that sustain the life of the community;
- ◆ making regular financial contributions (tithes); and
- ◆ payment of fees to facilitate the work of The Centre.

We recognise also that some members may live at a long distance from a Centre community. These members 'at large' constitute quite a large community and individually uphold The Centre and its purposes through their private communion and devotions, regular tithing, and creatively and willfully engaging in a range of activities to keep connected with the flow of life in The Centre. Such activities include serving on some of the boards or committees of The Centre, being part of a regular study group that meets via skype (such as is offered by the Institute of Metaphysics, robertjohn.org.au and the OMC), keeping up with the news and contributing to discussions on The Centre's private Online Community (Ning), receiving regular email greetings from the Meriti, as well as receiving and contributing to the regular 'Centre At Large' dispatches. These dispatches include news, teachings from our founder Rev Mario Schoenmaker, and a devotional guide for the month. Centre members at large tend to be good travellers and keep

abreast of special events or festivals held in Centre communities near them. They are always welcome to add their strength and being to these special events.

Privileges of Membership

In practical terms, the privileges of membership include:

- ◆ regularly receiving communication from the Meriti;
- ◆ attending Members Only activities, such as the Agape Ecclesia;
- ◆ serving, if asked, on their local Centre Council or on the Committee of Management; and
- ◆ attending members' business meetings as called from time to time.

Tithing

All members of The Centre tithe a regular amount of money in order that The Centre can function in the world and carry forward the vision to which it is committed. The effective planning of our activities

from one year to the next requires a regular and predictable income. The amount of the financial contribution is a personal decision, although the current recommended minimum is \$50 per month.

The word 'tithing' originates from Abram's gift to Melchizedek which was one tenth of everything he had. A member's financial contribution forms part of this ten percent; the giving of energy, skills and time also forms part of this contribution.

We see the practice of tithing as establishing a personally responsible relationship with our spiritual life. It involves discipline and orderliness and giving priority to our spiritual ideals. Tithing also upholds our spiritual community and displays a mindfulness of and commitment to the larger purposes at work in The Centre.

Members are invited to review the amount of their tithe at the end of each financial year or, in the case of financial difficulties, they may review their tithe in consultation with the local Centre Leader.

Clockwise from top left:

Musicians at an Easter service, Adelaide

Singing together, Deacons' Retreat, Melbourne

Quiet reflection during a workshop, Wellington, New Zealand

Waiting to begin International Retreat, The Netherlands



WORKSHIP AND DEVOTION

Main: An agape service in Adelaide, Australia

Top right: Blessing during a priest's ordination, Melbourne, Australia

Bottom right: Preparing the altar, Wellington, New Zealand



The Centre Governance and Leadership

The Meriti are the spiritual leaders of The Centre and the channel of the power of Christ to the priests and people of The Centre. They provide inspiration and spiritual direction. They are responsible for accepting applicants into membership.

The Office of the Meriti is the international headquarters of The Centre, providing advice and resources to all Centre communities and Centre-affiliated groups wherever they may be found.

The Consultative Council, which comprises the Meriti and ordained priests in good standing, meets at least once a year in what is known as the Priest Conclave. It gives direction as to the focus of development within The Centre, initiates new projects, approves the ordination of priests and authorises liturgies.

The Committee of Management meets more regularly and oversees the day to day operations of The Centre, dealing with financial matters in particular, in accordance to the principles laid down in our Rules of Association. This Committee is elected by the membership at the Annual General Meeting.

Local Centre communities are led by one or more priests or pastors especially commissioned to do so. This is usually accomplished in conjunction with a local Council.

Preparing for Membership

If you are interested in becoming a member, you will be encouraged to undertake various activities:

- ◆ take time to experience all facets of The Centre and exercise thoughtfulness;
- ◆ read the Membership and Guiding Principles brochures, and discuss this with a Centre Leader or appointed minister;
- ◆ learn about the structure and governance of The Centre and be introduced to the Meriti;
- ◆ develop your relationships with members in the local community and beyond;
- ◆ undertake and complete the Institute of Metaphysics course Metaphysics in Action. This is a prerequisite for membership. It introduces fundamental metaphysical concepts which sit at the core of The Centre's outlook and ministry. This course is available in a distance

learning format as well as a traditional trainer-led program.

- ◆ read the book *Becoming* and have an interview (based on this book) with a Centre Leader or minister appointed by the Meriti. The purpose of this interview is to identify your gifts and abilities as well as the inner quality to be developed in order for you to take up membership of The Centre. The development of this quality will be displayed through taking on a certain activity, behaviour or task. There may be a number of interviews to ascertain progress in this area, and this whole process may take some time to complete satisfactorily. What is identified in these interviews will, after admission into membership, assist you to fully take up active membership.
- ◆ through this preparation time, it is important to continue to develop your relationship with the Meriti whose role is to accept applicants into membership.

Application Process

Once you and the minister working with you are satisfied all preparations have been completed, you will be given a Membership Application Form.

When you have completed this and returned it to the minister, together with a joining fee of AUD\$50, it will be sent together with the minister's letter of recommendation to the Meriti for consideration.

If your application is successful you will receive written confirmation from the Meriti, together with a copy of The Centre's Rules of Association, and arrangements will be put in place for you to be formally admitted into membership.

The Promises Made in Becoming a Member

Induction into Membership is a ceremony which takes place during the Cosmic Mass in the community where you have experienced The Centre and where you will express your membership.

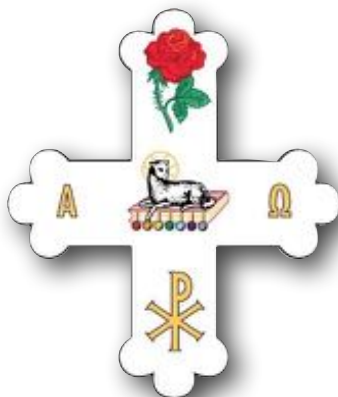
During the membership ceremony, certain questions are asked. If you can truthfully answer 'yes' to these questions, then you are ready to be part of The Centre and share with us in a great and wonderful ministry. The questions are:

- ◆ Are you prepared to accept the Affirmation of The Centre (The Independent Church of Australia, The Independent Church in New Zealand and Het Esoterisch Christelijk Centrum) as your creed, and will you endeavour in word and deed to keep this creed alive wherever you go?
- ◆ Will you strive to live in the spirit of love and understanding with all human beings, and apply the laws of the spiritual life to transform ignorance and destructive thoughts?
- ◆ Do you accept the responsibility of a member of The Centre to uphold the standards set forth in Christ, to work and strive for the proclamation of the Gospel, as we understand it, and to assist others to become whole in body, soul and spirit?
- ◆ Do you promise to share with us in the vision and the ideals upon which The Centre has been founded, realising that nothing is impossible with God?
- ◆ Do you also promise to uphold our ministry in your own personal development practices, in prayer and meditation, and by sharing with your fratres and sorrores in the communal devotional activities of our Centre?
- ◆ Will you uphold The Centre physically in giving of your time, energy and financial support as your conscience dictates?

When the new members have made their vows, they are then anointed with the sign of the cross on the top of the head, the forehead and over the heart. This action is a confirmation of the commitment made and indicates that they bear the cross gladly in spirit, mind and heart.

The decisions we make and in particular the vows we make publicly are very powerful. They are actions springing from our own inner idealism and determination and they have the effect of invoking the power and strength we need to live out these promises.

Becoming a member of The Centre is not like becoming a member of a social club or even another church. We regard our members as intimately connected to one another and to Christ, and responsible for making themselves able to fulfil the purposes for which The Centre has come into being. Membership is truly a covenant that is entered into through which we become spiritually bonded to one another and responsible for one another. Accepting a new member into our fellowship is not something we take lightly. We strongly recommend that you take your time in becoming acquainted with all the aspects of The Centre, its purpose and its members, prior to deciding to apply for membership.



The Centre

- ▶ The Independent Church of Australia
- ▶ The Independent Church in New Zealand
- ▶ Het Esoterisch Christelijk Centrum

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