

Take a journey back in time ...

If you were to hop in a time machine and go back to the early 1900's in New Zealand, you would find a supportive community of people with a strong belief in spiritualism. Their daily lives guided by a spiritual philosophy that was all inclusive and provided a solid foundation for their day-to-day interactions.

The philosophy bought with it strong beliefs in personal responsibility, the natural law of cause and effect, and the desire of individuals to evolve and grow. Growth occurs over multiple lifetimes under the guidance of an ultimate divine source (Divine Creator, Universal Source, God, or whatever you choose to call that eternal spirit).

Everyday practice of spiritualism is distinguished by communication with beings on the 'other side', whether these are loved ones who have left their physical bodies or other spiritual beings such as angels and guides. Connection with these beings and bringing messages through to those on earth (mediumship) can provide welcome relief to those in distress. It can also accelerate healing for those in need.

In a world characterised by hardship and physical labour (in the early 1900's), talk of the non-physical (e.g., communication with people who have passed over) was greeted with scepticism and often outright hostility. At the time, New Zealand was operating under the English Witchcraft Act 1562 which provided penalties of imprisonment and death for practicing witchcraft. Incidentally, the Witchcraft Act was not repealed until 1951.

*"The Act provided that anyone who should "use, practise, or exercise any Witchcraft, Enchantment, Charm, or Sorcery, whereby any person shall happen to be killed or destroyed", was guilty of a felony without benefit of clergy, and was to be put to death."*¹

As you can imagine, there was some concern amongst the Spiritualist community that a lack of understanding could result in Spiritualists being brought to trial for living by their philosophy. A group of these concerned citizens came together and requested that the Spiritualist Churches be incorporated and, therefore, recognised as a legal entity. The Spiritualist Church of New Zealand Act (SCNZ Act) was passed on 22 September 1924 which provided for a governing organisation (SCNZ) for the churches.

Every three years, representatives from the member churches came together for a national council, to discuss issues relating to spiritualism in New Zealand and to elect an executive committee. This executive committee ran the organisation until the next national council. However, the SCNZ Act related only to spiritual churches that belonged to SCNZ and over the years the number of Churches that belonged waxed and waned.

Gradually the reach of spiritualism changed and was no longer focussed predominantly on attendance at church. People were acknowledging the spiritual aspect of themselves and their lives in many different ways. To honour this, it became clear that the national organisation needed to change and grow.

¹ Gibson, Marion (2006), "Witchcraft in the Courts", in Gibson, Marion (ed.), *Witchcraft And Society in England And America, 1550–1750*, Continuum International Publishing Group, pp. 1–9, ISBN 978-0-8264-8300-3. (Sourced from Wikipedia, April 2024.)

In order to allow our organisation to reflect these changes, in 2017, with the help of lawyers, a new constitution was written. This was needed to better reflect the meaning of the Act in today's society. There was a recognition that a spiritual person is no longer always part of a Spiritualist Church and that living spiritually can follow many different pathways. To acknowledge this, our current organisation (SNZ) has expanded to welcome in individuals as well as spiritual churches and centres.

Spiritualism New Zealand (SNZ) is run by a volunteer Board who have built a strong base of members and subscribers to the monthly newsletter over the last seven years. Connections have been made throughout the country with churches/centres and individuals through online webinars and services, workshops around the country and many other activities.

On 22 September 2024, we would like to acknowledge those who worked so hard to have the SCNZ Act passed and the growth and development of spiritualism in New Zealand since that time. It is our aim to have many different organisations and individuals doing something to celebrate this day and to give the public of New Zealand an opportunity to learn more about spiritualism and what living a spiritual life means. In order to commemorate this day in the future, we will also use this celebration to launch a National Spiritual Day to be celebrated every year, on the 22 September.

Amanda Cartridge

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