

# FAITH IN THE NEXUS



## TEACHERS' ACTION PACK

EXPLORING CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR  
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION RESEARCH



Canterbury  
Christ Church  
University

# Welcome to the Nexus Teachers' Action Pack.

Every child has a spiritual life.

But what can we do to help? How can we support children in their spiritual development, and help them to flourish? What are the best approaches to support them in this often neglected aspect of a child's life?

At NICER, we have been researching children's spirituality, with a special focus on the relationship between home, school and church in helping to foster a child-centric approach to spiritual flourishing. Our research offers key insights and approaches into this important topic, in which we have developed a range of resources and toolkits to help you put into practice what our research has revealed.

This Nexus Teachers' Action Pack has been designed especially to help you on your journey to support children in their spiritual development. This action pack includes an assembly, links to animations, posters, podcasts and many more resources. Our hope is that these resources will give you the insight, confidence and tools to help you support children on their spiritual journey.

## THE RESEARCH

The Faith in the Nexus research project identified the fruitful ways in which twenty church primary schools, working in collaboration with churches and other interested stakeholders, facilitate opportunities to explore children's faith and spiritual life in the home.

The research findings emerged from research focus group interviews with 450 participants (pupils, parents & staff) and an online survey with 1000 participants across 20 church primary schools in England.

A nexus is a focus for connection, where multiple lines from different places form a relationship around

a point of focus. In this project, the Nexus refers to the connections between church school, the local church, and the home.

The Faith in the Nexus project revealed the influence of these connections in children's developing spiritual life. Central to this research study is the child's experience of faith exploration in the home.

The Nexus report highlights four aspects of this exploration, talking about, having a sense of belonging, being still, and participating in routines and relationships, all essential elements of spiritual growth.

**[He] comes home and asks what was there before God. How do you answer that, you know what I mean? He's really, really deep into it. He wants to know answers. He's asking questions that I can't really answer.**

- Parent

## What did the Nexus research reveal?

The Faith in the Nexus research revealed that children have an innate spirituality that kindles their sense of awe and wonder, their curiosity and imagination. They are not empty vessels waiting to be filled; instead, they are co-agents in their spiritual journey.

As such, they are naturally inclined to search for meaning and purpose in life and love to ask questions, particularly about God, creation, science and religion, and death.

Children seek time to explore these questions with significant adults in the home, church school and church or parish community.

What happens, though, if adults avoid these conversations through a lack of confidence or fear of giving the wrong response? How should we respond when they hear thoughts like this?

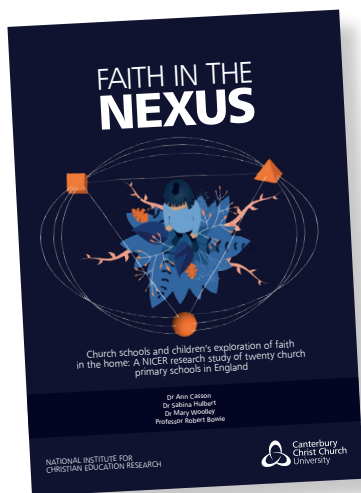
**It makes me wonder if God is actually real [or] if someone just made the whole thing up.**

- Pupil

How can we encourage children and adults to see these conversations as precious moments to be treasured and nurtured? Walking shoulder to shoulder, child and adult can support and encourage each other in exploring spirituality and faith.

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# ASSEMBLY

## OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

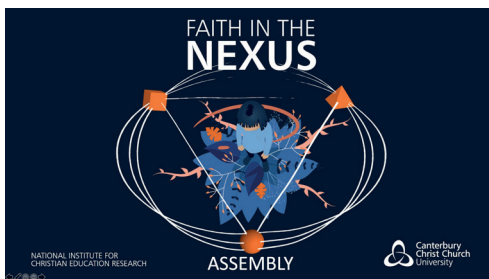
This assembly is designed for KS1 and KS2 audiences. It can be adapted, at your discretion, for older audiences.

**Themes:** Spirituality, faith, religion, inclusive, invitation, reflection and inspiration.  
**You will need:** Assembly Animation and PowerPoint, both available to download at [nicer.org.uk/faith-in-the-nexus](http://nicer.org.uk/faith-in-the-nexus)

**Aims:** For pupils to understand that:

- We all have a spirituality
- It is good to ask questions and seek meaning to things that make them curious.
- We are all on a journey of discovery, even adults.
- Big questions of life, existence, and God can lead us to further questions, rather than answers and this is ok.

**Time:** 15 mins



SLIDE 1

### Introduction

*Take time to introduce the theme of spiritual life. This first stage is about orienting your pupils to the idea of spirituality and making connection with their spiritual life.*

**Slide 2: Today we are going to be exploring our spiritual life. We all have a spiritual life. Do we know what that means? Can anyone tell me what spirituality means?**

*Elicit answers from the pupils, there may be some references to the supernatural, ghosts, spirits inside us, etc. Others may make references to faith. At this stage we just want to acknowledge different ideas and responses.*



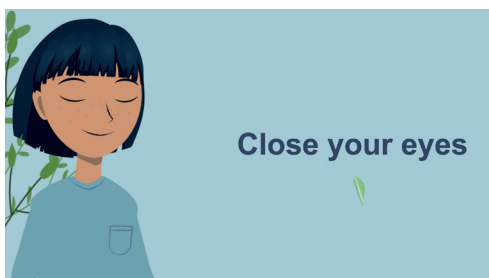
SLIDE 2

**Slide 3: When we pray we usually close our eyes. Why do you think we do this? So, let us try a little exercise. Let us all be quiet a moment, and close our eyes.**

*Pause*

**Now, when we have our eyes closed we can begin to discover that we have a quiet world inside us, a world where we have all of our thoughts, feelings and wishes. Stop for a moment and listen to the thoughts in your head.**

*Pause - encourage them to keep their eyes closed for the next section, use a soft gentle voice for this section. Create long pauses between each sentence.*



SLIDE 3

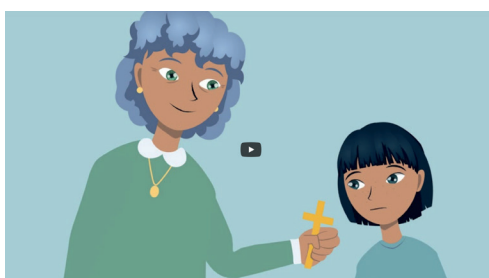
**This is your inner world. It is not empty. When we listen to our thoughts we can see that this inner world is full and alive! This is the place where we all go to when we pray to God. We go here when we're afraid, because this is our safe space. It also the space where we think about the big questions which we can't answer.**

### Background

Faith in the Nexus research revealed that children and young people have a strong capacity for spiritual wondering. They are ready to ask big questions about life, they are on the search for meaning and how to make sense of the world around them. These are all spiritual questions.

Our research also shows that adults lack confidence about exploring issues relating to children's spirituality, because there is a fear that we might not have the 'right answer'. But the important thing is not about having answers, but rather about helping create a safe space for children to explore their spirituality, ask big questions and be encouraged to keep seeking.

If we do give answers to the big questions about God, death, purpose and meaning in life, then we close down their spiritual wondering. Our role is to help create a safe space for children to be open to exploring their spiritual life and encourage them to remain curious, keep seeking and find time to nourish their spiritual life.



SLIDE 4

**Most of the time we keep our inner world to ourselves, but sometimes it is important to share our inner world with others.**

*Open eyes*

**Slide 4: OK, now let's open our eyes, and let's watch a short animation about our spiritual life.**

*Watch video animation.*



SLIDE 5

### Reflection slide

Take this time to reflect on the animation, you can use the Nexus Toolkit What is the research behind the animation PDF for more information and to further explore the themes. Please use some of the questions here as a prompt which works with your audience.

- Slide 5: When do you reflect and think?**
- Who do you share your inner world with?**
- Who helps you most with your big questions (such as God, creation, religion, etc)?**
- When might you think about God?**
- What one question would you ask God?**
- If you have a big question, who do you ask about it?**

Create a discussion around the theme of having a spirituality.



SLIDE 6

### Slide 6: What does the Bible teach us?

Here is a reading from the Bible.

*"The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us."* 1 Corinthians 2:10-12

### Other Bible passages to explore:

#### Key Stage 1

*Isaiah 43:5* – Do not be afraid for I am with you.

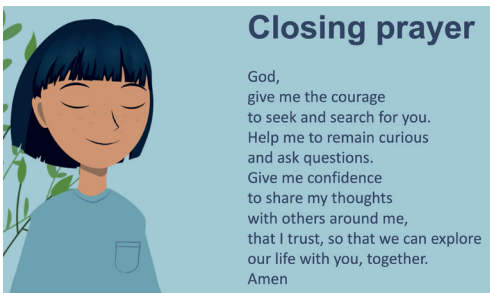
*Matthew 28:20* – I am with you always.

*Galatians 5:25* – Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

*Matthew 7:7* – Ask and it will be given to you: seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

#### Key Stage 2+

*Matthew 7:7* – Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.



SLIDE 7

Pause for reflection and then close with the following prayer.

**Slide 7: God, give me the courage to seek and search for you. Help me to remain curious and ask questions. Give me confidence to share my thoughts with others around me, that I trust, so that we can explore our life with you, together. Amen**



## Animations to explore further

Our series of animations have been designed to help you explore the themes raised in the Faith in the Nexus research. Each animation has been designed to work with different audiences including children, parents and a general introduction to the research. Below is a link to each animation for you to view, along with some suggestions on how each one can be used.



### Faith in the Nexus for Children

This animation has been designed to be used for children (KS1 and KS2), to be a stimulus for further discussion on children's spirituality from a child's perspective.

This can be used as:

- part of an assembly (see pages 3-4),
- part of collective worship
- classroom stimulus material
- part of philosophy 4 children enquiry

The purpose behind this is for children to reflect on what it means to have a spirituality, why they need help from others, and the importance of asking questions and remaining spiritually curious.

VIEW HERE <https://youtu.be/z4vXynkkhDU>

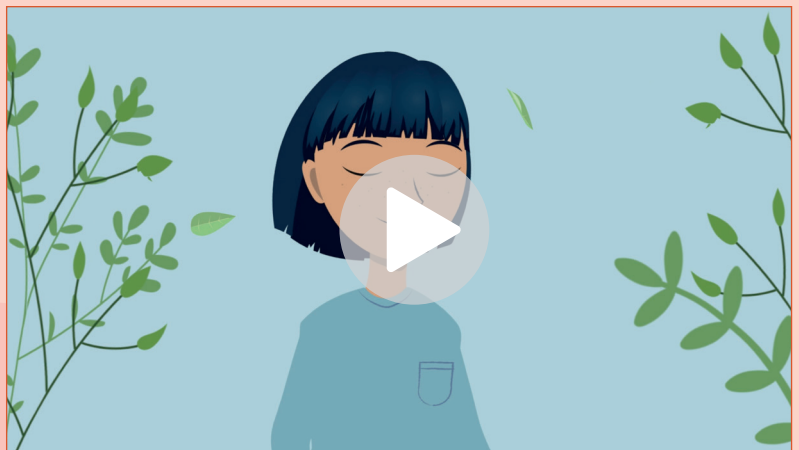
### Faith in the Nexus for Parents

This animation has been designed to be used by parents for parents, to help them explore some of the themes that the research raised.

The research shows a deep anxiety held by many parents of feeling inadequate when talking about faith and spirituality with their children, or being able to offer the 'right' answers to the questions children may raise.

This animation is to assure them that we don't have to be 'experts', but rather we create the space for children to think and reflect deeper on the questions they raise.

This animation can be promoted through school newsletters and websites, helping parents understand the importance of children's spirituality and how they can accompany their child as they grow.



VIEW HERE <https://youtu.be/fl-iXfQMqfE>



### Faith in the Nexus - general introduction

This animation gives an overview of the Faith in the Nexus research project, and a summary of the findings are presented in a story format to help you reflect deeper about some of the issues raised in our findings.

This animation outlines the importance of an integrated approach to helping children's spirituality to flourish, and offers the insight that by working together, with the child's needs at the centre, we help to create a nexus of faith. This nexus is the 'container' to help children to remain spiritually curious, to go deeper and to build an inner resilience that they can take out into the world on the next steps of their journey.

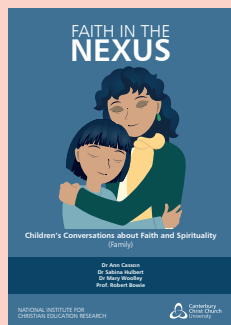
This animation can be used by anyone, especially teachers, who want a short overview and introduction to the whole project.

VIEW HERE <https://youtu.be/RGNXewx4wtQ>



# The Nexus Toolkit

In addition to our range of animations, we have created some detailed booklets and posters to help you explore some of the themes raised through our research. These resources are all free to download and consist of an A5 booklet and an A3 poster. These are all available via our main website.

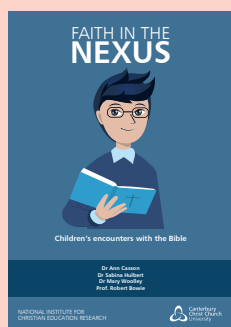


## Children's Conversations about Faith and Spirituality

Where do we find the opportunities for children to talk about faith and spirituality?

Children seek to explore faith and the big existential issues by asking questions. They may be seeking to confirm or to challenge ideas encountered in school. While adults were often looking to provide a definitive answer or solution, children may be rather just seeking to explore these issues with parents, teachers, and others.

AUDIENCE: FAMILY

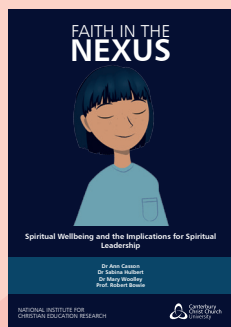


## Children's encounters with the Bible

How can we encourage children's encounters with the Bible, at home and in school?

The major challenges are a lack of resources in the home environment – whether Bible or family knowledge and understanding of Bible stories. Opportunities which did appear to make ripples included gifts of Bibles, a variety of Bibles in the school library and experiences of Open the Book, particularly when parents were invited in. Children's engagement with the Bible at home was limited. The surprising finding was that several children spoke of the gift of a Bible from grandparents, school or church.

AUDIENCE: FAMILY, CHURCH, SCHOOL

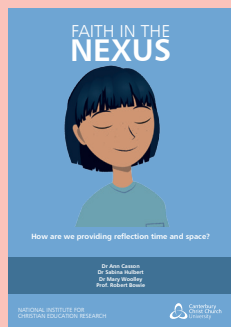


## Spiritual wellbeing and the implications for spiritual leadership

Addressing Children's Spiritual Wellbeing Needs

What is clear from our research is that no one way is sufficient. A variety of approaches, from different people and different spheres of life, are needed to create an environment in which spiritual wellbeing can flourish. Concern for the spiritual wellbeing of all children should be the main focus for the Nexus.

AUDIENCE: CHURCH, SCHOOL

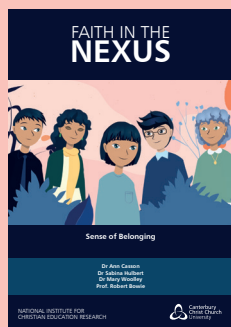


## How are we providing reflection time and space?

Creating space for spiritual flourishing

Church primary schools provide several spaces such as reflection corners and spiritual gardens. What emerges through analysis of children's responses to the research questions, is a need for space to reflect, think and pray. In the church primary schools, these spaces were in classrooms and in the playground; at home the children made their own times and spaces. Few children mentioned church as a place to reflect. This space and time is essential for spiritual wellbeing. Many children, like adults, had no or little quiet time in daily life.

AUDIENCE: CHURCH, SCHOOL

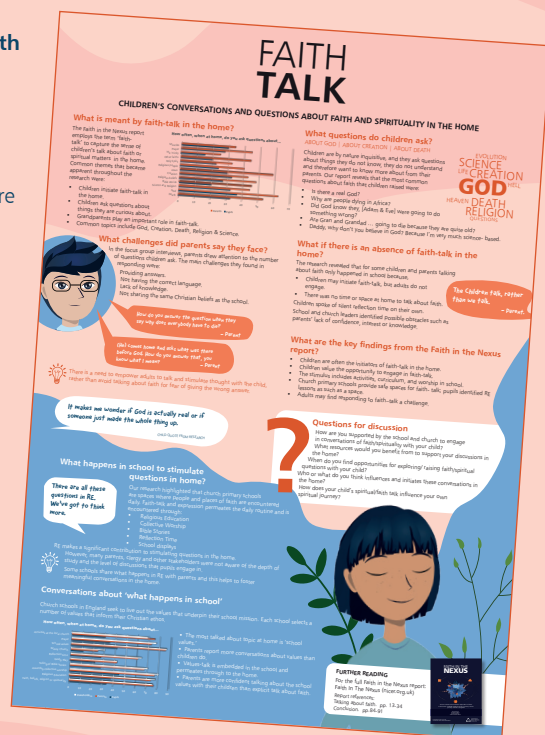


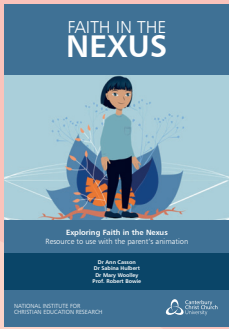
## Sense of belonging

How are we sustaining a strong connection between local church and church school?

Where a strong, active relationship between church and school was perceived, then there was more evidence of faith-related activities at home. Flourishing connections between school, home and church nurtures relationships between individuals and these institutions. Positive relationships between church and school are characterised by invitational worship, celebration of festivals, the presence of the minister in the school, and a sense of belonging and connection to the church community and building. What does it mean to belong to church? The concept of occasional believers includes many of the church school families, who perceive themselves as belonging through their connection with the school.

AUDIENCE: CHURCH, SCHOOL



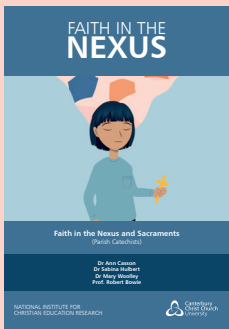


## Exploring faith in the Nexus

### What is the research behind the animation?

This booklet sits alongside the parents animation and explores how the animation can offer support. The animation recognises that all children have a spiritual life that drives them to seek meaning and purpose in life. Often in this search, children turn to their parents with big questions about things such as the origin of life, the existence of God, and life after death. We acknowledge that being confronted with such questions can be daunting for parents and can leave them feeling inadequate to offer a response. Our main message is to reassure and encourage.

**AUDIENCE: CHURCH, SCHOOL, FAMILY**



## Faith in the Nexus and Sacraments (Parish Catechists)

### How does the Faith in the Nexus research inform sacramental preparation?

Ideally, faith formation should be part of the natural rhythm of daily family life, spoken of, lived, and modelled. Findings from our Nexus report showed that many parents struggled with how to respond, often due to lack of confidence. However, with clear support and accompaniment parents were better equipped to embrace the journey of faith formation with their child seeing it as a precious and sacred time to be treasured.

**AUDIENCE: CHURCH**

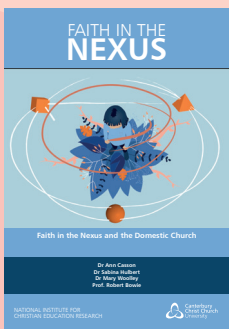


## Let's talk about death

### Responding to questions about death

We underestimate children's understanding of death. Reluctance to engage with children's questions is problematic. Looking to others to answer these questions is not best for the children. When adults fail to answer, children were likely to persist with their questions.

**AUDIENCE: CHURCH, SCHOOL, FAMILY**

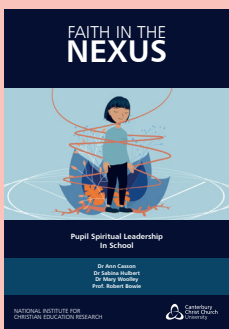


## Faith in the Nexus and the Domestic Church

### The family as a domestic church

Findings from our Nexus report revealed that families talked about faith-related matters in the home more than they participated in faith related activities in the home. However, our research also found that families engaged more with faith related activities at certain times of the year linked to the key Christian festivals; evidence of increased school activity at these times rippled into the home environment. The cycle of celebrations influenced the families' perception of the rhythm of the liturgical year and offered opportunities to facilitate exploration of faith in the home.

**AUDIENCE: FAMILY, CHURCH**

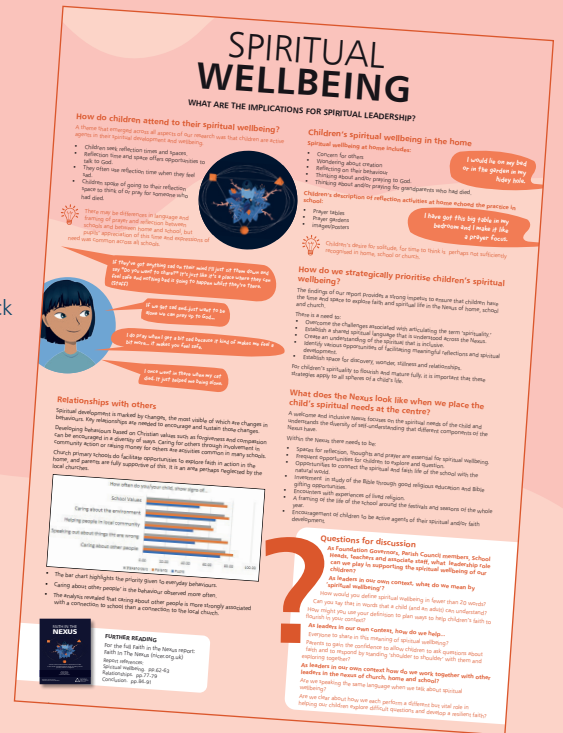


## Pupil spiritual leadership in school

### Recognising children as spiritual leaders in school

A theme that emerges across all aspects of our research is that children are active agents in religious socialisation, and spiritual development. They are not passive recipients of a faith transmitted through school, church or home. Primary schools often recognise and encourage this role for the child. The findings from our research reveal that pupils relished these opportunities for independence and autonomy, using their ideas and vision.

**AUDIENCE: CHURCH, SCHOOL**



## Further exploration, CPD and learning

To help you develop and learn more about children's spirituality we have a range of further resources and materials to help you on your journey.

### Podcasts

In this series of podcasts, led by Dr Ann Casson, and including guest speakers Nick Taunt and Kieran O'Brien, we explore a range of themes and topics some of the issues we all face



#### Episode 1 - Exploring children's spirituality

This introductory podcasts gives an overview and introduction into Children's spirituality and the Faith in the Nexus report. We discuss the idea of what is a spirituality and how can we make sense of our spiritual lives.

#### Episode 2 - How can we help children's spirituality to flourish?

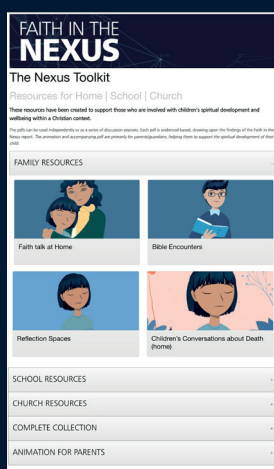
In this follow up podcast we explore the idea of how to help children's spirituality to flourish, what steps can we take, and what are the necessary components that we need to ensure are in place to help children flourish and grow their spiritual lives.

#### Episode 3 - How can we nurture children's spirituality in today's world?

There are many challenges we all face when we try to support children in their spiritual development in our complex and often confusing world. How can we guide children in their spiritual development, whilst also recognising the many stresses and strains children and young people face today.

#### Episode 4 - Spirituality and storytelling

Why is storytelling so important for spirituality, and how can we become better storytellers? This podcast explores, with professional storyteller Kieran O'Brien, the importance of the stories we tell to children in helping them to develop in their spiritual life.



### Our Nexus Toolkit

All our resources to support home, church school and local church or parish can be downloaded via our Faith in the Nexus website page [nicer.org.uk](http://nicer.org.uk). Should you wish hard copies or the accompanying power points that work alongside these PDFs, please contact [nexus@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:nexus@canterbury.ac.uk).

### Blogs

We also have a live blog which features notification of our upcoming events and links to the recordings of our series of Nexus seminars led by various speakers. Topics include talking about death, storytelling and spirituality, spiritual leadership, plus many more. [blogs.canterbury.ac.uk/nicer](http://blogs.canterbury.ac.uk/nicer)

### Keep in contact



Our bi-monthly newsletter provides readers with current information of Faith in the Nexus activity, resources, and events. You can sign up to receive these by emailing [gill.harrison@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:gill.harrison@canterbury.ac.uk)



If you would like to find out more about the wider work of NICER, please visit our website [nicer.org.uk](http://nicer.org.uk) or email us at [nicer@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:nicer@canterbury.ac.uk)



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