

Thirteen Years in Exile



St Mary's Matters

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From the Editor

We are into our thirteenth year in exile so it seems appropriate that our final hard copy edition of St Mary's Matters will be a reflection on this transition period. The idea came from the board members who were planning to present their sense of the journey of their community. They wanted to speak also of the manner in which we as a community have kept true to the aspirations we articulated when we first came here to the TLC.

Each board member contributed to a homily and these contributions are included in this edition as a celebration of how well we have moved on in terms of spirituality, liturgy and understandings. I have included excellent prayers written for our liturgies by Ingerid, poems and her excellent piece on reciprocity by Margaret, reflections by Liz and Narelle and more.

There is a suggestion of what it means to be a progressive Christian, which many of us purport to be, written as part of the UC Forum. This may encourage us to see ourselves as a larger movement than just SMX.

Take time to read a new look at Eucharist and for something completely different - Peter's piece!

We are a gifted community and an inclusive one. We are grateful to all who work hard to keep our community functioning at such a high level.

Marg Ortiz (Editor)

Don't Look Back

On the 19th of April we celebrated 13 years of being the St Mary's in Exile community. Marg Ortiz asked me to write a piece for the latest edition of St Mary's Matters to mark the occasion.

In 1998 Bishop John Shelby Spong published a book entitled "Why Christianity Must Change or Die". As a liberal Christian theologian and author, he called for a fundamental rethinking of Christian belief away from theism and traditional doctrines. He referred to himself as a Bishop in Exile and was very supportive of our community of St Mary's In Exile.

In this book he shares a story about a woman who withdraws from being ordained on the eve of her ordination to the Episcopal Church in USA. On her withdrawal from ordination, she was able to address the seminary community, family and friends, and speak of her reasons for withdrawing.

She begins by sharing a story of a woman who lived in a small village community which regularly had to face the devastation of flood waters inundating the village. This story is very applicable to many who have recently experienced crippling effects of flooding waters here in Australia.

The woman when experiencing the early floods believed that she could adapt and create a home which could survive the flooding waters.



Initially this appeared to be the case and was encouraged by her early efforts to adapt. But as more floods appeared more frequently and each time worse than the previous she wondered how long she could continue living in her beautiful home in this small village. As each flood came it was worse than the previous with the later floods bringing with it toxic sewage from the sewage treatment plant in the village. Her health was gradually deteriorating, and her spirits were flagging and her hopes for any structural or lasting changes being made by the authorities to mitigate the problem of the flooding were feeble. There came a point where she could no longer live in the village which had been her home her entire life. She decided to leave and informed her family and friends of her intentions.

The woman withdrawing from being ordained on the eve of her being ordained said that woman in the flooding waters was her. As a woman in a patriarchal male monopolized church dominated by male images and concepts of the divine, they became the flood waters threatening to drown and poison her. She thought she could cope and develop creative strategies to survive and maybe make a difference. But she eventually had to leave for her own physical and mental health.

In some ways this woman's story reflects something of our story. St Mary's in Exile, a woman in exile. In order to survive we had to leave. Although we did not do this voluntarily, we were asked to leave. In order to remain within the Roman Catholic Church, we were asked to revert back to a church and theological expression no longer relevant or viable to the majority of the community. As someone from our community wrote at the time, that once you know the earth is round and not flat, you can't go back to believing the earth is flat. We could not go back, as our attempts to do so at the time, were met with many dismayed and disappointed people.



It is interesting to note that Bishop John Bathersby was the bishop responsible for our Exile. We invited him on many occasions at the time to come and speak to the community. He refused to do so, much to our disappointment, adding to our disillusionment. What we did not know at the time was how much he was suffering from Alzheimer's disease and how much this had been covered up. Some of the early symptoms being difficulty in remembering recent events, disorientation, (easily getting lost) mood swings, and withdrawing from family and society. All things John had displayed, as I experienced first-hand about a year or two after our Exile in an informal conversation I had with him. I knew John well from my time in the seminary when he was the main Spiritual Director. So we had much to discuss from our four and half years together. He was very at home in the past but lost in the present and recent history. As I reflected on this, I could not help recognising how John's condition reflected the church he represented. A church lost in the past, and almost incapable of effectively engaging with our present reality.

Over the thirteen years there have been many milestones. We very quickly set ourselves up as a Company Limited by Guarantee in order to be accountable to a recognised body for our many activities in particular the use of our funds. A St Mary's in Exile Board was formed, and a Constitution developed in keeping with our overall vision to Act Justly, Love Tenderly, and to Walk Humbly with Our God. Another entity formed to assist in the Faith dimensions of our governance, and after much consultation the Community Faith Council was born.

Our story was being told in many ways, first of all on the ABC'S Australian Story, our book, 'The man who threatened Rome', the documentary film, 'The Trouble with St Mary's', and the play 'St Mary's In Exile'.

Our e-news, web site, social media sites, St Mary's Matters, became opportunities to inform the community and provide a forum for creative thought.

Our connection to the Roman Catholic church diminished but our connection to the wider community remained strong. Our on-going relationship with Micah Projects is our most important and strongest connection. Micah's support for us has been vital to our survival. Our connection to the Union Movement has been strong with our home liturgical base the TLC Building. The Queensland Community Alliance, West End Ministers Fraternal, Retired Catholic priests gatherings, IPAN Independent and Peaceful Australia Network, Progressive Christian Network, Sabeel, Support for Palestinian Christians and many more have enriched the life of the community.

After about six years of calling ourselves St Mary's In Exile we had discussions of whether to change our name. As the likelihood of returning to the Roman Catholic Corporation was remote we asked people to suggest new names and put the top five suggestions to a vote. A majority of people voted to retain our name.

We came to realize we shared our being in exile with people like the Dali Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, Bishop Shelby Spong, our exile was more about with whom we stood. Those on the margins of society. Those who struggle to have a voice. The poor, refugees, homeless, Aboriginal and Torres strait islanders, LGBTQ lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer communities, our threatened species, forests and rivers and seas.

The aspiration of having our own place has always remained. But as we have matured its need and urgency tempered by our lack of funds has dampened this aspiration. At one stage it was thought we could not function without it, but now we are more aware than ever that we are the church, not the building.

This came also with the realisation that we didn't need some magical ordained male person

to celebrate our liturgies to make them valid. These were all growing points for our largely Catholic community conditioned to believe that to celebrate without a priest would be sinful.

The realisation that we are all in this together, and together we choose to thrive or perish.

As we examine SMX thirteen years on, we are an aging community decreasing in numbers. Many of us have belonged to the community for many years in various degrees of familiarity. We inhabit a world and future in increasingly uncertain times. With a rapidly heating planet, on the eve of increasing catastrophic events, collapse of economies, institutions, and possibly civilizations. The need for places where people can be encouraged, inspired, recharged is ever more needed. Spaces where hope is fostered, based on the reality of situations. St Mary's In Exile aspires to one such place. I hope we can continue to be this.

But the time may come when we are not able to be that space. I believe we are a mature community who will be able to face reality and know when it is time to call it a day. But in the mean time we will continue to do what we have always aspired to do and that is to Act justly, Love tenderly, and to Walk humbly with God.

And to always keep in mind those famous words by well known anthropologist Margaret Mead,

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has".

Terry Fitzpatrick

SMX and Being Catholic:

We are born into a tradition and then give birth to a new tradition for the next generation by the way we live. Many at St Mary's were born into the post Trent Catholic tradition and became critical Catholics who challenged interpretations of dogma, structures and practices while giving birth to a community mirroring Micah's vision to live justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God.

Our history shows a critical yet person-focused community in a restorative church culture promoted by the previous two popes – "a small church but a pure church" was the culture. St Mary's was very much on the fringe of this, calling instead in its liturgy and practice, for inclusivity, reconciliation and justice. At the time of exile this conflict was voiced as, "If you want to be part of a club, you must obey the rules." Our community challenged these rules and the very idea of the Church as a club which excluded others.

I see St Mary's in Exile as an important part of Australian Church history. Its embodied experiment of living as free and open Christians is following in the footsteps of courageous women and men throughout history - it calls the Church to be true to itself and move beyond the restorative model. A tradition that does not grow is dead. There have been many Catholics silenced and "exiled" in our time.



Kevin and his children presiding at Communion at the TLC. Taken some years ago.

(Think of Teilhard de Chardin, Hans Kung, Mary Daly, Charles Curran and then Paul Collins and Max Charlesworth in Australia.)

The current Pope's call to a synodal model of Church is encouraging as it, at least, moves the Church beyond the restorative quest. I would recommend The Bristol Text to Reform (2021) by Root and Branch which is a lay led English group founded by women. The text is "a statement of fundamental principlesthat need addressing." It encouraged me in that it helped put a theoretical and theological framework around changes SMX is living.

Whatever happens to our community, we are not alone and our community's witness is in the best of Catholic tradition.

Kevin Kehoe

A Community with a Vision - Thirteen years Later

Late last year, the SMX Board was discussing how SMX is travelling and whether what we do as a community is in line with our vision.

We consulted our constitution which contains six vision statements. There are six of us on the Board, so we each took one statement and reflected on/researched how well we were putting those ideas into practice. We would like to present our conclusions to you. After hearing what we have to say, of course we welcome your feedback and ideas.

The six statements and the explanations made to them by the speakers are:

•To provide leadership and governance to support a community of faith, recognising our Catholic and Christian traditions, and welcoming people of all faiths and denominations who wish to participate in our collective faith journey.

Leadership is the ability of an individual or a group of individuals to influence and guide followers or other members of an organization. Leadership involves making sound -- and sometimes difficult -- decisions, creating and articulating a clear vision, establishing achievable goals and providing members and followers with the knowledge, support and tools necessary to achieve those community goals.

•To facilitate liturgy and rituals to support people in our collective faith journey, guided by the principles that we act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God.

The values contained in this statement form the basis for the planning of the SMX liturgies. SMX has a Liturgy Committee who meet regularly to plan the liturgies. The committee decides on the themes which underpin the liturgies for the year. The Liturgy themes are chosen with reference to:

1. Social Justice Calendar

2. Church calendar
3. Relevant current issues
4. Ideas from homilists

The liturgies are planned by the Liturgy Group with involvement by many community members.

They include:

- presiders
- homilists
- prayer composers
- musicians
- contributors to prayers of the faithful
- those who put together online liturgies

The liturgies aim to be informative, challenging, hopeful, reflective – all those things that support people on their faith journey.

•To provide the community of faith with information, resources, reflections and connections to be active citizens and advocates for social justice.

The role of Spirituality listed under our Pastoral Care banner works within a loosely defined format. Since our beginning in the early 1980's there has been a 6.30pm Saturday night Spiritual celebration including meditation, and/or Spiritual readings and music. The key words here are 'community of faith'. Grounded in a spirituality of compassion and connection, these words inspire and inform our actions. It is primarily through our weekly liturgies, in a spirit of prayerful reflection, that we are invited to See, Reflect and Act.

•To maintain a partnership and relationship as community with Micah Projects to create justice and respond to injustice in the church and society.

Micah Projects is a social justice initiative in collaboration with St Mary's In Exile community, South Brisbane. Micah Projects Inc mission is to respond to people who experience exclusion, poverty, injustice, social isolation so that they may experience inclusion, economic wellbeing, justice and connection within their community

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of choice. Micah Projects is a not-for-profit organisation committed to providing services and opportunities in the community to create justice and respond to injustice. SMX evolved out of St Mary's response to the injustice of the Catholic Archdiocese demands: Insisting the priests wear vestments. Discontinue saying 'creator, sustainer and giver of life' at the end of a baptismal service. Declaring the church to be used for liturgical functions only. Preventing the Gay & Lesbian choir from rehearsing in the church. Excluding the use of the church to the Buddhist Mindfulness Meditation Group.

- To provide direct assistance to the disadvantaged and marginalised through ongoing financial support to Micah Projects, including its Homelessness and Housing Fund. Micah Projects aims are to: Break Isolation and Build Community

Micah Projects supports are:

- Education - The Hope Street Cafes Social Enterprise.
- Medical assistance - Health Inclusive Health Partnership (IHP).
- Housing – Common Ground Supportive Housing.

Collaboration and partnerships is how Micah Projects achieves its outcomes.

- How Can You Support and Assist Micah Projects?

- Ongoing financial support by direct donation to Micah Projects - micahprojects.org.au DONATE
- Have breakfast, lunch or coffee at the Hope Café, Social Enterprise
- Attend the Moonlight Magic Dinner on 10 June 2022 at the Plaza Ballroom of the Brisbane Entertainment Centre
- Register to participate in the Christmas Hamper packing and delivery



Terry and Karyn just prior to building of Common Ground

- Leave a gift in your will.

Conclusion

The SMX Board wish to engage with the community and hear how we can: Support your spiritual needs; Assist you on your faith journey; Provide a ministry of pastoral care and support to you in a wholistic way; Offer you the information, resources and support so you can be an active advocate for social justice. The Statements of Purpose that we have outlined are still providing us with guidance ten years down the track. We welcome your feedback and ideas, so please feel free to speak with us or email your feedback to: smx.info.enquiry@gmail.com

Board of Directors of St Mary's in Exile

Celebrating Who We Are!

At the 5pm Liturgy as Presider Kate Ellis cried after Terry's Homily on the journey of SMX, I am sure there were other tears also flowing in gratitude for the special people who make up the community of St Mary's in Exile.

As I sat there, beside me was one who has walked almost every inch of the way in my own struggles. Over the way was one with whom I have worked professionally and personally and she never fails to put her hand up to help with a SMX cause. Not too far away to my left was one who has documented and published with tireless commitment, so many of our SMX happenings. In front of me sat someone who has generously shared her creativity. And others who have been troubled by illness keep coming to SMX as do others who continue to bravely mourn loved ones lost along the way.

Terry's sharing of milestones in our last thirteen years was so moving and honest. It was real... as each person in the SMX Community is so

real...so human...not caught up in trappings of institutional thinking. This is what I value, ever since my first visit to SMX as a visitor to Expo '88 and then when we moved to Brisbane as a member of the community two years later.

In the late 90s, in a little townhouse at Carseldine, we started the Northern Cluster. They were fiery gatherings as we debated the value of the "old ways" and the challenges of thinking more broadly. The pot luck food was always tasty and the laughter and joy so tangible.

That Cluster continues although we had to move to the "other side of the River," but I come back to the "now" still consciously drawn to gather in our own "Upper Room" as often as I can.... for, in connecting with the special people who make up SMX and the joy of music and song, I touch the possibility of becoming kinder, more open and more conscious of Presence!
Thank you SMX!

Narelle Mullins



The very first cluster - "Dine and Divine" met in the old church

Wow, 13 years in Exile!

Michael and I shifted to Brisbane in February 1988 with our 2 primary school aged children planning to stay for just a couple of years and then return to the 'Land of the Long White Cloud'. Thirty+ years later we are still here and now have 7 beautiful grandchildren ranging in age from 10 to 17 years.

In New Plymouth, NZ we had been actively involved in children's sports, kindergartens, unions, and our local church community, initially in YCW then on various committees. Michael served on the Parish Council for years and we were members of a group who ran Engaged Couples courses for our local parish and were also involved in Family groups (similar to our Clusters).

So, when we arrived here in Brisbane we searched for a faith community that reflected what we had left behind, but never really felt like we had found it.... until about 16 years ago when friends invited us to come along to St Mary's at South Brisbane. Funnily enough by an ex-priest and two Ursuline sisters who we were friendly with at St Mary MacKillop, Birkdale. What a vibrant community where everyone was welcome! We truly felt like we had come "home" as our hometown New Plymouth was fairly progressive and we loved the participation of the community, especially from women. We were all equal!!

We enjoyed 3 years at St Mary's on the corner of Merivale Street and thought we would always be there. It was such a busy place and all about people, community and especially the marginalised. Of course we were both impressed with Peter and Terry, although we were disappointed that they didn't wear vestments every Sunday and stick rigidly to the teachings of Rome... NOT! We loved what we saw as people were 'walking the talk' and living out their faith. We had our grandson Ryan in one day who was all of four years old. He was bored and Michael took him outside and then into the



sacristy where Peter was chatting with a number of small children and introducing them to his beautiful kelpie blue heeler. Ryan was so shy and Michael recalls Peter just said "Hi!" patted Ryan on the head, knelt down and introduced him to his dog and the other children. A beautiful moment which we have seen repeated on so many occasions.

We vividly remember walking down to the TLC on that fateful Sunday. Michael wanted to stay and fight the establishment and I thought that it was just a hiccup... that we would be back in our old St Mary's Church building in no time once the Bishop realised that we were "okay", how wrong was!!

Well we have certainly weathered the storm as a community and now we are weathering the Covid storm. Even during lockdown the online liturgies kept us feeling connected as well as the Zoom meetings on a Sunday morning which helped enormously with the social isolation. The work put in by John Hallett and the team has been nothing short of outstanding. On a local level, we enjoy our cluster group activities and meeting up on a regular basis by either sharing a meal or going to the theatre/movies/etc., picnics in the park, or an intellectual/philosophical discussion on something interesting/topical.

We look forward to participating in the next chapter of SMX in whatever form that takes. Thank you Peter and Terry for everything you do for the SMX community.

Eileen & Michael Kirby

Together We Can Do It

This is a reflection on the power and the importance of community in these most uncertain and unstable times. And how it will be, in community we will find solutions or at least face our problems into the future. I have borrowed from a Ted Talk by Dr Anna Hands. She holds a PhD in Neuroscience and is a director of a not-for-profit community organisation PPL PWR which promotes sustainable innovation through public engagement.

The story I want to share with you is probably familiar to you. It is a story adapted from the 'The Star Thrower' by Loren Eiseley (1907-1977)

I want you to hear it with new ears and so to adapt it to the huge problems we face as a human community into the future.

Once upon a time, there was an old man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach every morning before he began his work. Early one morning, he was walking along the shore after a big storm had passed and found the vast beach littered with starfish as far as the eye could see, stretching in both directions.

Off in the distance, the old man noticed a young man approaching.

As the young man walked, he paused every so often and as he grew closer, the man could see that he was occasionally bending down to pick up an object and throw it into the sea. The man came closer still and the old man called out "Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?"

The young man paused, looked up and replied "Throwing starfish into the ocean. The tide has washed them up onto the beach and they can't return to the sea by themselves. When the sun gets high, they will die unless I throw them back into the water"



The old man replied "But there must be tens of thousands of starfish on this beach. I'm afraid you won't be able to make much of a difference."

The young man bent down. Picked up yet another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean.

Then he turned, smiled and said, "It made a difference to that one".

This story is about the importance of taking Individual responsibility. Taking seriously the impact we can have to make this world a better place.

The problems we have today such as climate crises, the global pandemic, the refugee crises, systemic racism are all huge.

We live in a society which stresses the importance of individual actions. It's true we all need to do our bit – such as reduce our carbon foot print, challenge racism when we see it.

At times I agree with the old man in the story – the challenges we face are too huge to be taken on by just one individual, but I wonder how different that story would have been if the young man had persuaded the old man to join him. Better yet what if he had gone back to the local village/town and persuaded the whole village/town to do the same. They could have cleared the whole beach. That is the power of the individual actions when they take place in the context of community.

Together We Can Do It (continued)

We don't need to write a new fable to demonstrate the power of community. There are many real-life examples. Cast your mind back to the star fish beach but instead of the fish imagine plastic and garbage. Imagine if the garbage is three to four metres deep. This could be an image of Versova Beach in Mumbai, India in 2015. When I see this, I feel sick in my stomach, I see the immense damage that humans are doing to our environment.

In 2015 a young lawyer by the name of Afrez Shah, was similarly shocked by the devastation, and like the young starfish man, set out with gloves and a bag to pick up the trash. When he realised he could not do it alone, unlike the young starfish man, he went along to his community to get volunteers to come and help. In a little over two years together they recovered the beach, removing 12, 000 tonnes of plastic on the three kilometre stretch of beach. Today the beach is an area of natural beauty that benefits the whole community.

Making the seemingly impossible possible. That's the power of community action. Most actions are most powerful when they happen in the context of community.

In the Gospel there is a story which illustrates the point that, if we are generous with what we have, what we have will be multiplied. The story is that of the 'loaves and fishes' where the multitudes were fed when a small boy offered his two fish and five loaves. Perhaps it was because of the domino effect of his gesture – others came forward with whatever they had to eat. And shared it with the others.

Together we can achieve what initially seems impossible. Feeding five hundred people in the middle of nowhere?

These stories reveal three elements of the power of community that can assist us in facing the many global challenges we face today.

The first being empowerment.

Making choices to make the planet a better place can feel futile, we can feel as though we are a single drop of water in the ocean.

It is why there is so much anxiety around today. Statisticians tell us that seventy percent of young people felt a high level of anxiety about the climate crisis.

Surveys have revealed that engaging with community has shown to reduce anxiety and in a diverse setting it can become a place where we can learn about and prevent climate change. It makes sense because humans are social animals. Which of us can't run or walk longer and faster if we have someone running beside us? In the community we can empower those around us, we can feel less alone, and we can learn from one another.

The second element is Influence.

We should not underestimate the influence we can have on one another. Making choices should be regenerative – it shouldn't stop there.

Rebecca Huntley, author and social researcher, in her book, 'How to Talk about Climate Change in a way that Makes a Difference' says, 'The most important thing we can do about addressing climate change is to talk about it. So let's talk to each other about our climate choices. Let us influence each other.'

The third element is resilience.

Communities are more resilient to disruption, in particular communities which value compassionate empathy and exercise this among its members. It is this empathy which puts oneself in another's place, trying to deeply understand another and feel what might be going on for them, and then takes practical action to assist.

Together We Can Do It (continued)

Dr Anna shares the story of when her husband lost his living situation at the beginning of the covid outbreak in London because he was a teacher going in and out of schools, at a time before lockdown of schools became essential for combatting the virus. His landlord said that he was a danger to others in the units he lived in and evicted him. Bereft and at a loss he turned to his church community where someone offered him a place to live where he was made to feel welcome, loved and valued.

Being part of an empathic community helped his level of disruption to reduce because he did not have to face this disruption alone.

We have numerous examples of our Community of SMX doing similar things over the years.

We are fortunate that we still have a supportive faith community that encourages, informs, empowers, influences, enabling us to be a little more resilient into the future.

Let us not take these communities or family, however small, that surround us, however subtly, for granted. Let us continue to nurture them as they nurture us to be the best persons we can be.

Terry Fitzpatrick

Counsellor of our Soul

Holy Presence, Counsellor of our Soul,

We bow our heads in gratitude

and give thanks for community,

for each other and for those in leadership.

May we be a community of consecration

in which we celebrate the wholeness of life.

May we be a community of resistance

to all that is false, unloving and evil.

May we be a community of hope,

fresh balance and new vision.

Amen



Ingerid Meagher

Reciprocity

My attention was drawn to reciprocity by the 'On Being Project' in which Krista Tippet interviewed Robin Wall Kimmerer, a New York scientist, professor and member of the Potawatomi nation.

In this podcast Kimmerer argues that the concept of us sustaining the Earth is narrow and doesn't change the dynamic we have with Earth. She says we need to have a reciprocal and loving relationship with Earth.

So I've begun trying to understand what she means by this.

The Cambridge dictionary says reciprocity is behaviour between two people (or groups of people), where each gives and receives, and the feeling of mutual exchange strengthens the relationship. I suggest that reciprocity could be at the heart of all our relationships.

In her book 'Braiding Sweetgrass', (described as a "hymn of love to the world"), Robin Kimmerer weaves her scientific knowledge with the indigenous way of knowing handed down by her Native American ancestors.

She believes reciprocity is central to life on Earth and provides many examples of how other species weave webs of reciprocity. Fungi forage for mineral nutrients in the soil and deliver them to the trees in exchange for carbohydrates. Trees warn each other of danger and share carbon and moisture.

Kimmerer also explains that if one of these species and the gifts it carries is missing in biodiversity, the ecosystem is depauperate. Every species is important.

She tells the story of asking her Uni students "Do you love the Earth?". Being conscientious students of botany, they said "Of course, we love

the earth!". She continued "Does the Earth love you back?". They were silent. They were unable to imagine what a reciprocal relationship with Earth would look like.

There are so many ways Earth loves us – giving life, showering us with food, nurturing us with beauty, as well as other species giving of themselves, that we might live. Kimmerer says Earth longs for a reciprocal relationship with us and there is great joy in having a mutual, flourishing, loving relationship with Earth. Sustainability on its own can mean we are superior; we stay the same and keep on taking. Reciprocal loving relationships require much more.

The concept of reciprocity broadens what it means to be human. It means being non-dualistic, non-competitive, open, a good listener, self-aware, as well as being able to receive from others and give generously and sensitively.

Kimmerer explains that language can define relationships and in her culture the personal pronoun, ki, is used to lovingly address all living beings.

In our western culture we still see humans at the top of the hierarchy and in English we use the word "it" when we talk about Earth, rivers, plants or animals, which tends to objectify them, reduce them to a thing and gives us permission to treat them as "other" and disrespect them.



She suggests the word "kin" is the closest in our language to describe a close and loving relationship with Earth and other living beings.

Cosmologist, Brian Swimme says *The universe is not a collection of objects but rather a communion of subjects. This is especially clear in our Earth community where every living being on Earth is cousin to every other living being.*

I have found it adds a whole new dimension to walking in nature when I think of the plants, trees, and the river as "kin" and when I am fully open to receiving their gifts. I am conscious that their beauty asks me for reciprocity – to not only care for and advocate for them, but also to make something beautiful in response!

I believe reciprocity is essential for healing and developing a good relationship with our First Nations people. Accepting the gift of the Uluru Statement requires a huge shift on our part - a shift to a reciprocal relationship with First Nations people where we become more aware of our blind spots and colonial mindset, where we set aside our opinions, listen deeply, be open to radical change, where we gratefully receive the gifts offered to us and respond in love. (We are only beginning the journey.)

The podcast caused me to reflect on all my relationships and consider how I nurture others, bring beauty to their lives and how open I am to receive from others. For some of us receiving is difficult. We like to be doers and givers. Over time we develop strategies of diverting attention away from ourselves.

Creating a space and an openness to receiving is an essential part of reciprocal, loving relationships. Not that it needs to be even or at the same time. As we know, there are times and seasons in relationships, for giving and receiving.

The concept of reciprocity is a key theme in Scripture. Hebrew Scripture is all about a Covenant relationship between God and the people, based on love and a responsibility to each other – I will be your God, you will be my people. It was a loving, reciprocal, Covenant.

In Hebrew Scriptures there are multiple creation stories that contradict the narrative about our dominion over Earth, which has been conveniently emphasised and cemented in our psyche. There are also many passages about the holiness of creation and God's abundant presence in all of creation. The New Testament also presents an invitation to a reciprocal relationship with a loving God, as well as a command to "love your neighbour as yourself".

The mystics have continually called us to reciprocal relationships, though they may have used different words. Thomas Merton said The whole idea of compassion is based on keen awareness of the interdependence of all living beings which are all part of one another and are all involved in one another.

Teilhard de Chardin saw the western mindset as the problem of modernity. He said, the artificial

Reciprocity (continued)

separation between humans and the cosmos lies at the root of our moral confusion. Einstein said *Our task is to free ourselves from this illusion, this prison of separateness, by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.*

Finally, Thomas Berry says *All of the universe is the unfolding of God. To destroy a living species is to forever silence a voice of God who is deeply involved in all our lives and who is everywhere.*



I find Robin Kimmerer's call to reciprocity very compelling. It provides a different way of being in all our relationships and all our interactions with all living beings. She says *If all the world is a commodity how poor we grow. When our world is a gift in motion, how wealthy we become.*

How does reciprocity, based on gratitude, become a way of life? There are many ways we can try to change our mindsets. For some of us, it takes deliberate practice to make changes to our worldview.

That is the challenge.

Margaret Clifford

Adapted from her homily September 10, 2022

Progressive Christianity

By calling ourselves progressive Christians, we mean we are Christians who

1. Follow the way of the radical teachings of Jesus that leads to healing and wholeness that brings each person to Sacredness, Oneness and Unity of Life. These new sources of wisdom including the Earth enhance our spiritual journey.
2. Seek to create community that is inclusive of all people including but not limited to:
 - Conventional Christians and questioning skeptics
 - Believers and agnostics
 - People of all races, cultures and nationalities
 - Those of all sexual orientations and gender identities
 - People of all classes and abilities
3. Live our lives as Jesus did showing radical compassion, inclusion and a willingness to

challenge radical injustices.

4. Commit to life long learning and contemplation as we search for discernment with an open mind and an open heart.

Warren Rose 29SEP2021

The UC FORUM is a free movement of people who have been brought together by their inspiration from Jesus and a commitment to the future of the Church and the world. Although there are members who have no church affiliation, there are also members from several Christian denominations. From its inception in 2001, the UC FORUM has had a particular interest in the future of the Uniting Church in Australia. This has expanded to the Church as a whole. It aims to bring together people asking questions about the Christian faith. It encourages the church into a realistic re-assessment of the way it engages with the modern world.

Cometh the Hour, Cometh the Man

Cometh the hour, cometh the man is a quotation you see used, but it is not clear which work this quote is from. It means that when a hero is required, one will appear. It does happen sometimes, and I would like to discuss two heroes who rose from very unlikely backgrounds.

Volodymyr Zelensky was a Ukrainian actor, comedian and producer of TV shows. The highlight of his career was a TV comedy called *Servant of the People*, which ran on Ukrainian TV from 2015 to 2019. In it he played a school teacher who accidentally became president of Ukraine.

While the show was still running, he announced his candidacy for the presidency of Ukraine. I can imagine that this was good for a bit of a laugh – the sort of thing *The Chaser* might do in Australia. The difference with what might happen in Australia was that he was elected. He won the presidency fairly easily. Which makes you wonder what the electorate was thinking. Could they not tell the difference between fiction and reality? Ukraine was a country with more than its fair share of problems and they elect a comedian as president?

Then came the Russian invasion. Suddenly Zelensky was everywhere on our TV screens, addressing parliaments and assemblies. His sincerity and determination are riveting, and everyone wants to hear him talk. Many countries, including Australia, have offered help to fight the invasion. His ability to perform in front of a camera went from being a ridiculous reason for being president to what Ukraine needed most, and what has enabled them to resist the invasion so far.

Winston Churchill is generally accepted to be a heroic leader of the British people during the Second World War. But if I had been in the British electorate in 1939, I would never have

voted from him. Churchill was from a wealthy family who lived on a country estate. In spite of the wealth, he had a reputation as a bad payer of bills, he was rude to support staff and he was an alcoholic. He wanted England to fight to keep its empire, when most of those around him could see that the days of empire were past. He had acquired a reputation for erratic decision making, not helped by his promoting of the disastrous Gallipoli landings in World War 1.

When Neville Chamberlain resigned in 1940, and the Conservative Party chose Churchill as leader, Britain was in a desperate state. A German invasion was expected at any time, and there was a line of thought that Britain should negotiate with the Germans, maybe something like the Vichy French had done.

Once Churchill became Prime Minister, his leadership and determination made it easy to overlook his negatives. From one of his most stirring speeches:-

'We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.'

These words contain so much emotion that I have quoted them as verse, rather than prose. They left neither the waverers nor the Nazis in any doubt as to what they were facing.

Peter Brown

Photostory - going into exile



Peter presides



Fire ceremony



Certainly - 'a considered response'



Terry with candle leads the way



Women read and do homilies



Easter fire -threatens to burn down the church



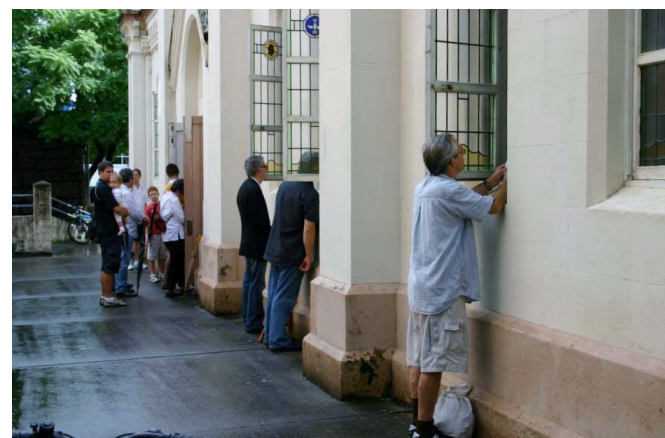
We all come along too.



Yes - almost all of us.



What a congregation!



We can't all fit in.



Arriving at The Promised Land - our new home



Singing us in are the Union choir.



Peter rides away - but not too far.



Ready to leave the old Church.



There is even a play and a movie made about us.
St Mary's Matters



In the TLC - we show our solidarity.

Awakening

I glanced up and saw you
rushing towards me
your arms reaching out
your face lit up
with joy and expectation
You didn't wait
for an angel's announcement
or a birth, you poured
your presence out
you became my life
Everyone, everything, was you
and I wondered
why did I not see you before
why did I not feel you
brush up against my skin
Why did I not know
you were entangled
in the deep reeds of my heart
and that I'd borrowed
my breath from you
But now I know
and I can't un-know
and we are moving forward
together, becoming
something more

Margaret Clifford

The Origins of our Ritual of Eucharist

On Holy Thursday we celebrate the origins of our ritual of Eucharist. The origins are Jewish and go back to the ancient story of God liberating the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. The Christian account picks up the story at around 30 CE. It focuses on a group of Jews observing the ritual of Passover. They are celebrating their story of freedom from slavery; they are celebrating liberation and hope.¹

In the Gospel account, Jesus and his friends, good practising Jews, are keeping the Jewish law. They are gathered in an upstairs room in a modest house on the Western Hill of Jerusalem. Because it is Passover, the Holy City of Jerusalem is full of pilgrims and the small group gathered in this room are also pilgrims. They have taken several days to walk the 100 kilometres from the Galilee to the Holy City.¹

In the room we find Jesus and twelve male disciples. But the scholars tell us that there are others as well; that there are other men and several women. The most notable of the women is Mary Magdalene, along with Mary, the mother of Jesus. And this makes sense. Everything we know about Jesus suggests that the group would have been more diverse than just thirteen men.¹

In this particular celebration, not only are Jesus and his friends keeping the ancient rituals; They are also creating some new ones.¹

The importance of this story can be appreciated when we realize that it is included in all four Gospels as well as in the writings of St Paul. Naturally, the four Gospel accounts are not all the same. Each tells the story from a particular point of view.

But between the four Gospels we have all the elements of the story –

- the prediction of Judas' betrayal
 - and of Peter's denial,
- St Mary's Matters

- the mention of the New Commandment,
- the promise of the Holy Spirit,
- the delegation of authority to the disciples,
- Interestingly, the foot-washing is found only in John's Gospel.
- And the bread and wine event does not occur in John's Gospel.

Changing the Relationship

The various events of the story have been closely examined by Beatrice Bruteau, an American author.³ She sees the Lord's Supper telling the story of a change in relationship, the relationship between Jesus and the disciples. The relationship changes from one of leader and followers to one of friends.⁴

John's Gospel tells us that during the meal Jesus says *I do not call you servants any longer; but I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.* (John 15:15)

So Jesus is aware that his execution is imminent. He has spent three years teaching his followers about a new way of living, but now the followers must take the lead in the transformation of their world. To do this, they need to be Jesus' friends, his equals. They need to be empowered.

Washing the Feet

Jesus demonstrates this new relationship by his actions during the meal. Washing his disciples feet is an act of great humility on the part of Jesus, not what a master normally would do for the followers. Peter is shocked and says to him, *'You will never wash my feet.'* Jesus answers, *'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.'* (John 13:8)

So the washing of the feet is much more than just an act of humility. It is a remarkable sign



loving the way Jesus loved has the particular slant. Jesus loved in a way that broke down boundaries, that allowed everyone to live life fully, to be empowered. It allowed all people to be all that we were created to be.⁷

Agency

In all these elements of the story Jesus invites equality and mutuality. He gives the disciples agency. He empowers them to take responsibility for their own teachings and their own actions.

Even in acknowledging Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial, Jesus does not attempt to stop them. He lets them make those decisions.

It is enormously significant that Jesus gives his disciples agency. Agency is a really important part of human life. It is what dignifies human life. Sadly, it is often denied, especially when an imbalance of power is involved and when the powerful seek to keep it that way.

Also sadly, we don't have to look far to find examples in our own times of denial of agency.

- Russia's invasion of Ukraine denies the Ukrainians their right to independence and self-determination, and even their rights to life itself.
- Australia's inhumane treatment of asylum seekers denies innocent people their rights to freedom and safety.
- Our failure to allow our indigenous people and to make their own decisions denies them the right to self-determination.
- Actions that deny people agency.

Conclusion

And that is not what Jesus modelled at that final supper. Jesus modelled agency and empowerment.

When he re-enacted that ancient Passover meal, he and his friends celebrated liberation and hope. And every time we celebrate our Christian ritual that emerged from that one, our Eucharist, we remember the liberation and hope that comes from agency, from giving every person a voice and the right to their own self-determination.

Footnotes:

1. <https://gregoryjenks.com/2017/04/13/breaking-bread-sharing-a-cup/>

2. *Matthew 26:17-29; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-38; and I Corinthians 11:23-25*

3. Bruteau, Beatrice, *The Holy Thursday Revolution*, 2005, Orbis Books, New York

4. <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/reviews/view/9890>

5. Bruteau, Beatrice, *The Holy Thursday Revolution*, 2005, Orbis Books, New York, page 59

6. <http://www.bobcornwall.com/2007/04/maundy-thursday-gathering-at-table.html>; Borg and Crossan, 2006, *The Last Week*, Harper, San Francisco, p 120

Liz Little

of empowerment and equality. When Jesus says you will have no share with me, he is empowering the disciples to be with him as friends and equals. He is breaking down the barriers between master and followers.⁵ And this is not a surprising thing for Jesus to do; he spent his whole ministry breaking down barriers - between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, male and female.

Bread and Wine

The message of mutuality is emphasized further when Jesus shares the bread and wine and speaks of it as his body and blood. By the sharing of his body and blood, Jesus invites all present to also share his execution and resurrection, to share death and new life, a passing from bondage to liberation. Jesus does not invite them to observe it all, but to be very much part of it.⁶

A New Commandment

Another element of the story found in John's Gospel is the giving of a new commandment. John has Jesus say

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. (John 13:34)

Now, loving one another is hardly a new commandment or even a new thought, but

Opening Prayer

Sacred Presence, Holy Mystery,
we meet You everywhere, in everyone and
in everything.

You meet us in our hearts, minds and
bodies.

You weave our lives into a rich, diverse
tapestry.

Move hearts so as to free silenced voices
from repression.

Then earth will sing in the perfection of
an unfinished symphony.

Amen

Blessing

May all be blessed with Hope,
Light and Harmony.

May all be free of repression
and live in Peace.

And may blessings surround us
all.

Amen

Ingerid Meagher



Befriending Reality

I start with this unexpected find the other day . It is a letter to my mother written when I must have been in about Grade 5 and it surely shows the intensity of Catholic conditioning!...

Dear Mummy, Do you know that girl who I said hated Catholics? She said when she gets 21 she is going to become a Catholic and see about becoming a Nun. She is Fair Dinkume. I am taking my Catechism and she is learning it. She said her mother was a Catholic and married an Anglican in the Methodist Church. I am giving her holy cards and medals

Narelle

PS Could I have sixpence?

Now how about that for a reality check on the essence of oneself!

This weekend, I ponder our reality as individuals, community and world and the challenge of befriending our reality.

In Matthew's version of the Palm Sunday story the last line says "And the whole city was in turmoil." That reality is being experienced the world over and especially in horrifying ways in the Ukraine..and still in Afghanistan...and still in central and northern Africa...The whole world is in turmoil.

I love the work of Irish poet and theologian, Padraig O'Tuama. He is currently the host of "On Being" my favourite weekly podcast with Krista Tippett. In an interview with Krista he talks about what is reflected in the liturgy at this time of the year known traditionally as Holy Week. He says:

And the second thing that strikes me, in terms of the spiritual background of my childhood, is the Stations of the Cross. In Catholic and Episcopal churches, you'll find 14 images, from the time that Jesus of Nazareth was condemned to death to the time that his corpse was laid in the tomb.



And they're just 14 stopping points. And for 10 years, I did the stations every day. And what I like about the Stations of the Cross is that they don't say, "Oh, but then there's the fifteenth one, where it's all lovely, fantastic."

In the traditional understanding, there isn't a fifteenth station. The idea is to find hope in the practice of what seemed to be the worst. However, there is the understanding that, within it, we can discover some kind of hope — the hope of protest, the hope of truth-telling, the hope of generosity, the hope of gesture — even in those places.

So, with the background of our Lenten Theme Rrefresh, Review, Refocus, I have entitled this Homily "Befriending Reality." I really can't recall where I first heard the title, but Robert Thurman, ordained Tibetan Monk writes:

Buddhism is engaged realism, because they say that Buddha himself discovered the nature of reality — completely understood it, fully and totally, and also understood that other beings could do so, and also understood that only by such discovery can you find freedom from that suffering.

"If you really know the reality, then you will be free of the suffering" was his real innovative teaching, which has lasted now for thousands of years. So being in tune with our reality is the key.

I also love Thich Nhat Hanh's words *The pure white lotus can only appear if there is mud on the bottom.....and don't we all have mud in our reality?*

Padraig O'Tuama calls being in the now "Hello to Here." He speaks of the daily practice of saying Hello to Here" by naming his reality at this moment! Looking for not only what is muddy but for aspects of the here and now for which I could be grateful. Padraig says:

"Neither I nor the poets I love found the keys to the kingdom of prayer and we cannot force God to stumble over us where we sit. But I know that it's a good idea to sit anyway. So every morning I sit, I kneel, waiting, making friends with the habit of listening, hoping that I'm being listened to. There, I greet God in my own disorder.

"I say hello to my chaos, my unmade decisions, my unmade bed, my desire and my trouble. I say hello to distraction and privilege, I greet the day and I greet my beloved and bewildering Jesus.

"I recognize and greet my burdens, my luck, my controlled and uncontrollable story. I greet my untold stories, my unfolding story, my unloved body, my own love, my own body. I greet the things I think will happen and I say hello to everything I do not know about the day. I greet my own small world and I hope that I can meet the bigger world that day.

"I greet my story and hope that I can forget my story during the day, and hope that I can hear some stories, and greet some surprising stories during the long day ahead. I greet God, and I greet the God who is more God than the God I greet. Hello to you all, I say, as the sun rises above the chimneys of North Belfast. Hello."

SBS recently on the program "Insight" had a beautiful way of putting it:

If ever you stand in a storm or a crisis. Raise yourself like a bird above the storm or crisis and get a bird's eye view. You will get a better angle and a complete perspective of what is going on down there!

So, we continue to take on board yet again the urge to personally stay in the now. Recently I listened to an interview with the late poet Mary Oliver and she spoke about paying attention to the now and said that of itself, paying attention is no more than a report. When we pay attention we need to learn to pay attention with empathy. I think that is the key to the practice of befriending reality.

Let us think about Jesus befriending reality on that first Palm Sunday...I wonder, what was Jesus thinking at that moment, as the people surrounded Him, cheering for Him, praising His name pouring out their adoration, worship and honour.

Trying to get into Jesus' mind...and his heart, his reality on that Palm Sunday moment....His reality might have been a sadness that had caused him to weep for Jerusalem and the fickleness of crowds....Perhaps he felt numb... His reality may have included much fear about the unknown but it may have also included a calm and a God presence beyond words. His reality may have included a great love for those close friends who had travelled around with him...It is we who know how that Palm Sunday did evolve, but Jesus in that moment only had his reality then. So, what comes to us when we say "Hello" to the reality of St Mary's – refresh/renew/refocus? Does the SMX vision statement reflect where we are at now? I see our reality as:

- strong desire for meaningful connection that Terry spoke of when we gather

Exile

An inconspicuous structure

just an ordinary inner City building

No character no beauty no architecture that might arise feeling

They'd been exiled to the second floor

didn't even claim a view

No paraphernalia no Altar

only simple chairs no sign of a pew

Each Soul as they arrived appeared at ease to be allowed there

They were warm friendly and gentle they had no cross to bear

No anger no remorse no feeling of loss within that barren exile

Hope love and joy filled that space as each of them would smile

I'd gone without expectation

there would be nothing there for me

Left with love in my heart realising just how my life should be

An inconspicuous structure

just an ordinary inner City building

But each Sunday its second floor filled the World with meaning

David Melville

28th February 2021



- Beautiful, rich liturgies thanks to the commitment of the Liturgy Committee and all those who contribute to liturgy

- The power of continued connection through online liturgies

- Joy through music and song

- Continued public activism

- Close connection to Micah Projects

- The reality that we many of us seem to be ageing fast!

- The reality of the unpredictability of Covid

- What seems to be a huge workload for a few

- Community members with struggles beyond the community that can sometimes keep us at a physical distance from SMX (that is me right here, right now).

How does this reality match up with the vision statements? It's a bit like the Jesus of Palm Sunday – how the SMX Vision Statements might evolve 12 years ago could never have been predicted. What was our community reality then has evolved and so well audited by recent Community Members' sharing. That is a truth we can hold on to now – that even as we refocus, how the Community can continue to evolve in the future is an unknown. What we have right here and now is something tangible that inspires gratitude. Richard Rohr reminds us not to see church (or our SMX Community) as an end in itself, but merely a vehicle for the original vision.

I recently went to a virtual funeral of a Goulburn Sister of Mercy and learned that the ageing Congregation has instructed the Sisters to prepare their own funeral now! Now that is a reality check!

But while ever there are beautiful humans who continue to step up sharing creative talents and activism for justice and truly loving one another, SMX may continue to evolve...but maybe the time will come when holding on to what we can do now becomes impossible and we may just have to let go. Maybe it will be a reality check to honestly assess what we can and can't do or maybe we determinedly continue to walk together until we are no more? Maybe we will become only an online community? Let us not be afraid of reality. Let us not worry about tomorrow as we focus on saying Hello to the here and now. Let us befriend reality with empathy and courage. The refocussing with truth telling on our reality as SMX now can make for meaningful conversation and connection. Let us hold one another as we make our own community Palm Sunday ride on the donkey into Holy Week with the conviction of hope in Resurrection transformation.

Let us pray this Solstice Blessing for our families, for all of the SMX Community and for the community of the world...(While not the time of Solstice, the Blessing is still meaningful).

Narelle Mullins

SMX Palm Sunday 2022

A Solstice Blessing

May that breath rest you
and may each breath rest you
as it has until now, and now
and now. This one, after
that one, after that one after that

Padraig O'Tuama

Season of Absence

It's not a chapel with sunlight pouring
through stained glass windows
offering slithers of silence
or a cathedral stained by history
offering ancient rituals that strain
to lift heavy hearts.

It's just a room on the second floor
large square posts supporting
the structure, gathering us in.
A holy place that holds
and heals our hearts, emboldens us,
turns us outwards.

We'll carry this room within us
during the long summer days
and we'll stretch across the absence,
keep each other connected, held,
knowing the holy presence, breaks through
walls, bursts out into lives.

*(Response to announcement at St Mary's in Exile Liturgy in December 2021
After Christmas we won't be gathering in the Trade and Labour Council building till the end of February".)*

Margaret Clifford