

Take Wings and Fly



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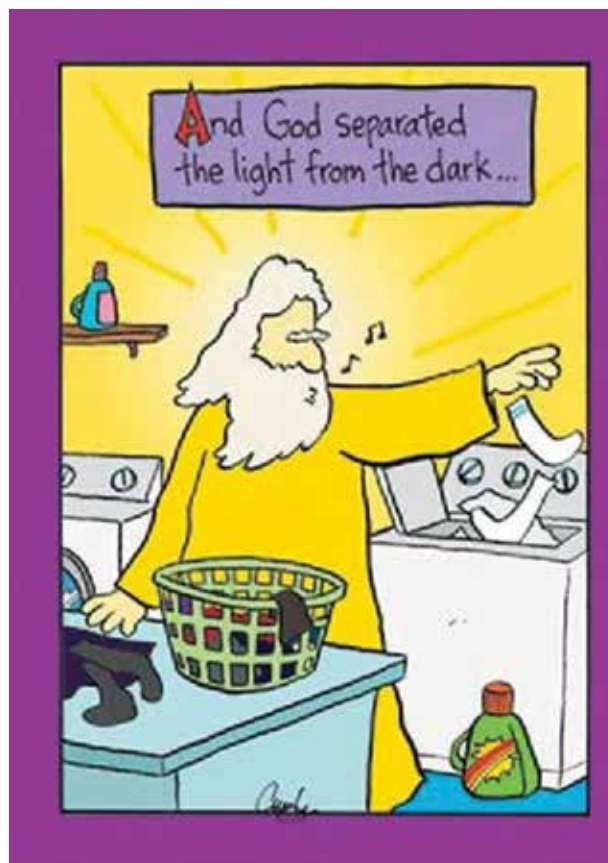
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From the Editor

The rather beautiful image on the cover suggested itself to me when I saw it, as a symbol of where we are as a community now. We were weary from the emotional effort of the move from the church and we were happy to construct a nice safe cocoon for ourselves at the TLC. We have become comfortable there. But like that beautiful emergent butterfly the time has come for us to use our wings and take off into the world around us.

We have a sense that there is a need out there for what we have here and we are willing to share these blessings.

So this issue talks about what we have to share and some ideas on how we could go about it. I have revisited the great piece that Gaye Keir wrote for our edition nineteen as it is pertinent to this issue as well.

We are much blessed and this is a call to each one of us to do whatever we can to take our community and all it has to offer out there into a waiting world.

Marg Ortiz - Editor

a vital, living community

welcoming anyone and everyone.

A couple of weeks ago I was visiting my brother Jack in a nursing home and the conversation came around to the retirement of Archbishop Bathersby. He made the comment that the Archbishop had at least tolerated St Mary's for a long time. I mumbled something that indicated a certain acquiescence. 'Ah, yes he did.' But I felt something that rankled within. As I was driving home my troubled feeling gave way to an insight. In saying even hesitantly that 'yes' to the Archbishop I was in effect agreeing that we, as a faith community, had over twenty years been doing something wrong.

The opposite was correct – we had taken the spirit of Vatican II to heart and we had committed ourselves as a community to those who live on the edge. We had nothing to be ashamed of – in fact it was the hierarchical, patriarchal, authoritarian institution under John-Paul II and Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, who should be ashamed. They set out to bury Vatican II 'lock, stock and barrel', becoming a church increasingly authoritarian and ultra-conservative. A church that demanded of men appointed to be Bishops that they promise obedience of mind and will to the Pope, the successor of St Peter. This, of course, is a complete fiction, as is the claim that the bishops are the successors of the apostles. So in this country as in other countries, the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church is aligned with the powerbrokers in the Vatican and requires slavish



Six week old twins, Finn and Marcus are nursed by Peter and Margot while dad Glen looks on. The babies' other dad, Ben isn't here today.

obedience to them. We have just seen this, when, towards the end of last year, the Bishops went to Rome for the *ad limina* visit and where they publicly aligned themselves with Vatican bureaucracies, at the same time distancing themselves from Bishop Bill Morris of Toowoomba who dared to raise issues that the people time and time again in this country and worldwide wanted Rome to reconsider. But of course the role of the people is to pray, pay and obey. The bishop says to the priest 'I obey the Pope, you should obey me and they (the people) should obey you.'

Well, you don't need me to tell you what a parlous state the Roman Catholic Church in this country has in recent years fallen into. Time and time again you hear reports from Catholics still in the pews how dolorous, how painful, how irrelevant liturgies are in various parishes around Australia.

Talking for myself, I feel that this community has survived the Tsunami that was inflicted upon

it by the Catholic Church – in fact more than survived; we are still here. I believe we now have an intentional community of Christian people who feel comfortable about themselves. We have a liturgy in which we all actually participate, where women are in leadership, where distinctions between Catholics, Anglicans and Protestants are no longer a factor, where homilies are given by a wide variety of people, and with a spirituality which is broad and unimpeded by doctrines and dogmas – a spirituality which continues to be deeply concerned with those on the edge.

I believe we, as a community, are now in a position to start 'talking ourselves up'. We are a vital, living community, a Christian community. We need to get on the front foot, be proactive and invite our families, friends, and neighbours to come and see. Maybe we need to start advertising ourselves publicly as an alternative faith community that welcomes anyone and everyone.

Peter Kennedy

Sharing our Gifts

A few months ago, at Peter's suggestion I got a group together to promote St. Mary's. I will share some of the ideas that have arisen from our discussions.

We often read of the importance of our inter-connectedness with each other and therefore the importance of community, so I would like to suggest ways that we can harness the existing love within our community to organically and sustainably promote ourselves.

I'll start off by saying that we prefer to say 'sharing our gifts' rather than 'promoting St. Mary's' as it seems more appropriate for what we experience here.

There are three parts to my suggestions:

Firstly... What is it that we have here at St Mary's? What are our gifts?

Secondly.... Why do we want to share it with the wider community?

And thirdly.... How do we go about it?

So what do we have here at St. Mary's? What are our gifts?

There are two important aspects to St. Mary's. One is our ever evolving liturgy which allows us all the freedom to explore what it means to be spiritual from a base of love and not fear. And because it is love based, it is sustainable. This is why we are still here, three years after we moved out from the umbrella of an institutional

Church. This freedom to explore is precious beyond words.

The second aspect of St. Mary's is a supportive community. This support network is one which most of us have had the privilege of experiencing.

So moving onto the second part. Why do we want to share our gifts with the wider community? This part I would like to share through my own experiences.

When Peter first suggested we get a group together to promote St. Mary's, without even thinking about it, I said 'yes' to him. This came from a deep sense of gratitude for what St. Mary's has been for me. I came to St. Mary's two and a half years ago. I had recently separated from my husband and due to the

“gratitude for what St. Mary's has been for me”

nature of my relationship, I had inadvertently let myself become isolated for many years. So when I finally separated, I realized that I did not have the support I was going to need to be able to cope with my upcoming challenges. I made a conscious decision at the time to get the support I so desperately needed. My cousin who is a community member of St. Mary's suggested to me to come along. She said, 'they have a meditation service on Saturdays and you will meet like-minded people there'. So one evening I did.

I loved the whole experience of coming around the table, holding of hands etc. And there was just this amazing feeling in the room. On about the third or fourth visit I met Brian and Angela. After the service, they followed up and engaged in conversation with me. I cannot remember what was said, however I remember feeling safe with them. From there on they visited me every Friday at home. I could honestly say I felt like I was a part of their family. They have been and continue to be my guardian angels. This is what St. Mary's has been for me. Truly loving support when I so needed it.

My own life's journey has proven to me that I can't make it alone, I need community. I grew up thinking I needed to be independent. One of my greatest lessons has been that it's more important to be interdependent.

St Mary's offers two avenues, a sustainable liturgy and a supportive community which helps us to go inwards and connect with our spirituality, our essence which is the love that we all are. When we start to act from that place of love it will cause us to make more love-based conscious choices, and thereby heal our world a little bit too. Everyone counts in doing this. So these are the reasons I would like to share our gifts.

So now finally, how can we then share these gifts with the wider community? What sustainable avenues can we use?



We felt that it is important we make sure new people who come here share what we enjoy. Visitors would experience a great liturgy, as we all do. To facilitate this, the liturgy group meets every week, working to create an evolving celebration which provides more enriching experiences for us all.

What about our community? Do we actively and consciously work on being a better community? Do we actively and consciously reach out to other members or do we sometimes take for granted that everyone feels supported, included, loved, accepted etc.

What about when new people come along. Have we got a culture in place where it comes absolutely naturally to us as individuals to engage with them, offering a smile or a welcome? What about existing community members that we don't know as yet. Do we venture outside our comfort zones to meet new people?

I have been coming here for two and a half years. I have only ventured out to meet a few of you because that is where I am comfortable. I always sit in that same spot. And after the service, I generally have a chat with the same people. Sometimes I might

meet someone new. However I don't make a conscious effort to do so because I am happy and comfortable with those I know. Could there be other community members that are not as outgoing as they might be. Some who have been coming here for many years still feel a bit isolated.

Just as our liturgy group is always working on our liturgy, could we as a community make sure we are working on how we interact with each other so that we too are ever evolving our ways of connecting with and including others.

By the way we start to interact with each other in more meaningful ways we can be walking testimonials for St. Mary's and thereby organically attract people here. Our group believed this is a sustainable way to go about sharing our gifts. We all know that word of mouth is the most authentic, sustainable and of course cost effective method of advertising.

Here are just a few of the suggestions that came up. Firstly how can we get to know more of our community? We are all very grateful to our Connections Group for the events they organize to achieve just this. As well as these we could: Change the spot where we sit, we get a different view and we get to meet someone new too.

Make a conscious effort to engage with someone new, if we have the confidence to do this. The more people we get to know within our community, the better support

network we can be for each other.

Volunteer to welcome community members as they come out of the lifts and up the stairs. We currently have Mary and June who so lovingly welcome us every Sunday morning. Do we have someone welcoming at the other masses? If we think of ourselves as one big family and that this is our home, we would expect to welcome visitors at the door. If they were coming for the first time we would show them around and introduce them to other family members so they feel comfortable.

We could form groups around similar interests. People don't mind travelling to meet like-minded people. At the moment we have a number of geographic cluster groups, a meditation group and a few special interest groups. But this idea could be expanded.

There is a concept called 'Pay it forward'. It is about doing random acts of kindness for people we don't know and asking them to pay it forward. Acts of kindness can be as big or as small as we want them to be. This could be our community signature. Even the kids could be involved. This would really foster community spirit.

To sum up, we need to actively and consciously work at being an evolving community which could organically and sustainably attract people. This, alongside appropriate media exposure could help our community grow.

*Namaste.
Carolyn Vincent*

St Mary's for Me

I first appeared at St Mary's in 1988 as a visitor to Expo from the ACT. I had heard there was a "Taize like" liturgy there. I came and it was soul stirring.

Two years later, our little family headed to Brisbane to live and I immediately sought out St Mary's again although I only came intermittently from Redcliffe until 1992 when the journey itself was a thoughtful experience and I then came weekly, immersing myself in the richness, especially of homilies, liturgy and people.

I once heard a Prayer of the Faithful by Wendell Rosevear and it was such a prayer of deep pain that when I learned he was a GP (and I was searching for one to take on this complex being!) I went to him and am still there with probably the biggest file on record! Along the way, Wendell's journeying with our family has been a wonderful gift.

And so, through St Mary's, I met others too. Our Northern Cluster operated with literally "close" connections in our small townhouse for many years. It was a group that was vibrant, angry at times, always searching and definitely a great experience of acceptance and community with one aspect in common - that for whatever reason we all found ourselves in the "thick" of St Mary's.

I know that the homilies over the years and the thoughts I passed on through school newsletters to

students and families have been overall embraced with the yearning and hunger of so many disillusioned Catholics.

I journeyed from the "old" to the TLC with a heavy heart and wondered what might be the implications for someone as a leader in Catholic Education. There were no immediate implications, but I chose to be part of a full commitment to St Mary's in Exile and decided that retirement with a need for some ongoing income may just be do-able....Now, I work three days a week, am "Nana" for the rest of the time and simply delight when I walk into Mass with a precious Grandson of whom others make a fuss and then probably excite him even more (as the "chocolate Communion" does!) despite his prior commitment to "sit still, be quiet and listen!"

There have been times of great pain and St Mary's was there when Ashley was dying - in the form of great care, but also wonderful food when preparing such was the last thing any of us could think about. I so admire the "Marys" who are attentive to needs and thoughtful in their actions.

I like the ability to be myself even though I often don't quite know who or what that is! I don't like labels and hence I don't want to wear a nametag knowing I then have make additional efforts to become familiar and connected



*Transcendence in the Forest
by Wendell Rosevear*

with people. I tend to get into a rut in the same seat although where I sit up the front comes from my mother's marching the seven of us always up to the front seat of the Church so that we could see and understand what was going on! I do like the recent challenge by Carolyn to try to see the community from a different perspective though.

I love going to the gatherings that are arranged but these days, we can't manage to do that easily. However, I draw strength from my weekly liturgies and that seems to suffice.

I love the uniqueness of both Terry and Peter and have really felt nurtured by their soul-searching and honesty even though the exposure of their struggle may have been costly for them.

So many of my friends, especially in Religious Life in NSW and Victoria continually express their

Spreading the News

If I thought our community that meets at the TLC had All Truth I would certainly want to shout the news from the rooftops. I think we are a wonderful, even extraordinary group of people who do not all have the same beliefs or even the same ideas of what a community like ours should be or do. But that I think is one of our greatest strengths.

In coming to the TLC each and every one of us had to look at what he/she believed, examine carefully what he was walking away from, and come to the decision that the risk of moving out from under the umbrella of the Institutional Church was the only thing to be done in the circumstances. Some have been disappointed that we did not more rapidly adopt ideas that are at odds with the teachings of the church in which we grew up. Some have moved back under the umbrella as they thought we were abandoning truths that they were not prepared to question. Most of us though were less concerned about the details of what we believed or dismissed. What really mattered to us was that we were being treated as honest human beings who are trying to understand who we are and how we can relate to the Divine. We are all looking for the Truth and have each felt in at least a small way that we have deepened our

relationship with that Ultimate Being. We are all convinced that this sense of authenticity is extremely important to us. We do not always agree with Peter and Terry so cannot be accused of following them into exile. This too frees them to come to their own faith for it is only when we look deeply into our beliefs that we are able to grasp them more fully. An unexamined belief is hardly worth mentioning!

“
we wonder if the people in the pews were really important to those in positions of power

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Certainly we were hurt and dismayed that we were not asked to present our opinion of Peter as a PP: though many of us did write to Archbishop Battersby and tried to fill out the picture of a man who was the most unlikely of rebels - someone who had found the need to be authentic. Being treated as unimportant collateral damage of his dismissal made us wonder if the people in the pews were really important to those in positions of power.

For years people had been coming to St Mary's from all over Brisbane

and beyond because there they found a community where their search for God was taken seriously and it was recognised that whether they were straight or gay, rich or poor, uneducated or very learned, in a valid marriage or in a union not recognised by the establishment, born in Australia or overseas, mattered little.

The really important thing was whether you really wanted an authentic faith and that someone would listen to you and recognise in your story the search for Truth - for God. This openness is still there and has attracted people from other religions (and none); but we will continue to question, to seek union with the Great Awareness who is in and through all things but who is and has always been in the Eternal Now where Past, Present and Future are as one and what happens here in South Brisbane today or at the outermost parts of the universe thousands of years ago are Eternally Present and part of the oneness of Being.

The freedom to share our insights and our story helps us all to look honestly at who we are and where we are being led - not by rebel priests but by the Spirit of Truth we each find in the deepest recesses of our heart.

Shar Ryan

St Mary's For Me

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sadness of not having a "Church" like SMX.

I am sharing one of Wendell Rosevear's paintings (what a

beautiful title?) as when I saw it today, it reminded me of not only of his talents and care, but that he is just one of the beautiful people who make up SMX and

reminds me of the depths that our journeying can discover through meaningful encounter.

Thank you St Mary's!

Narelle Mullins

Paradigm Shift

There are many who believe the Catholic Community of St Mary's in South Brisbane should have made compromises to retain technical communion with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane and the universal Catholic Church.

To suggest that compromise is possible in this situation is to misunderstand the nature of paradigm shifts. The St Mary's Community has undergone several such shifts – in theology (the nature of God), Christology (the nature of Christ), and ecclesiology (the nature of the Church). And these shifts have had consequences for how the Community lives out its commitment to Gospel values.

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there has always been more emphasis on what people believe than on how they live their lives
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There's no going back from a paradigm shift and there's no compromise position. Once you've decided the earth is round and not flat, there is no going back to believing the earth is flat and there's no compromise position that encompasses both flat and round. Once you've decided the earth revolves around the sun and not the other way around, there's no going back and there's no compromise position. It's either one or the other. And so it is with the people of St Mary's who have arrived at an understanding of

God, Jesus and Church that is at odds with the paradigms of the hierarchical Church.

Paradigms are key to institutional religion, particularly Christianity where there has always been more emphasis on what people believe than on how they live their lives. Hence the hierarchical Church seems more affronted by someone saying “I don't believe in the Virgin Birth” than by saying “I was molested by my parish priest when I was a child”.

The story of Christianity is the story of paradigm shifts. The primary challenge facing Jesus was bringing about a shift in how people understood and related to God and therefore each other. Shortly after Jesus' death, Peter and Paul had stoushes about what it meant to be a follower of Jesus. And such stoushes have remained integral to the Christian story throughout its two thousand year history.

The Catholic Church has never led the pack in paradigm shifts. It's always brought up the rear, agreeing to the shift only when to do otherwise would lead to annihilation. The status of women is an easy example. The hierarchical Church remains cemented in a role-based anthropology of gender that makes no sense to educated people of the twenty-first century. For St Mary's the equal status of women is fundamental to the life of the Community, recognised in many ways, including inviting women



to preach. But it is safe to predict that the Catholic Church will once again be bringing up the rear on something as blindingly obvious as treating women as equals in ministry.

Religious paradigm shifts tend to originate silently in the pews, followed, sometimes centuries later, by what is often a shift-by-stealth in the hierarchical Church. The Church is not known for its capacity to stand up and say “we got that one wrong”. What they are known for is harsh treatment of those who dissent from the prevailing paradigm. So the people sit quietly in the pews and hold onto their private views, many of which are irreconcilable with the official position. Or else they walk away. Many do.

What makes St Mary's different is that the views in the pews matter, and out of those views in the pews, supported by priests who acknowledge the reality of paradigm shifts and are not afraid to embrace them, have come models of God, Christ and Church that make sense to people as they struggle to live their lives, faithful to the message of Jesus, in the twenty-first century.

What's in a Name?

Several people (some outside the community) have asked me “Why is St Mary’s still in exile?” This had relevance when we had just been chucked out of the Catholic Church. (In fact Peter Kennedy had just been chucked out – we were considered irrelevant to the hierarchy who did not appear to understand the meaning of pastoral care or who considered we would sit there like sheep.) Is this image still relevant today and will it be relevant in the future?



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The identity that we forge could then continue and evolve
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Exile conveys a negative, an excluded, image. Many of Australia’s first citizens were exiles from England or from Ireland. What would our national consciousness be if we called this great southern land “England in Exile” or “Ireland in Exile”? The image would be unthinkable.

Perhaps it is time for us to consider our name and whether it is the correct image for the future. It needs to be a considered endeavour. We should consider whether we think of ourselves as followers of Peter Kennedy (though we love and respect him and Terry, as leaders of our faith community, dearly). Perhaps we should think about the process of forging our future identity with Peter and Terry as our current leaders but with the prospect of successors to the leadership in the longer term. The identity that we forge could then continue and evolve.

“St Mary’s – Spiritual Progressives” or “St Mary’s Faith Community” come to mind as the sort of titles which would be forward looking without defining ourselves too carefully or straight-jacketing future members or leadership. These key words on our web site might be picked up by those searching the internet for a new spiritual home. A carefully thought- out title may be a positive in publicizing ourselves and hence in outreach for new members.

Can we encourage this discussion?
John Roberts

Paradigm Shift

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St Mary’s is at the vanguard of a paradigm shift. Like all heralders of such shifts, the community will probably be extinguished as one would a spot fire. But the spot fires will continue to break out and grow in number. And, with no disrespect intended to the devastated people of Victoria, the spot fires will eventually become a roaring inferno and

the hierarchical Catholic Church will once again be overtaken, thankfully, by the innate wisdom of the people of God.

Gaye E Keir

This article was originally published in Edition nineteen of our Magazine, Winter 2009. At the time it was much commented upon. It articulated in a coherent way what many of us had been

feeling intuitively, about what we believed and why we had to move out from the church, but were finding it difficult to explain.

After three years this ‘spot fire’ is still burning brightly and looks as though it may continue to do so.

Editor

St Mary's in Exile

Regarding our “in Exile” tag, I wanted to drop it. Being in a place of exile carries with it the thought/desire of going back home. But now I find its connection with the Book of Exodus illuminating. Let me explain. The Israelites first went to Egypt because of famine in their own land. They stayed there and built a new and comfortable way of life. But then came a new power—a Pharaoh who was not familiar with their story. Oppression became the force of the day. YHWH’s solution was to call his people out of the oppression into exile.

Moses was singled out because YHWH had heard the cry of the Israelites in their oppression. Somewhat reluctantly Moses obeyed, and the journey began. The Israelites were being taken out of bondage. The Pharaoh would no longer be able to oppress them.

In the wilderness and transformation, the Israelites encountered many difficulties. Discouraged, some even suggested that they would be better off going back to Egypt, the land of oppression. But, even in the face of their complaints, YHWH continued to nourish them with “water from the rock” and “manna from heaven.”

Biblical scholar and a member of the Jesus Seminar, Marcus Borg sees the Israelite story as a model of the vision of Christianity as a journey of transformation. “It is an image of the Christian life not

primarily as believing or being good but as a relationship with God. That relationship does not leave us unchanged but transforms us into more compassionate beings, into ‘the likeness of Christ.’”

The solution to the problem of bondage is liberation—moving on to the place of freedom. The way to liberation is through the wilderness; but this is a place where God is encountered. It can also be a place of fear and insecurity, where we might even be tempted to long for the old false security of “Egypt.”

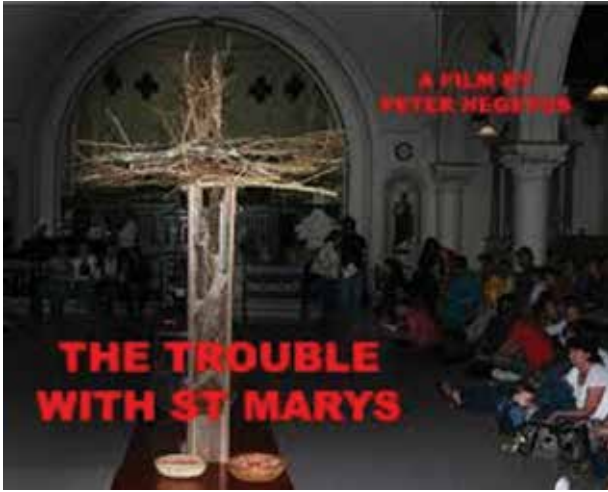
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St Mary’s, a place in which all people were respected and new ideas could be discussed without limitation.
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How does this resemble our SMX story? How are we like those Israelites? Our “hunger” for spiritual nourishment and connection with our Creator, which we had not been finding sufficiently in our various environments, had led us to St Mary’s, a place in which all people were respected and new ideas could be discussed without limitation. Our self-selected “Egypt” was our home in the beautiful St Mary’s church and our visible membership of the Roman Catholic Church. This “Egypt” gave us a sense of belonging and security. But then came a new regime—a Pharaoh who was

not comfortable with our story. Oppression became the force of the day. YHWH’s solution was to call us out of empire/comfort into exile.

Having been told to leave the official church and its building, most of us, with hearts full of hope, went into the wilderness, to strive to be, as Vatican II called us to be, the People of God in the Catholic Church. Some had misgivings and stayed. If we did not leave with anger, we did so with criticism of those who really gave us no choice but to move on. Maybe we felt we, too, were being called out of empire, to a new journey where we could encounter Jesus the Christ in a new way; and where we would have to find a new way of seeing ourselves. And the Exodus story tells us that wilderness is transformational.

I believe that we who make up SMX readily left what we deemed to be the growing oppression of the Roman Catholic Church because we wanted to more faithfully follow the model set down by Jesus. But we, too, struggle with new ways of thinking. Our wilderness journey tempts us to yearn for what was familiar and clear. That is its essence. But real life is about change. We cannot stay in exile forever. We must journey on, or die of heartbreak, or homesickness, or frustration. Much prayerful discernment must happen for us to find our true home.



As to that discernment, I wonder: have we, individually and collectively, let go of past attitudes and practices that no longer serve us on our journey?

Perhaps these questions may help.

- What made me come to St Mary's in the first place?
- Have my needs/desires been met?
- What attitudes, if any, have I had to change?
- Who is the Pharaoh within me that has enslaved me?
- Is anything still keeping me in bondage?
- Am I tempted to return to "Egypt" or otherwise leave the journey? If so why?

I believe St Mary's Community is an Intentional Eucharistic Community. What is that? First it is a community that we own. It is our community. This is a free choice. We come because we want to. Long gone is the burden of law commanding our attendance. We fully participate as we would at any event or exercise we attend.

Secondly, an Intentional Eucharistic Community needs no hierarchy. Vatican II made collegiality the new principle for the life of the Church,

so we need to embrace our membership in the community. This justifies, even demands, that we each offer our own wisdom and take on the responsibility this carries, so that SMX fulfils its potential in being faithful to the model given by Jesus. We remember Jesus, in speaking to his disciples, said, "You

know that among the Gentiles those they call their rulers lord it over them Among you, this is not to happen." [Mark 10: 42,43]

I think Jesus wanted his disciples to be one in Spirit while being unique individuals—unity not uniformity. For this to happen in an Intentional Eucharistic Community, we must be able to sit alongside someone who thinks differently from us and accept them without judgement, knowing they are just as acceptable to God as we are. There is only one DNA denoting a human person, but what a magnificent and wonderful diversity is put before us in the multitudinous cultures in the universe, and in the unique gifting of each person!

So clearly an Intentional Eucharistic Community needs the prayerful discernment I spoke of. As our aim is to deepen our experience of God, we need not only the opportunity to share our stories of our own experiences, but we must also be willing to do so. In this way we can all grow together. In this we need to trust that the Spirit will inspire and guide us.

To me, the essence of Christian spirituality is our consciousness of the presence and action of God in our life. This is more fully achieved when we share our experience of God with others, and then join our stories with the story of Jesus' life.

MY STORY + YOUR STORY
⇌ OUR STORY ⇌ THE STORY.

I believe this is why we come together so that we can be better followers of Jesus rather than just fans. How to achieve this in our large, dispersed community will take some discerning. This story-sharing could begin in the cluster groups. Then, perhaps, the groups could play a more visible role in the sharing process.

As well as story-sharing, Jesus called us to share a meal. Eucharist is a family/community meal. When a family gathers, especially for a celebration, they share food and drink and stories. Each member leaves nourished by food and drink, and word. If this is also the case with our gatherings, then we will want to keep coming back to this life-enriching experience. I believe Jesus wants us to celebrate His memory in this way fully. We do what He asked by inviting all to break open the word and approach the table, to receive the bread and wine, without distinction or exclusion. Thus our community will be the wellspring from which we draw the energy to intentionally enrich our life.

(The final part of this article will be printed in our next edition of the magazine)

Leo Wright

Apologies to Leo for wrongly attributing to him an article in our last edition. This is his piece.
Editor

Nuns Versus the Vatican?

I know which side I'm on

In 1978, I hitch-hiked into Northern Ireland, then in the grip of a sectarian civil war. A girlfriend from Glasgow had already acquainted me with the popular belief in that part of the world that you can tell whether someone is Catholic or Protestant by looking at them. I didn't give it too much thought until I crossed into Northern Ireland and promptly got picked as a Catholic.

But I'm not a Catholic as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican's thought police, would see it. In April, the congregation ordered the umbrella group for American nuns, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, be brought under the control of three male bishops, saying the US sisterhood concentrated too much on social justice issues such as poverty while not promoting church doctrine on issues such as male priesthood and homosexuality.

Last Friday the board of the leadership conference issued a statement calling the Vatican's edict "unsubstantiated" and "the result of a flawed process that lacked transparency". It would, they said, lead to "greater polarisation" in the church. The issue has been widely reported in the US media and there have even been public rallies in support of the nuns.

I can't speak for the US, but here in Australia I've met some mighty nuns, women who go beyond appearances to the heart of situations and, in a remarkable

number of cases, seem cheerful about it. I've also met some really good social thinkers among them, people who see ways forward where I see none. Australian nuns I know are following closely the developments between their American sisters and the Vatican.

The argument against Peter Kennedy, the Brisbane priest who embraced a version of Catholicism so catholic it included Buddhism, was famously put as, "If you don't want to play by the rules, leave the club." By that rationale, I left the club a long time ago, if in fact I was ever in it. When I recently asked my 97-year-old father if he ever really believed Catholic dogma, he replied, "Not really." Well, I didn't either. Not really.

But I like the special energy I seem to find in a lot of Catholic schools. I can't help thinking it comes from their social justice agenda, which basically means translating thoughts into action. I have given evidence against a priest in court arising from an incident I witnessed at school in the 1970s, but I've also met priests who are good blokes and ones like Kennedy who are seriously out there on the spiritual highway.

And then there are the nuns. I spent a night on the streets of Melbourne with a Sister of the Good Samaritan called Anne Dixon who cared for homeless people. It was a funny night; lots of unexpected things happened.



Martin Flanagan with Peter and Michele Gierk at the launch of 'The Man who Threatened Rome'

She drove me home. As we were crossing the Punt Road bridge a song came on the car radio and she dived forwards, turning it up, saying, "I love this." It was Always Look on the Bright Side of Life from the Monty Python film Life of Brian, which was condemned on its release by, among others, Catholic arch-conservative Malcolm Muggeridge.

Dixon spoke not of Roman Catholics but Australian Catholics. I thought she was like a tree, strong and deeply planted. I rang her this week and she said, "When are we going for a beer?" She can't meet Mondays to Thursdays because she's "in jail" (working in prisons).

I see the church's power elite in the Vatican as a group of ageing males immersed in pomp and the symbols of office. I compare them to some of the nuns I know and their dynamic female spirituality.

I may not be a member of "the club", but I know which side I'm barracking for.

*Martin Flanagan
Courtesy of The Age 10/6/12*

Advance Australia Fair

The international rugby season is upon us again, and now is your chance to see the national anthems of both Australia and other countries, sung with great fervour by groups of big men, some of whom even know the words.

There was a wonderful selection of anthems sung during last year's World Cup, during which a terrible realization dawned on me - most of them are better than ours. Not that *Advance Australia Fair* is awful or embarrassing, but it is very, very ordinary. And national anthems are all about nationalism, my country is better than yours, so what use is a second rate anthem?

Advance Australia Fair has not been our anthem for very long. It was first proclaimed by Prime Minister Whitlam in 1974, following a public opinion poll where people had to choose between *Advance Australia Fair*, *Waltzing Matilda* and *Song of Australia*. *Advance Australia Fair* won easily, but only lasted a couple of years before Malcolm Fraser, showing admirable musical taste, relegated it to being an official national song of some sort.

There was another poll in 1977, where *God Save the Queen* was added to the above list. *Advance Australia Fair* again won, and in 1984 was proclaimed as the national anthem of Australia by Governor General Ninian Stephen. I presume the seven year delay was caused by the government



realizing what they had done, and vainly hoping that if they ignored the whole business for long enough, it would go away.

In spite of all the interest in the 1970s, the song was written in 1878 by Peter McCormick. This is part of its problem. The stodgy melody is a brass band tune, and 'golden soil and wealth for toil' harks back to an agrarian society. As for part of verse 3, 'For those who've come across the seas, we've boundless plains to share,' I don't think the present government will be promoting those lines too heavily.

So before the rugby match, while our guys are informing the crowd that 'our land is girt by sea', the French are singing:

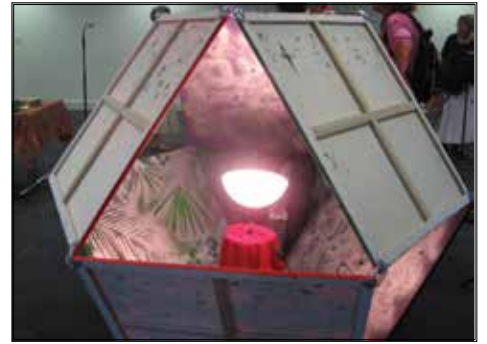
*Come on children of the
Fatherland,
The day of glory has arrived.....
To arms, citizens! March onwards!
March...*

No wonder the French have been responsible for so many upset wins over the years. And then there are the inspiring melodies of anthems such as the American and South African, and anthems such as those of New Zealand and Wales that are sung with such passion that no one actually notices the words or the tune.

I am not expecting a quick resolution to this problem. If someone suggested a change, you would be sure to get old diggers saying that this was the song that kept them going on the Kokoda Track, and retired politicians saying it was un-Australian to criticize the anthem, and the present government would back down before you could say Newspoll. But sooner or later, it needs to be sorted out.

Peter Brown

Images of Easter



Stations of the Cross at West End



A Parallel Story

Nick writes from Liverpool that he has followed and resonates with our story

I have followed closely, from afar, the ebb and flow in the tide of St Mary's catholic community in Brisbane, watching through my laptop screen in Liverpool just a few doors down from 'Mendips' where John Lennon grew up and wrote some of the early Beatles songs. My interest began after hearing of Peter Kennedy and his being hounded out by the diocese. I began to follow the published videos on the St Mary's website.

I was hooked.

As St Mary's story was unfolding, so too mine was beginning the latest ebb and flow of its journey so far. My mind and heart were also in conflict with Rome. I have felt called to Priesthood and ministry for many years, but now married, this call seemed to be an impossibility. I had buried the call and hidden it deep within. In 2005, now aged 42, hearing a sermon based on the raising of Lazarus, the priest (Roman) continued . . . "there is nothing so dead in us that Jesus cannot raise to life." The seed was re-sown . . .

In 2009 two paths began to open up before me. I was invited to consider the permanent diaconate in the Liverpool Archdiocese and also invited to attend a 'Synod' of the "United Ecumenical Catholic



Church" being held in London during the same year. I had been writing to Bishop Terry Flynn of the UECC since 2006 and this Synod was a chance to meet a wide range of members. It didn't take long to see that I couldn't take the path of permanent diaconate. Submitting my will and intellect to the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic church was never an option. Neither was accepting the teaching of the Magisterium as infallible, even if it hadn't been declared so ! Thankfully, the 'Synod' in London made a great impression on my wife and I ! The people we met at the synod lived a vision of being catholic that had evaded our personal experience.

**“
We celebrate life
and spirituality
in a catholic
sacramental
perspective
”**

Groups from Australia, (<http://www.eccaustralia.org/>) USA and UK met together to celebrate their spiritual journey, assess where they were and plan for the future.

Since the Synod I was ordained to priesthood in 2010 within

the UECC and established the catholic community of St Gabriel here in Liverpool. We celebrate life and spirituality in a catholic sacramental perspective, looking to establish small faith communities trying to make sense of this life in a Christian perspective. Peter Kennedy's article "Spirituality and the Problem with Modernity" (St Mary Matters: Autumn 2012) exemplifies for me the role and nature of the Priest. Those who have felt alienated from Rome for a whole host of reasons have come home to the sacraments and found a renewed impetus and direction in their spiritual journey and a feeling of coming home. Our Eucharist in Liverpool and Manchester are communities of mixed denominations.

Here in the UK there is our catholic community of St Gabriel (<http://www.stgabriels.eu>), the Community Parish of Holy Angels in Portsmouth (<http://www.holyangelsportsmouth.co.uk/>) and a Franciscan community of 3 nuns (one of them ordained a Priest) in Melling, Merseyside. All communities welcome all who respectfully draw near, an inclusive vision of catholic faith. They each have their own personality and have the freedom they would not have as part of the Roman

church. Our National website can be found at <http://www.unitedecc.eu> I also maintain a personal blog "Contemplative Catholic" <http://contemplativecatholicuk.blogspot.co.uk>

Like all families there are comings and goings. Our American community has 'moved on,' since Synod 2009 though we maintain a presence (<http://www.unitedecc.org>) Our Australian family has gone from strength to strength and groups from Poland (<http://contemplativecatholicuk.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/christian-united-church-of-poland.html>) and Africa have begun to walk with us. Our next Synod will be held in Sydney in 2013 and will raise the number of continents our members come from. Sadly my wife and I will not be able to attend, but if we could, a visit to St Mary's would have meant so much to us.

All over the world a new reformation appears to be taking place. The minds and hearts of individuals and communities have been experiencing a change in the gravitational direction of the spiritual tide pulling them in new directions. The inner experience of God in the lives of individuals and communities has begun to supersede their need of an institution: an institution that appears not to listen, appears to have backtracked on its own deliberations at Vatican II and also seems to ignore the call of its clergy and laity to review some of its discipline. Instead of listening to the calls to examine these disciplines, it dishes out discipline itself, silencing the voices of those lay people, nuns, priests and bishops who have much to lose by raising their concerns.

Some of these individuals and communities have been exiled. These include St Mary's, Brisbane, Spiritus Christi, New York, Companions on the Journey, Palo Alto, Community of St Peter, Cleveland, Spirit of St Stephen's Minneapolis, Corpus USA, One Spirit Catholic Church Community, Community of John XXIII, Inclusive Catholics, Melbourne to name just a few. Each of these groups sees care of the poor, inclusion of

“Once their vision begins to make itself heard though, censure and silence seem to rain down on them ”

all people and the discernment of God's calling in their life at the centre of their existence.

These groups have come about as a response to perceived shortcomings within the Roman Catholic Church. I would like to think they are not protest groups but exist to proclaim a prophetic vision of what the church Christ instituted could be. Each of them has a personal history as do the individuals that comprise these communities.

There are also many groups that have maintained their unity with

Rome and struggle from within to uphold the same prophetic vision of the church. Once their vision begins to make itself heard though, censure and silence seem to rain down on them, removing their freedom to voice any concern, usually concern over church discipline, not dogma or doctrine. In Ireland the Association of Catholic Priests is beginning to be suffocated by Rome, so too is the Austrian Priests Pfarrer initiative.

Common to all these groups is their story. Some would argue that the individual and group story is an ego trip. However, if a God of love accepts me, just as I AM, this means I am important. It also means I have to take account of my neighbour who is as important to God as I am. In other words their story and my story are important, because we are important to God; our story is important to God, to a God who calls us so intimately from the depths of our being.

Nick Young



Community Celebrations



Breakfast at the Broncos



Peter blesses the marriage of Bevan and Judy Beall

Ageing Peacefully

In her wonderful book on ageing, “The Gift of Years”, Joan Chittister says that older people come in two flavours, the sour ones and the serene ones. Which flavour are you or which one will you become if you are still in your youth or mid-life?

There are many ways to describe the life-journey, but whatever model you wish to use it is important to take on board what Carl Jung said about it – “What works for you in the first half of life will not work for you in the second half of life.” The first half of life is largely about “accumulation”, with regard to knowledge, position, and material goods; and we compete in order to attain these things.

In our youth-oriented culture this will always be the “way of the world”, but as we age it becomes important to follow what Jesus said about “being in the world but not of it.” The second half of life is about “subtraction” or “letting go.” To be still stuck in “accumulation” will make you into a very sour, grumpy older person, as you are no longer able to compete very effectively against younger people.

*For age is opportunity no less than youth itself, though in another dress,
And as the evening twilight fades away, the sky is filled with stars, invisible by day.*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The words from Longfellow’s poem illustrate one of the major



obstacles to living an exciting life in the later years. We focus so much on what we are losing that we become completely unaware of what we are gaining.

The perennial search for “happiness” is basically a search for Self, but somewhere along the way we have accepted the heretical notion that what we have is what we are. At every stage of life it is helpful to realise this, but in the later years it becomes essential if you wish to attain the serenity that Joan Chittister talks about.

Let go of Who You Think You’re Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are.

Brene Brown

I am considering running a course on “Ageing Peacefully” at the Brookfield Spirituality Centre sometime later in the year. It could be a 1 day course or it might end up as a series of workshops. If this interests you, please email Mike Sherman on msherman47@optusnet.com.au expressing your interest. You might also indicate whether a weekday or a weekend suits you best.

Mike Sherman

**The Potential
of Faith
through
Knowledge**

Ted

Kicking on with Clusters

Clusters and small groups have been a part of St Mary's stories for many years. Some begin, last a year or so and then fade away. Others, such as the Southern Cluster, who meet at our home, have been going for many years.



Northern Cluster

These clusters began as geographic groups as a means of getting people together outside of our liturgies. We have been for so long a community that is not parish based, but one that has attracted folk from all over the suburbs. Therefore it has been clear that the normal casual corner shop meeting of our people wasn't going to happen too often. How to get to know each other better was the question. Clusters and small groups was one of the answers.

Currently the geographic clusters are:
 Northern Cluster - contact person Mary Long
 Southern Cluster - contact Marg Ortiz
 North Western Cluster - contact Wayne Sanderson

Camp Hill Cluster - contact Jo Marsh
 Western Cluster - contact Brendan
 Fairfield Cluster - contact Ingerid Meagher.

We have some special interest small groups. These include:
 The meditation groups, morning and evening - contact Brian O'Hanlan
 The Bible study group (reading Jenks' *Once and Future Bible* - contact Gwenneth Roberts
 The future dreams group - contact Carolyn Vincent

As well there are groups that are associated with our community but not exclusively, such as Meanjin Voices - contact Joan Mooney; the Buddhist meditation group - contact Terry Fitzpatrick.

In her homily Carolyn suggested we could expand our clusters and small groups to include more people. It is a very good way for people to get to know each other and enjoy shared interests. Perhaps there are other special interest groups that could be started. Perhaps you could start one. Or maybe we could have more simple get-togethers. Perhaps geographic groups suit this idea best as it reduces travelling.

Perhaps you have a good idea of how we could expand this cluster/ small group concept. There are ways of doing things out there that we haven't even thought of yet.

If you have such an idea get in touch with me. My job as coordinator of the clusters has always been simple - encourage people to start a cluster and just let them get on with it. Anyone who asks, I direct to a cluster or the most appropriate group.

Let's get some new Clusters up and away!

Marg Ortiz



Gwenneth leads the discussion at the Jenks study group

The Spirit which Transforms lives

Peter, last night, gave a reading from Eckhart Tolle, which said basically that there is no past or future, there is only NOW. This moment.

Today we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, where we hear the story of the coming upon the early disciples of the Holy Spirit which transformed their lives, driving them out of the timidity of the Upper Room to the ends of the earth.

Recently, there was an article published in the weekend Q-Magazine of the Courier Mail of myself and mother. In the article it mentioned my and my mother's involvement in the Charismatic Movement – a movement which very much focused on the Holy Spirit and its power to transform one's life and world. Having the opportunity to share today has given me a chance to reflect on something of what I believed about the Holy Spirit then and how I make sense of it today.

When I was a teenager, I believed in the power of the spirit to transform lives. I had experienced something of this and had seen similar transformations in my family and friends. I suppose the transformation for myself was a move from living my life not aware of the things of the Spirit (as St Paul describes – where the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience and self-control), to becoming aware of this Spirit



working in my life and the lives of those around me – a move in focus from the things of this world (if you like) to the things of the world beyond form, or material world: a deep interest and focus to know more about this experience and to live a life empowered by this spirit of love and service.

My understanding of it came largely through the Bible, the Charismatic movement and the leaders of this movement, the Church generally and of course my friends and family. I believed then that the Holy Spirit came into the world at Pentecost, that this was that great moment of receiving and being empowered, firstly by those early disciples and then moving out to others.

The Spirit had been given by Jesus to his followers, so in a sense only they could possess this spirit. And this spirit was received only by the laying on of hands by the Christian Community, and if the person had received this gift then they may display something of the gifts of the Spirit: for example, as St Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthian church, the gift of preaching, healing and working miracles, the gift of prophesy and

recognizing Spirits, the gift of Tongues, and another's ability to interpret them (1 Cor 12:8-12) and on it goes.

I must admit I did receive the gift of tongues, although I am not going to give you an example of this seemingly bizarre gift. So, what are my thoughts on the Holy Spirit, after some 34 years since my first encounter with the Charismatic Movement, as it was called?

I suppose I would have to say that I am not as certain as I was then of what this mysterious encounter with the sacred is all about. My encounter with this movement changed my life; it propelled me towards priesthood and what I continue to do in my life. So for me it had a powerful effect, a life-changing one in fact. But there are some perceptions that have changed.

I no longer believe that the Holy Spirit first came into the world in this encounter as we have heard. To limit this Spirit, this phenomenon to beginning here, belittles and reduces this Spirit, this presence.

It commodifies and creates the church as monopolisers of this Spirit. It activates an attitude that only the Christian Church has this magnificent spirit, and if you want it then you have to do all these things set out and down by the church, led and dictated, primarily by men. No-one I now believe can or must claim sole custodianship of this Spirit. It transcends ownership, boxes, creeds and dogmas which attempt to define and control or divvy out at the whim of another. The Christian faith does not have a monopoly on this Spirit.

I have encountered this same presence in indigenous spirituality in their dreamtime stories and myths. In their encounter with nature and in particular the deep inner listening of Dadirri (Miriam Rose Ungunmerr, from Daly River in the Northern Territory, speaks of this experience of Dadirri), listening to the essence of the Spirit found in nature by sitting in silence and allowing the silence of nature to connect to your silence.

This Spirit is found described in all the great mystical traditions, those preceding Christianity, and those since. I find it in the mindfulness experience of Buddhism and beyond. In the practice of living mindfully we live in harmony with this spirit, this presence. We imbibe its essence of joy, peace, harmony and stillness.

One of the connections which is common among the mystical mindful traditions is the central practice of following the breath in order to still the mind- the coming back to the breath as an anchor in the spiritual life.

The word for Spirit is often translated breath, an equally valid translation of both the Greek and Aramaic words – ruha/ pneuma: the word for God in the Old Testament, a word not to be uttered, because it was not a word as such but more a breath.

A breathing out – Ya
A breathing in - Weh,
capturing beautifully the mystery which is God and Spirit.

In the reading from Acts about the first Pentecost, where the disciples are gathered in the Upper Room, what they first encounter is a powerful WIND from heaven, the voice of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting.



The symbol of wind and breath was central to many of the mystery religions, before and at the time of Jesus. It was a powerful symbol for purification. For example, many images are found with Dionysius (a Greek avatar, also patron of wine and fertility) known as “He of the Winnowing Fan”, (winnowing fan used to sort the husks from the grain).

In many paintings, initiates into the Dionysian Mysteries are

pictured veiled and seated with a winnowing fan being waved above their heads.

This same image was given to Jesus by John the Baptist in Matthew’s Gospel- “with winnowing fan in hand, he will clean up his threshing floor...” So the place of wind, breath, spirit has this powerful cleansing, purifying effect. The writer of Acts knows this and has the powerful wind from heaven sweep the room clean, making it ready for a meta-noia, a movement into the larger mind of God where all is ONE, no separation, and this is what they experience in this story. All the many people who gather around this Upper Room in Jerusalem (a bit like all the Eurovision names) hear the disciples speak their language, breaking down the barriers.

The early disciples are said to have each sold all their possessions and pooled their resources and lived in common. This experience of oneness is what I experienced in this movement so many years ago. This experience of being truly brothers and sisters to one another and to all those we encountered. It changed my life, and wherever I encounter this same Spirit in its myriad manifestations, whether at a music festival, concerts, group meditation or yoga, dancing or bushwalking, singing alone or in a choir, whenever and wherever this Spirit is encountered, it makes life worth living.

It is truly an encounter as Jesus promised where there is not only life, but life in all its fullness.

Terry Fitzpatrick

Womenspace Miracle

Womenspace has flourished since the nineties – **as one of the few places of spirituality that are just for women.** A miracle in itself by my definition of miracle: a synergy of faith, vision and energy. Sometimes it happens ‘while you’re busy making other plans’ as John Lennon described life. And isn’t life a miracle? I think so, considering the vast odds of a specific individual being born.

Another miracle by my definition is the existence of religious orders, which are an alternative Christian lifestyle within a very institutionalized church.

Women’s Religious Orders, in particular supported the vision of Womenspace because they know how necessary it is for women to have a sacred space of their own. One Women’s Religious Order provided the building and another the upkeep.

My own individual miracle happened at Womenspace where I met Thea Gaia who mentored me onto the path of The Goddess for whom I had searched for several years. I wrote in my journal that night ‘I am changed profoundly and my life will never be the same again’. I am and it hasn’t.

A diverse group of women has been refreshed and renewed at Womenspace. A couple of years ago some cracks appeared at Womenspace and one was structural – rendering the building unsafe. Within a few days sacred and domestic objects (most one



and the same) were in storage and the search began for another home.

Shell-shocked we came to realize Womenspace was not just our beloved physical building but the spirit within and between us. The new committee organized Wise Women’s Circles twice monthly at Holy Cross Church hall at Woolloowin and Womenspace miraculously flourished with new members boosting our numbers each month. The committee also created a Vision Board which at our first meeting in the rented hall we all sent energy with faith toward the vision of a new physical home for Womenspace. Womenspace continued at Holy Cross hall until a structural crack was found in the hall. It continues still at another venue.

Womenspace has now been gifted with our latest miracle: a bequest in the extremely high six figures which unsurprisingly we will use to purchase our new physical home. So if you want to be a part of this

stage of the Womenspace miracle and know of a large building for sale that is big enough for a large meeting room and other smaller rooms in an area not too far out of the city, preferably northside, zoned for community, not residential use, with plenty of parking, please contact Glenys Peacock: coordinator @ womenspace.org.au

More information available at:
www.womenspace.org.au

Joan Medlum

Understanding Meditation

Our Journey

Through the practice of meditation we can transform ourselves from an ego state to an awareness state, from selfishness to selflessness and with the wisdom of Micah, act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly.

The Beginning

The first gathering of St Mary's "Understanding Meditation" took place on the Thursday evening of 6th April 2011. I suggested to the gathering that we consider meditation 'a skill' and our gatherings 'a laboratory' – a place where the skill can be experienced, refined and then taken to the real world and applied. Also I borrowed a working principle common to all of the major traditions: that the experiences we have, we create, and that we are responsible for the experiences (and behaviours) we create. That is, we experience the world the way that we are, and through meditation we can see the world the way that it is.

The benefits of meditation come in three broad categories: therapeutic, personal and spiritual. Meditation is useful for the management of symptoms, self-understanding, performance and behaviour change, and for a contemplative/mystical lifestyle and religious development. Many personal benefits are to be gained through meditation, including:-

- Mental resilience and flexibility
- Improved memory
- Better problem solving skills
- Stronger relationships
- Increased creativity and efficiency
- Integrated emotions
- Calming of the body

- Relief of chronic pain
- Reduced anxiety
- Decreased stress

Those who attend the "Understanding Meditation" gatherings are able to use the meditation for whichever category they prefer. However, in the long run, "Understanding Meditation" will always be interested in generating a contemplative/spiritual lifestyle within a Christian context. Richard Rhor proposes that in the gospels Jesus seems to consistently run three themes:

- Do not be afraid
 - Forgiveness
 - Repentance
- These themes seem to reflect the wisdom of Micah too.
- * Act Justly
 - * Love Tenderly
 - * Walk Humbly

Thus we are provided with a way of engaging with each other in our community as we move towards a contemplative lifestyle.

What We Do

I attempt to take a modern western/scientific approach towards "Understanding Meditation". That seems to make it easier for myself and hopefully for others. According to Stephen Bachelor, the eastern approach suffers from too much hierarchy, too much dogma, is based on an outdated cosmology, has many many variations (each claiming to be correct), has lost its own message to itself and needs to return to its ancient roots.

Wow - does that sound familiar! I thought Stephen Bachelor was a reincarnation of Peter Kennedy. We know that the Christian tradition of a contemplative/mystical lifestyle has been severely hounded and suppressed throughout history by those in the Christian hierarchy, but in modern times the World Community of Christian meditation is making a good attempt to reinvigorate the Christian spiritual lifestyle.

At our meditation gatherings we follow this procedure:

- Stillness – centring ourselves for a few moments;
- Listen to a reading in relation to meditation practice;
- Undertake some movement meditation, the primary purpose of which is to practise paying attention;
- Take a modern approach to the Buddhist contemplation of loving/kindness meditation. At present we are generating the experiences of 'friendship, joy, compassion and even-mindedness', before we send them out to others (we need to have them before we give them away);
- Engage in at least half an hour of mindfulness meditation, attending to our sense of stillness, paying attention to the breath (the in breath and the out breath) or to a mantra or a candle, whichever is preferred, shifting our attention to the sensation behind the eyes or the experience of keeping the eyes still, attending to that place where thoughts arise and usually last of all experiencing a body scan of awareness. The session is then complemented with the sharing of food.

Spiritually

The spiritual pathway is never one of achievement; it is always one of letting go. In general, meditation is the practice of letting go of distractions. Put another way, the key to deepening and enhancing meditation is paying attention to the task (the breath, the mantra etc), a soft approach attention. Attention is crucial to the meditation experience of awareness. In movement meditation we pay attention to the body, the skeleton in space; in loving kindness meditation we pay attention to the experiences of the heart; in mindfulness meditation we pay attention to the breath etc, to generate the sense of calmness and a peaceful mind. When outside our laboratory, in the real world, I have been encouraging our gatherers to pay attention with their eyes, to use macular vision (macular vision is focused attention). Macular vision switches on the brain's frontal lobes. The frontal lobes regulate the rest of the brain which lowers the muscle tension throughout the body. Much practice has been given over to how to consciously generate macular vision. (In the future we will be practising how to pay attention with the ears. Attentive or active listening also gently relaxes the body.) As well, in the future there will be a lesson, a functional analysis, regarding attention. When paying attention, what does one do with their eyes or ears, what does one do with their posture, their breathing, and what does one do with their mind??

Attention is powerful; attention stimulates neurogenesis, the growth of more brain cell connections, and indeed the growth of new brain cells all

of which help improve one's meditation. A good example of brain cell growth is the well known study concerning London cabbies who showed an increased thickness in the left hippocampus (the left temporal lobes) due to learning the complex patterns of streets and contexts through which they transported their passengers. This is the well-known "use it or lose it" principle which applies to muscles. It also applies to brain cells.

Studies of process line workers in Japan (putting just the nuts on the car wheels) show brain shrinkage. In a way this is how long-term mindfulness meditation works, through acknowledging, accepting and letting go of our various ego-driven distractions and judgements of others or self, as well as letting go of the events of the past and anticipated future and the associated negative emotions. One gradually turns down the ego of the 'installed self' and facilitates a general open awareness towards all others, towards our planet, towards our connection with the stars and even towards the universe. (That is, from an individual reflected sense of awareness towards a universal knowing of awareness.) We have all tasted the boundary-less-ness of such awareness: the awesome beauty of a wonderful sunset where our sense of self is lost to the beauty before us. That same sense of wonder occurs when visiting our favourite parts of our coastline, or desert, or bushland, and in particular, a social context when we were able to suspend our point of view and see and feel for another's point of view. We call this empathy – a move from selfishness to selflessness.



Attention is the tool of such awareness.

In recent gatherings we have confronted the challenging question from all the traditions "Who am I?" Christianity calls it the 'real person', Buddhism – 'no self', Hinduism – 'pure awareness' or 'we are our thoughts and feelings and perceptions'. In this awareness, knowledge, the boundaries and repertoire of being have dramatically expanded. We are no longer constricted to 'me and the world out there'. With attentive empathy the two become one – I am one with everything.

Attention turns down selfishness (ego) and turns up selflessness (awareness). These topics are bound to be ongoing in our Understanding Meditation gatherings. If you are intrigued or interested, you are invited.

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Meditation sessions:

3rd Thursday of each month

10.00am – 12.00 noon

7.00pm – 9.00pm

Brother Bill Comes Home

An excerpt from the Announcement to Province re Comunidade Edmund Rice (CER Timor Leste)

Bill Tynan has worked tirelessly for the people of East Timor in the Railaco sub-district for ten years and the achievements have been truly remarkable. During this time, solar lights have been installed in many of the village houses, reliable water supply has been established, school and pre-school buildings have been erected, volunteer teachers have been provided with training, women have been provided with a means of earning an income, coffee growers have been helped to improve their crops, a mobile health clinic has been established with trained local personnel and many visitors from Australia have been provided with unique opportunities for volunteering and working with the local East Timorese people.

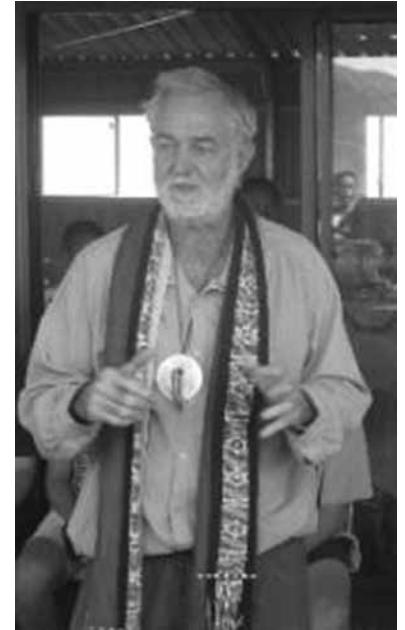
At the same time, many East Timorese people have had the opportunity to come to Australia for training and study. The dream of Br Dan Courtney, through the work of Bill Tynan assisted by the other Brothers, many volunteers and immersion participants and generous donors over the years, has been moving steadily towards becoming a reality.

The dream is of course to have the East Timorese people independent 'masters of their own destiny', confident and competent to provide for their own needs. The

people of this very young nation are seeing that this dream is closer now than when CER began its work some 12 years ago. However, the East Timorese people have expressed their wish during the Review to have CER walk along side them for a bit longer.

We are happy to be able to answer their request positively and thank Peter and Frank for their generosity in answering this call to go to East Timor. We are confident that they will continue to assist the local people to continue to build their capacity for independence.

As Bill Tynan prepares to return to Australia after 10 years in East Timor, it is timely to acknowledge the great work he has done and the extraordinary impact that he has had on the East Timorese people for whom he is not only Brother, but also brother, and on the many people he has



drawn into the ministry of CER through donating, volunteering and immersions in East Timor. He can be justly proud of what has been and look confidently forward to what will be, as a result of his dedicated presence there. We wish him well in his period of preparation for return and his readjustment to life back in Australia.

*Vince Duggan
Province Leader*



Brother Bill introduced us to a group of young teachers from Timor Leste who are here on work experience.

Once Upon a Time

Myths and Miracles.

Once Upon a Time when I knew without doubt that Father Christmas was real I also knew that Jesus had performed miracles. He cured sick people, even brought dead people back to life. He could make wine from water and he could walk across the surface of a lake.

Certainty ruled my faith then. It never occurred to me to question the literal truth of the Gospel stories. But as the years rolled by I began to realise that there was more. One very wise Parish priest, challenging books, articles and discussions suggested there must be another way to understand the message in those stories from long ago.

If I read the Bible as myth or metaphor, I eventually found some meaning or truth rich in wisdom for living life in today's world. It seems to me that the events recorded in the Old and New Testaments are all about the Presence of God. When God is present a miracle occurs.

When those simple folk of Jesus' time saw or heard about the amazing things that the carpenter's son was doing they had no way of explaining them. By word of mouth the stories of these events were passed from one village to another, and later from one generation to another, each new telling a little different from the last. To make believable the mystery of it all the tales were

added to and embellished. An opinion or an element of guess work crept in but each telling deepened and enriched the story. They became myths that never lost their quality of reality and truth although the inexplicable grew in mystery.

So, literally walking on water? Someone, in an effort to make some logic of this happily believed that there was probably a sand bar or a reef below the surface of the lake that Jesus knew about. However, I find it interesting that the story recorded by the writers of both Mark and Matthew follows their recording of the feeding of the great crowd with a few loaves and fishes.

What powers did this humble man possess that could persuade those with a little to share with those who had less? Even more alarming was the fact that he involved the disciples themselves in the gathering, distributing and collecting the left-overs of the meal. They had helped to make it happen and they were becoming aware that they were expected to be personally involved in this Kingdom of God that Jesus repeatedly said was here and now! No more sitting on the side-lines watching him do it all!

They were tired, bewildered and frightened. How could they rise to this tremendous challenge? It was fine when he was with them, but on their own? It felt like being afloat in a tiny fishing boat on a deep wide sea tossed around by overwhelming waves and wind of

doubt and fear. They knew only too well how scary that could be. Faith and Trust deserted them. Until----

Out of their fear conviction grew. Christ would not desert them. In a sense he was made visible. As one, they KNEW he was there, with them! An empowering moment of certainty when God was truly present; they were not alone. And all would be well.

Later, in trying to describe this miraculous moment, to make it real for their listeners they came up with the metaphorical images of the lake, the little boat and Jesus' sudden presence walking on the water towards them. People believed he was special and that he could change men's hearts. So they listened to the story that the disciples told and they, too, knew. No more was their God remote, vengeful and judgemental. God Is. With them, loving and caring.

Margaret Orange,

News from the Library and Drop Shop

Drop Shop

Our drop shop is principally for fairly traded products such as coffee and tea. We endeavour to source our products from reliable distributors who ensure an appropriate price for the growers of these things.

Over the years the Drop Shop has also acted as a market for other products, made or grown by people in the community; Jo's jewellery, Joan and Peter's CD, the meditation music CD produced by Wendy and the delicious rosella jam made by Margaret Ryan are examples of these.. We may soon have copies of Robert Perrier's CD on our shelves.

As a community we are becoming quite literate in things theological and spiritual. Reading contemporary theological literature has been encouraged in the homilies of both Peter and Terry. This has resulted in our selling, at the shop, the books they use as well as others they or other community members recommend.

Any profits from the Drop Shop are put into the community, For more

information talk to Doc or email him at margdoc@gmail.com

Library

Often the books sold at the Drop Shop are a bit expensive or people would rather browse through them before they spend the money. In order that the literature recommended could be available to more people we started a community library.

The list of available books is on the website and anyone who wants to borrow one can email the librarian who will deliver requested books to the TLC on the following weekend. Thanks

to the dedicated efforts of Patsy Nugent there is a short comment on each of the books beside it on the list. This list is available on Sundays and community readers can request any book from the list by filling in their details on the booking list.

Each weekend there is a different set of books on the trolley for people to browse and borrow.

If you need more information you should talk to Marg (Sunday morning) Ingerid or Lisa (Sunday evening) or Mark (Saturday evening) or email margdoc2@gmail.com.



St Mary's Matters - Edition 28
Autumn 2012

Editor - Margaret Ortiz
Finances - Doc Ortiz

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Printed by John Hallett
Xavier Graffix

*Articles, advertising, letters, photos are always welcome. Send to margdoc2@gmail.com
You are invited to contribute financially to the work of St Mary's Community in Exile by donating to:
St Mary's Community Ltd, BSB 064- 131 Account 10339414, Commonwealth Bank, West End.*

Sorry Day

Sam and Cathy Watson, from our community, Link Up and Micah provided a great morning of celebration at Orleigh Park.

