

extra ORDINARY people



St Mary's Matters

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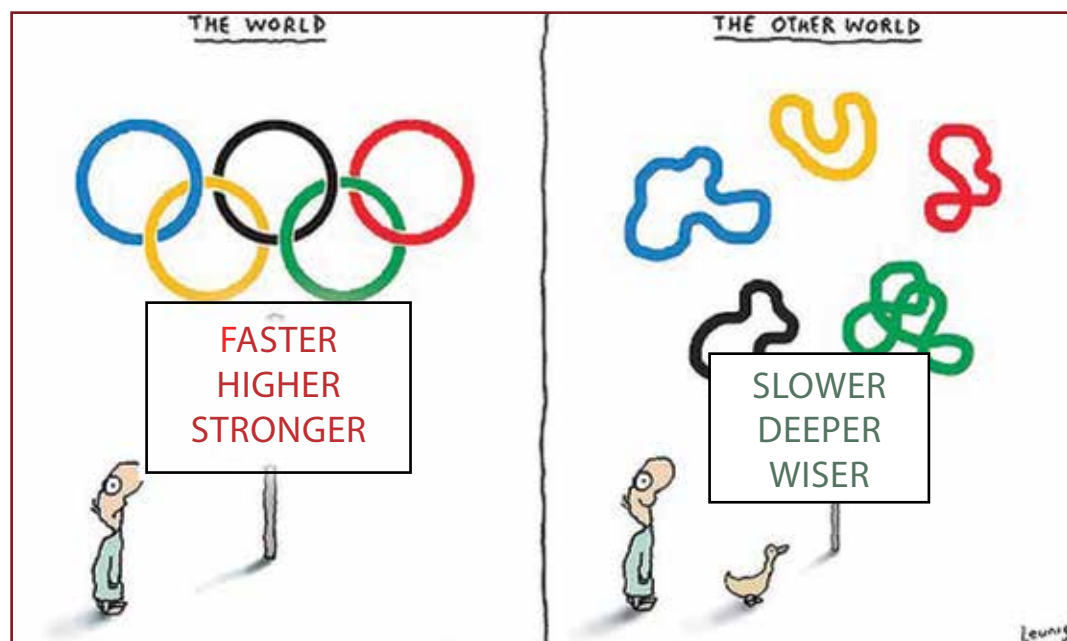
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From the Editor

I was listening to the homily given by a young man who had been a student at Milperra. He spoke of his gratitude to Adele Rice the principal and the other people at the school who so encouraged him when he first came to Australia as a young refugee. His story moved me to tears, with his affection for Adele so apparent. This prompted me to think about the way ordinary people can make an extra-ordinary difference to people's lives.

Hence our current magazine focus, extra-ORDINARY people. There are so many of these people in our community, if one starts digging, and only a few feature in this edition. I had hoped for a story about our anything but ordinary Joan Mooney (musician, poet, philosopher and liturgist) but it didn't happen. I do have a poem from her. Maybe more next time?

If you see glaring omissions - and I'm confident you will, then take pen to paper and write about the extra-ordinary person you believe should get a mention in a journal such as this.

Some of these pieces are about the people involved and some are telling their own stories (at my request). But all are inspiring. We are really so blessed to have such people in our community.

Marg Ortiz

Unleashing Potential in Young Refugees

It is no surprise that the young refugees who meet Adele Rice are so grateful. She is an inspiring person and the work she does at Milperra is quite extraordinary.



Adele was born in Bangalore, India in 1943 during the Second World War. This was where her grandparents had retired. Her mother's parents were of English, Irish and some Dutch heritage. Her father was from Belfast in Ireland and came to India with the British Army where he met his wife. At the time of Adele's birth her father was paratrooping into Burma while locally many Burmese were walking into Bangalore as refugees. Adele's own family had to leave India themselves in 1948 after India had gained independence from Britain a year earlier. Adele speaks about the family travelling by ship leaving from Bombay (now Mumbai) to Sydney and then by train to Brisbane's South Brisbane station.

Adele was a boarder from the age of five at Loreto Convent Coorparoo, then was a student at St Joseph's Nundah followed by a year at All Hallows in Brisbane and completing her education at The Range College in Rockhampton.

She studied to be a teacher at Brisbane Teacher's College and has served in the Education Department for over 50 years. She became Principal of the Corinda Special School in 1979. This school catered for non-English-speaking high school students especially from the Indo-Chinese influx at that time as the Wacol Migrant Hostel was then nearby. Adele

“ The composition of the cohort of the day, the month, the year, fluctuates depending on world events and providing services often requires a rapid and dynamic response

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was then the founding Principal at Milperra High School in 1984 and has worked there in that capacity ever since, with some time in senior management positions and some time spent in the education of pre-service and post graduate teachers.

Milperra means 'Meeting Place of Brothers and Sisters'. It is a special purpose high school in Chelmer and is the only purpose-built school of its type in Queensland

and in Australia. It provides English language preparation and settlement services to newly arrived immigrant and refugee students. At any given time at Milperra there are between 180 and 250 students from 30 to 35 countries, speaking up to 45 languages. Currently the school enrolment is made up of 68% refugees from various visa

categories. Adele outlined that Milperra strives to meet the educational, settlement and emotional needs of students, many of whom have been refugees fleeing from traumatic circumstances and enduring arduous and perilous journeys to

Australia. It strives to facilitate students' pathways to further education in schools or TAFE.

Milperra provides a range of student support services and staff including multicultural staff, bilingual teachers' aides, access to a Dental Health service, a School Based Youth Nurse, a chaplain, an on-site well-being and mental health program called HEAL (Home of Expressive Arts in Learning) as well as a wide range of diverse

service providers and multicultural workers who visit from outside agencies. Milpera has the assistance of 100 volunteers per week who work closely with students in areas such as reading and writing programs, excursions and general classroom support. They are invaluable and are great advocates for the school and for refugees.

Adele sees her role as Principal and her day to day work as very diverse, very interesting and very fulfilling and rewarding at the same time. She says that having worked at Milpera for 28 years has been a privilege and a good fit for her talents and who she is as a person. Her role as Principal/Advocate enables her to be an advocate on a daily basis as she and her staff strive together to meet the changing needs of the student populations as they evolve. The composition of the cohort of the day, the month, the year fluctuates depending on world events and providing services often requires a rapid and dynamic response. Adele works hard to ensure the school is a "safe, peaceful non-judgemental and non-threatening environment, a place where newly arrived young people can make mistakes and learn new ways of doing, learning and being". Students are assisted to come to terms with their past traumas and upheavals so they are able to access education and settle well into Australian life. Adele says she enjoys seeing young people learn, mature and go on to access the school system and community independently. Milpera enables students to be the best citizens they can be, the best workers, parents and community contributors they can be by



Adele with Abdul Ibrahim. Abdul talked with such affection of the influence of Adele in his life since he came here as a refugee. He now works as a teacher's aide at Milperra.

realizing their full potential and having good futures. Adele says that, "It is not what I do, but what we do together" at Milpera that makes the difference.

When asked what motivates her in her work as Principal at Milpera High School Adele responds that she sees and believes in the incredible potential people have despite their circumstances. She is proud of the resilience and courage of her students to overcome extraordinary barriers and is keen to assist them in their efforts. Adele says she is happy to be able to use what she has gained throughout her life for the common good and that her skills, maturity and wisdom are well utilised in her work at Milpera.

Adele says she enjoys being a member of a like-minded community of people at St. Mary's. She feels the support of the community and needs it. She remembers a homily Fr. Peter

Kennedy gave once on lay ministry and that he referred to a video about ESL (English as Second Language) teachers in which the ESL teachers were seen as almost lay ministers. She remembers the John Fitzwalter painting of the "boat people" like "souls afloat" on a banner, one Easter. St Mary's has been an inspiration, a support and a comfort. Adele considers that there is a fruitful spiritual, personal and professional overlap in her life as the values she holds, the things she believes in, are congruent with her world of work at Milpera. She appreciates knowing that the school and her work there have the support of the St. Mary's parish community. She believes that, "At St. Mary's what matters most is what you do even more than what you believe" and that this stance appeals to her and helps sustain her work with her students at Milpera.

Margot Henry

Jenny Ryan

Sophie's story



Whenever I think about mum the first thing that comes into my head is ABC and refugees. Every time Jack and I sit down to dinner, instead of mindless grace, which is over in 10 seconds flat, we spend a large portion of the meal hearing about children starving in Ethiopia or mum's favourite topic, the current asylum seeker situation in Australia. Since the age of six I have heard from mum many stories of families leaving children behind as they flee war torn Sudan trying desperately to avoid landmines. To a six year old these stories can seem quite confronting yet mum still stays firm to the belief that we got more nightmares watching Doctor Who. Whilst other families around Australia sit down to A Current Affair and Dancing with the Stars the Kimmins like to enjoy a spot of Australian Story or Insiders as we listen to mum's retorts at 'can do Campbell' or 'that awful little man' Tony Abbott.

To me mum always seems to be juggling multiple lives, one with us in Yeronga where she drops me without complaint to rowing at 4:30 in the morning, plays endless games of ping pong with Jack and cooks dinner, but it is her other lives that are extraordinary.

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target was to reunite families in Australia by bringing family members home
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Her job at the Mater hospital is centred on helping those who don't speak English. She is the Cultural Diversity Coordinator. This means she manages all the interpreters and she educates Mater staff about culturally diverse practices that need to be put in place when dealing with those who have a different cultural background. In 2006 mum, along with a number of other local women put together

a charity whose main target was to reunite families in Australia by bringing family members home from around the globe by lending money out with no restriction as to when it needs to be returned and no interest. It is a simple idea but reaches only a number of refugees because of the limited visas available; however the people who receive them show only appreciation towards mum.

I am grateful to mum for what she does as I look back on the years that she has worked, donated, mothered and fundraised, all as a single mother. I find it hard to thank her as my mother and to think of her as extraordinary but I think that the people who were helped and touched say everything anyway. So I say thank you mum for doing more than is ever expected, and for being extraordinary.

Sophie Kimmins



We have just returned from our tour of Common Ground. Everyone is spouting superlatives when they see it. It is indeed a beautifully planned and executed project. The building is so very attractive and hugely practical, the services that will be provided superb and the general ambience quite lovely. It seems not so long ago that we heard Rosanne Haggarty speak about the Common Ground concept at the Micah AGM. It was inspiring. And the whole thing seems so very sensible. As a housing project for the homeless and low income earners it works at all levels. How very good it is that people who are really doing it tough can have somewhere to live that is so attractive.

Micah kicked this project off and Micah is providing the services to make it work. Just another of the amazing things that Micah does for the least advantaged in the

community. And when I think of Micah I think of Karyn Walsh. She has been at the helm of this organisation since its inception in the 1980s. I clearly remember the gathering day that was held by the St Mary's Community and the strongly expressed desire of those present to see the community's commitment to social justice become something real and worthwhile. Karyn took on that project and it was pretty small fish in those days. Small but very useful. As the years passed the organisation grew and grew. Karyn has a gift for many things, particularly organisational and under her guidance this small project became a not-for-profit company with arms reaching out to loads of different groups of disadvantaged people. But as well her ability to make submissions for funding has been quite outstanding. This is pretty easy to appreciate when one considers that the budget for Micah Projects

when it began was in the hundreds of dollars (wholly provided by the community) and is now around ten million dollars.

Who is this Karyn Walsh that we see so often in her Micah role? The real person, who has a life of her own, even though it is hard to imagine how she finds time to live it. We see her with her sons and granddaughter, Hannah (she does the gran thing very nicely), and most of us know she has a nursing/social work background. One could ask her, but she is quite reluctant to talk about herself. So I resorted to googling. I found a good place to find something out about this remarkable woman is the website for the movie 'The Trouble with St Mary's'. It says of Karyn:

Karyn Walsh is passionate about advocating for people who experience discrimination,

disadvantage and abuse or violence. She has worked in the community sector for the past 30 years in the areas of youth, domestic violence, homelessness, disability services, young parents, prison ministry, care givers and social disadvantage. This experience is strengthened by her previous work as a Registered Nurse, by a Diploma in Community Management and through other leadership roles including Chair of the Domestic Violence Resource Centre. Karyn is the Coordinator of Micah Projects Inc. in Brisbane, President of the Queensland Council of Social Services (QCOSS) and a Director on the Board of Common Ground Queensland.

Karyn is also on the board of St Mary's Community Ltd, which helps preserve this important link between the community and Micah.

When I asked Karyn about the stresses involved in the work she does she said "I feel it has been such a strength personally and professionally to be a member of St Mary's because the work isn't easy, the vision is challenging, but it has been the lessons, support and views of so many different community members which has given me the knowledge and the ability to be constantly learning from others..to ensure that matters of the heart remain central to what we do.... This has informed so much of our advocacy and our values..in working with people....our shared motto to act justly love tenderly and walk humbly are truly guiding principles for me as an individual and all of us as a community."

My experience of Karyn over the past twenty or so years is that she is a person who pulls no punches

yet is very compassionate; she is highly intelligent yet capable of speaking, without a sign of superiority, to those who have intellectual disability. I think she can be very dogged and hard to budge in her opinion – yet so often her opinion is the best one. Frankly I am in awe of this young woman – she is indeed an extraordinary person.

Marg Ortiz

*Picture opposite:
Micah Projects leaders Terry Fitzpatrick and Karyn Walsh with project manager Paul Bickham at the Brisbane Common Ground building site in South Brisbane just prior to commencement of building.*

Children's Liturgy

Each month Anne teaches her children's choir a new song which they perform for us at the end of our liturgy.



Sam

We have so many reasons to be grateful that Sam Watson is a member of our community. For so many of us he is one of the few indigenous people we know well enough to call a friend.

He and Cathy help make a reality our wish, as a community, to walk with our Indigenous family. It was he who worked with Peter to set up the Treaty that was entered into by St Mary's and the Murri people before we left the church. And he helped plant the bunya pine to celebrate this event. He is considered to be an elder of our community and plans are afoot for us to develop a dreamtime space with Sam's people in the near future.

Sam encourages us to join in local Indigenous celebrations, such as Sorry Day, and he helps organise our annual excursion to the Sunshine Coast to visit Sacred Sites.

But what about the Sam who is known to the wider world? He was born 16 November 1952 and baptised Samuel William Watson. He is an Australian Aboriginal activist and a socialist politician. He is the grandson of Sam Watson who was of the Birri Gubba tribe. His grandfather worked in ring-barking camps and saved enough money to hire a lawyer to release him from the Aboriginal Protection Act. He was one of the first Aboriginal people to achieve this status.

Sam's son is the poet Samuel Wagan Watson. Sam and Cathy are now proud grandparents.

Through work at the Brisbane Aboriginal Legal Service in the early nineties, Sam was involved in implementing the findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The film *Black Man Down* is a fictionalized exploration of the commission's findings.

Sam is a deputy director at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at the University of Queensland and teaches courses in Black Australian Literature. He is also a writer and a filmmaker. He has received honours for his 1990 novel *The Kadaitcha Sung* and acclaim for his 1995 film *Black Man Down*. He also wrote the play *Oodgeroo - Bloodline to Country* which we attended as a group when it was produced at La Boite Theatre last year.

We love Sam. He is good fun and a good friend. One of my proudest moments at SMX was when Sam referred to me as Auntie Marg. A mark of high esteem in his culture.

He is certainly a man of diverse gifts and he uses these for the good of his people. He has a gentle manner but holds firm when required. He is indeed an extra-ordinary person.

Marg Ortiz

Greetings from Helen and Roger Dewar

Now living and loving it in Tasmania



Roger and friends



Roger and Helen at a favourite vineyard



Sam and Cathy Watson. See some of Sam's story opposite.

Sacred Sites Bus Trip

11th August 2012



Thanks to Margaret and Jim Lawson for these pictures.



Our favourite madrigalist, David Cantwell, sings a few songs at the axe grinding site.

Keeping a Balance

Our only daughter, Rebecca, suggested that Joan and I might like to watch a particular A Grade Rugby Union match as she knew one of the players, Sean Tweedy. We had slight difficulty locating the ground and were late for the start. We arrived just in time to see Sean being sent off! He had taken matters into his own hands when the referee did not protect him from the persistent dangerous and illegal tackles of an opposing player when Sean was jumping for the ball in lineouts.

Not a very encouraging start for my relationship with the bloke who became my son-in-law and whom I eventually realised is an extraordinary character.

I am at present reading *A Common Humanity* by Raimond Gaita, who teaches philosophy at the Australian Catholic University and at King's College, London. Gaita considers that there are religious influences pervading our secular society and I consider that the way Sean leads his life exemplifies the attitudes, morals and ethical standards that he has absorbed from his religious background as a youth and his contact with St Mary's as an adult.

Sean grew up in a Protestant milieu and became interested in Biblical studies and lead a group of young people who met regularly to read and discuss the Bible in the early 1990s. His faith journey, like that of many members of SMX, has now lead him away from institutional religion and to the



model of church championed by Peter and Terry.

Any short description of Sean's career will leave out some important details. He has played sport at the highest level and with much success. He has a PhD in exercise physiology and lectures at UQ. He is a dedicated husband, devoted and hands-on father and has a larger number of close friends than I had believed possible. I forgive him for the corny jokes to which he is addicted.

I will concentrate on his efforts for, and association with, handicapped people. He turned his back on a career with elite young athletes because of his disenchantment with its fruits – poorly balanced young people moulded by fame-seeking, insensitive parents. Instead he became successively the force behind the gym for the Sporting Wheelies, the advocate of exercise and sport for disabled people and now the author of the accepted plan for classifying athletes in the Paralympics.

This last job warrants some explanation. The Paralympics have been a huge success, but the competitive side has been bedevilled by the difficulty in deciding whether, for example, a swimmer with one leg experiences the same amount of difficulty in swimming as a swimmer with cerebral palsy. This problem had appeared completely insoluble until a plan was proposed by (drum roll, please) Brisbane's own Sean Tweedy. Sean's plan has received official endorsement from the International Paralympic Committee, who have given him the huge task of leading the research efforts to bring the plan to fruition.

So Sean has, in the best tradition of St Mary's, concentrated on helping the marginalised members of our community. He denies that this makes him altruistic because he feels that his actions are ultimately self-serving - he derives significant personal satisfaction from working with and sharing the lives of people with disabilities. As a consequence, he feels that it is incorrect to characterise his

actions as selfless, one of the defining characteristics of altruism.

Sean's reasoning is in line with those who argue that altruism does not exist. They argue that, while the effect of an action helping another at some cost to oneself is to perform a selfless deed, the cause is the subconscious desire to live a life which is consonant with one's own ideas.

I accept the theory, but consider that Sean is a good example of

the principle (which I first read in a book by that militant atheist, A J Ayer, discussing the concept of free will) that anyone's moral worth depends on having good moral principles. The evil is not done by the bank robber when he robs the bank, but when he accepts the principle that "what's mine is mine and what's yours is mine".

I know that Sean, like any young father with important work commitments, has difficult moral decisions about his use of time. When his schedule is full and overflowing, does he let down a

child hopeful of having his father at the dinner table so that he can finish a proposal for a project involving handicapped people? Sean uses the meditation he has learnt and practised for many years to keep himself balanced and I consider that his spiritual life has been influenced by the religious ideas he imbibed from Christ's teachings in the Bible and from the community of St Mary's.

David Pincus



Sitting there, his hair brushed back, looking a little less wild than usual, he sings. He sings of love and of war. He sings from a deep well of feeling, of pain perhaps. His songs are sad, poignant and sensuous. And his listeners are carried along by the sound first and then the lyrics. This concert of Robert's is not an easy experience to describe. But it is memorable. And it's hugely

enjoyable. His musicians make beautiful music and so does he. They are all masters of their craft and the result is so good.

I don't know much of the Robert 'Bomber' Perrier story. I know he has been successful in theatre work, that in 1984 he won the BHP Pursuit of Excellence Award in Arts and Literature (I found that on Wikipedia). I also know that he

has been homeless and was living at one time in someone's shed (he told a lovely story about this in a homily once). He is great with gardens and chooks (I know this from experience). And I can guess that there is much, much more to his story. However I can say this – Robert Perrier is a fine musician and an extra-ordinarily beautiful man.

Marg Ortiz

HOW OLD ARE YOU

I don't answer that question
I can't answer that question
There's not a specific solution

Well – say – somewhere between
Seven and a century
Or – seven and a thousand
No, really, I'm older by far

This person, though tabbed by a number
Arches through aeons and ages

For, consider this hand
Or this finger
Whence came it, and when?

Down the dim pathways of time, and beyond,
This limb, these atoms-
Forged in eruption of energy-
Travelled

Maybe riding on African antelope
Maybe swimming with ancient sea-creatures
Embedded in rock of high Andes
Or imprinted in leaf of Gondwana

But the wheel of existence spins further
In a star
In a gas
In Higgs Boson
An explosion
There I started this journey to me

To return to your question –
There's an answer,
Not specific
Not simple

It's confusing
It's complex

But it's me.

Joan Mooney

Faith and Reason

A group of women religious in the U.S. accused of being 'radically feminist' by the bishop, are part of a quiet revolution



If your conscience collides with authority, which will win? If you pledge loyalty to an organisation, institution or country, are you bound to obey whatever the circumstances?

The questions are those of the whistle-blower, the party politician, the conscientious objector – and in the United States today, the Catholic nun. There, thousands of sisters who vowed obedience to their church and its hierarchy find certain church teachings disturbing, and are resisting attempts to whip them back into line.

This does not amount to a Protestant-style revolt against the authority of pope and bishops. But the nuns are certainly stirring the church in a way that will resonate with Protestants who are aware of their heritage.

The latest tussle between conscience and authority comes as no surprise. Many Catholics in the United States and elsewhere are dismayed that in the decades since 1962-65, when fresh

breezes blew through the Second Vatican Council, successive popes have worked steadily to put the liberating genie back in the bottle – and none so diligently as doctrinal enforcer Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI.

So when leading American nuns expressed support for President Obama's broadening of health care, thought afresh about homosexuality and the male-only priesthood, and focused on social justice issues, their bishops and the Vatican combined to order them to "get in behind".

In 2010 the bishops opposed health reforms that obliged Catholic hospitals, universities and charities to provide contraceptive coverage free to women employees, Catholic or not. This, they said, was an assault on the church's ban on contraception and therefore on religious freedom.

A compromise was reached allowing the women to receive that cover direct from the health insurance industry. Sisters of the Leadership Conference of Women

Religious, an umbrella organisation representing about 80 per cent of American nuns, found that satisfactory and said so. This angered the bishops, who insisted that no public money should be spent in church institutions on something they oppose.

Despite the bishops and their teaching, surveys have shown

“ Their error was to put too much emphasis on poverty and economic injustice

that up to 98 per cent of Catholic women use contraceptives. For them it is a question of conscience and personal responsibility, and they don't let the church get in the way.

In April this year an inquiry by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith determined that the Leadership Conference had serious doctrinal problems. Besides not toeing the

Sister Pat Farrell is the president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in the United States of America



line on homosexuality and the priesthood, the nuns were accused of promoting “radical feminist themes incompatible with the Catholic faith”. The report said they should not “disagree with or challenge the bishops, who are the church’s authentic teachers of faith and morals”.

Also in the firing line is Network, a social justice lobby founded by a group of sisters. Their error was to put too much emphasis on poverty and economic injustice, while staying silent on abortion and same-sex marriage.

The hierarchy’s efforts to rein the nuns in have not gone down well with many Catholics, including priests, who were already perturbed by Rome’s tepid response to child sexual abuse on the part of some clergy. The branding of progressive Catholics as “termites” by the president of the Catholic League did not help.

If Catholic commentators in major newspapers are any guide, however, there is change in the wind.

One excoriates “an out-of-touch, self-consumed hierarchy and its musty orthodoxies”. Noting that American Catholics’ views on contraception, abortion and same-sex marriage are much the same as among Americans in general, he says: “These Catholics look to the church not for exacting rules, but for a focus for their spirituality.”

**“
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Another columnist commends the breakaway Spiritus Christi Church in Rochester, NY, which describes itself as “Catholic, not Roman Catholic”. The church has a woman pastor and presides at same-sex marriages. He advises fellow-Catholics: “If you are not getting the spiritual sustenance you need, if you are uneasy being part of an institution out of step with your conscience – then go.”

It seems to me that if the Catholic Church is ever to fulfil the promise of Vatican II, it will be the women who make it happen, both in America and closer to home.

Episcopal (Anglican) Bishop John Spong sees it the same way. After the April slap-down of the Leadership Conference he wrote: “Those vital nuns are now on the battle line facing this out-of-touch male hierarchy. I predict, however, that the nuns will ultimately prevail.”

The Vatican, he added, had never understood either feminine ways of operating, “or that truth cannot be finally trampled in the service of institutional power.”

*Contributed by Ian Harris.
Otago Daily Times,
July 27, 2012*

Beyond Tribal Loyalties

As a Jewish author and peace activist, Avigail Abarbanel is an extraordinary woman. She talks here to our community about her book and her life.

My husband Ian and I left Australia and moved to Scotland in January 2010. Perhaps because we were busy with the stresses of our move, that we missed the events in 2009. I am referring to the removal of Peter Kennedy from his role as Parish Priest, and to the subsequent exile of your community from the Catholic Church. I understand that Fathers Peter Kennedy and Terry Fitzpatrick took most of their community with them and that the TLC has become your home. Before I left Scotland, I listened to the interview Peter gave on the ABC on your website, and was deeply impressed and moved. This exclusion from the Church could have been the end of your community but it wasn't. Not only are you here and thriving, you are also doing a great deal of good.

The reason for my visit to Australia this month, is the publication of my book *Beyond Tribal Loyalties: Personal Stories of Jewish Peace Activists*. The book is a collection of twenty-five personal stories of Jewish peace activists who have been through a challenging personal journey. They have come to question the values and beliefs they grew up on and that they were expected to follow automatically. I think their journeys have more than a little bit



Avigail (between Terry and Sam) and friends, after she gave her homily.

in common with Peter and Terry's journeys, and the journey of many of you who are members of St Mary's Community in Exile.

This book came about as a result of a suggestion from a dear friend of mine from the United States, Dr Kenneth Ring who thought that I needed to tell my story. He believed that the fact that I was born and raised in Israel, served in the army there and then turned into an activist for Palestinian rights was a story worth telling. In my introduction to the book I explain how uncomfortable it felt trying to write a whole book about myself.

Although we are still a minority overall, there is a growing number of Jewish people around the world who are questioning Israel and the occupation, and who are prepared to take a stand about it. In my book I wanted to share the space with some of those good people rather than be on my own. I also thought it was important for the world to know that there

are Jewish activists out there who have been through a remarkable and difficult personal journey.

In editing this book I had a question I wanted to explore. I wanted to know what makes it possible for some people to stand up for what they believe in the face of the powerful demand to be loyal to their group, its dogma and its beliefs. In the afterword to the book I describe what I believe is the answer to this question.

“ what makes it possible for some people to stand up for what they believe in the face of the powerful demand to be loyal to their group ”

I think that all the contributors and others like them have something that I call “emotional resilience”. Sadly, in our world it still requires a great deal of courage and incredible emotional resilience to

stand up for one's convictions and personal values, especially when they contradict the values we are supposed to uphold because we are members of a particular group. The more oppressive and insecure the group, the harder it is to differentiate from it and stand up for one's personal values and beliefs. And there is always a cost to doing that.

Mainstream Jewish communities around the world demand automatic and unquestioning loyalty to Israel as a central part of every Jewish person's identity. This means accepting everything Israel does and in particular not criticising it in public. This is often referred to as "Israel right or wrong". Listening to Peter's interview I realised how similar our experiences are. He and his parish were supposed to believe in "Catholicism or Vatican right or wrong". Peter mentioned that the foundation of the Catholic Church and creed is rooted in a historical and doctrinal lie, and I'm afraid so is the foundation of Israel and how it presents itself.

Growing up in Israel in the 1960s and 1970s, I didn't know anything about the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948. This was hidden from us in our history classes and in the general culture. I was brought up to believe that we were a persecuted people who simply "returned" to our country after 2000 years of exile, that all we wanted was to live in peace and that there were bad people who didn't want us to have our country and to live in peace.

As I learned over the years, while we were indeed a persecuted people there was no exile and we are not innocent. Far from it. My people, led by the Zionist movement, the national Jewish movement, colonised an already populated land. Talks about removing the local population were there right from the start. The Zionist movement wanted to create an exclusively Jewish state on the historical land of Palestine as a safe haven for Jews from persecution.

While this in itself isn't particularly wrong, the problem that I and many other people have is that this Jewish safe haven came at the expense of the indigenous people, the Palestinians. Around 750,000 Palestinians were made refugees before and during the 1948 war. Their villages and towns were deliberately destroyed so that they couldn't come back. Israel has not only appropriated Palestinian homes and land but also enacted laws that meant that these people

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**much worse than South Africa's
Apartheid**

could never get back to their land and their properties. My own grandparents who were holocaust survivors were given a house that used to belong to a Palestinian family in Jaffa. My mother grew up in that home and I still remember it as a small child.

The colonisation and ethnic cleansing of Palestine is still ongoing. Israel is continuing to appropriate more and more land and precious resources like water.

This is done in the context of a brutal occupation and a regime that has been likened to Apartheid and described by Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela as much worse than South Africa's Apartheid.

Israel works hard to present an image to the world of a democratic and innocent country but sadly it is anything but. It also tries to present an image of symmetry between Israel and the Palestinians. What I mean by symmetry is that Israel presents the conflict as a conflict between equals, and any negotiations as negotiations between equals.

This illusion of symmetry is meant to obscure the fact that the Palestinian people are an essentially powerless people under a brutal occupation. Israel also wants to obscure the fact that it holds all the power in this conflict. This power is military, economic and political. Israel also determines the parameters of public discourse on the conflict and of any so-called "peace negotiations", while all the while continuing the colonisation and following the old Zionist policy of "creating facts on the ground". This is the policy of building infrastructure and towns and populating them with "settlers" or rather colonists. This creates de-facto annexation of the land. This is designed to make it very difficult to evacuate land later and return it to its rightful owners should a two-state solution be imposed on Israel.

Israel is being helped to maintain its dominance and the status quo



by the loyalty of many Jews around the world who would do anything to stifle and silence discussion on Israel's occupation. I and my fellow panellists who are contributors to the book have been excluded from the recent Limmud Oz conference in Melbourne. Limmud Oz is an annual Jewish conference of culture and learning. The exclusion came because some of us including myself support and promote the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions campaign against Israel. The BDS

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they need us to speak on their behalf

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is designed to put pressure on Israel to end the occupation. This campaign represents a non-violent action similar to the one that led South Africa to end its Apartheid. Those of us who support the BDS are labelled antisemitic and regularly and publicly accused that we promote the “destruction of the state of Israel”. It is in this context that the message of the book is so important. It's about standing up against so much opposition, exclusion, anger, name-calling and threats. Those of us who do it had to choose between our loyalty to our group and our own values, which is the choice you too have made.

When I realised that my tribal loyalty to my people clashed with my universal human values, and when I learned that so much of that loyalty was grounded in lies and half-truths, I had a choice. I could pretend I didn't know what I now knew and continue to keep quiet, or I could follow my own sense of right and wrong, and my own values and take a stand.

Like you, I decided to follow my own heart, my faith in the transcendent and my values, and do the right thing. I am grateful to be in such good company here with you. I am also grateful to you for the work you are doing to make things better for homeless and marginalised people here

in Brisbane, and for forging a strong relationship with Australian Aborigines. You are setting a wonderful example and I hope that many more will follow in your footsteps. You clearly all have the emotional resilience that I speak about in my book.

Jesus who was a follower of the prophetic tradition in Judaism questioned dogma and human authority both Jewish and Roman in his time and focused on the importance of kindness and compassion. For that he was considered a problem and was executed. Jesus spent his life helping the marginalised and rejected, and his life and message continue to inspire people like you to do good to this day. You certainly follow in His footsteps and if there are some people out there who can't see that, well sadly, it's due to their own short-sightedness and nothing to do with you.

Please remember that without our help, the Palestinians cannot hope for justice or a future. Since they are deprived of any real power, they need as many of us as possible to speak on their behalf and to expose their situation to the world. It's really about kindness, compassion for our fellow humans and about doing the right thing. I hope for the day when we are mature enough for our politics to be based on these simple and noble principles.

Thank you for your hospitality, for your good works and for being who you are. God bless you all!
Avigail Abarbanel

**St Mary's in Exile.
What is possible
to the believer?**

Ted

Homophobia: a litmus test of social morality



Forty years ago the crude and cruel social boundaries of homophobia and racism abhorrently shaped dominant ethical boundaries in Australian society. They are both offspring of prejudice generated by the human fear of difference. Related to such basic aspects of humanity – our sexual and racial identity – they are capable of stimulating deep anxieties. Homophobia in particular is often reinforced by ideological and religious justifications which only serve to amplify the irrationality with which they are vehemently practised and defended. Happily, as repeated polls demonstrate, most Australians (including some religious leaders) have moved past these discriminatory attitudes while the laws which legitimated them have largely been removed by our Parliaments.

However, as recent Parliamentary debates in Brisbane and Canberra have shown, when it comes to marriage equality (or so called gay marriage) there is still one bridge too far. In the Federal sphere

this is a direct consequence of Opposition Leader Tony Abbott's refusal to allow his members a conscience vote on the question, thereby demonstrating his disdain for the liberal philosophy his political party claimed as its founding doctrine. Meanwhile Queensland's new Premier has been forced to compromise with factions of his huge LNP majority. As a result, homosexual couples may be "registered relationships", but the State will not sanction the ceremonies which seal their commitments. In a related move, and in a ridiculously discriminatory way, the Queensland Attorney-General is amending Queensland's surrogacy legislation. (Whatever one's view on surrogacy there can be no question that the proposed action of the LNP government is discriminatory, for the intention is to remove all partnerships, other than those of legally recognised heterosexual couples, from eligibility for legalised surrogacy).

As ever, leading the charge to save us from the social ravages of faithful, life-committed same sex marriages are certain Christians and their conservative churches. This time, however, the case is not overtly about the cruelty of zero tolerance to those of different sexual orientation. Rather, the cruelty is cloaked by the question of "defining marriage". Marriage, they say, is only for a man and a woman (or have I omitted the qualifier, "heterosexual"?). On the basis of questionable belief and religious ethics – for there are many Christians and people of other religions who support gay marriage – they demand that

our Parliaments in our secular democracy protect their minority view.

Personally, I find a disturbing *deja vu* in all this. At the height of the Joh (Bjelke-Petersen) days I was a young Methodist minister attached to the church adjacent to King George Square in the heart of Brisbane's CBD. On Monday June 18, 1973, Queensland's daily, *The Courier Mail*, carried a prominent page three story quoting me under the banner, "Cleric tips 'blessing' for man marriages". Anonymous hate mail and venomous telephone calls began instantly. In no uncertain terms I learnt that I had crossed a forbidden boundary. My actions were the subject of censure motions in church councils, while the President of the Methodist Conference wrote to *The Courier Mail* assuring readers that my views were not those of the church. Altogether, the conflict damaged me personally but also gave me a profound sense of the hurt gay and lesbian people experienced on a daily basis.

I first made the statement which generated *The Courier Mail* story to a public forum on sexuality which I had organised as part of a series on public issues. I probably never would have entered the debate that evening except for the fact that one of our panellists, Ian George, then Dean of St John's Cathedral (later Archbishop of Adelaide) had to leave early to conduct Evensong. In his place I took a question from the audience about gay marriage which triggered *The Courier Mail*

reporter's interest. I later gave the following considered statement to the newspaper.

Society is being forced to rethink its expectations of marriage. This may lead to different forms of marriage. Likewise the Church must redefine what it means by Christian marriage. Inasmuch as the spiritual dimension of marriage is a matter of faithful, loving relationships open to the love of God, the church will have to face the possibility of conveying its blessing on homosexual partnerships where persons intend a faithful and loving commitment under God.

Subsequently I wrote a paper, partly as an offering to my critics, but chiefly to defend and clarify my own views. I cited credible, scientific and theological scholarship to show how ridiculous and prejudicial is the view that homosexuality itself is a sinful state.

On "homosexual marriage" I wrote at the time:

The homosexual person does not have the benefit of living within a supporting order that is informed by a traditional ethos such as that of the institution of marriage. If homosexuality is not necessarily a sin and if it is possible for two persons to have a faithful, permanent homosexual partnership open to the love of God, then doesn't the church have to face the possibility of recognising their union in God's sight?

But the debate goes on – in the church at least. I never cease to be amazed at the preoccupation with sexuality as a defining characteristic of the Christian way of life. As a retired minister of the Uniting Church I am saddened at the lack of compassion evident in organised campaigns in the name of Christ on this matter. Life has taught me that sexuality is an area which must be approached with compassion. We cannot be who we are, nor can we collaborate to build livable communities without keeping our passions alive. However, an unbridled, undisciplined expression of passion can be destructive. Furthermore, our sexual passion is most vulnerable to the human capacity for self-deception, a fact that those who are judgmental in this domain would do well to remember, and a fact that is borne out in the widespread sexual abuse by clergy now publicly revealed. Of course it is unacceptable to lapse into permissive relativism in questions of sexual ethics but, conscious of my own frailties, I have learnt to be wary of those who crusade on this matter.

A series of legislative changes through the 1990s culminating in amendments to Queensland's anti-discrimination laws in 2002 suggest that, in this matter, it is

the state, not the churches, which has given the lead on human rights. Marriage as an institution in Australia and countless other nations has evolved significantly over recent decades. No longer is there a black and white template for what is meant by 'marriage'. Not only are divorce and childless marriages commonplace among the religiously faithful, but there is a widespread trend for marriage to take place without a spiritual blessing and outside church buildings. These are realities many of us may lament but, in the case of gay marriage, I would welcome the possibility of ceremonies which recognise the place of the divine Love spoken of in ancient scriptures, in that most sacred of loving relationships between two people. That for me simply defines the essence of marriage: a loving, faithful commitment between two people.

We all know high profile same sex couples who practise such marriage – former High Court judge Michael Kirby, former Senator Bob Brown, Federal minister Penny Wong. To that list most of us can name members of our extended family and, some of us, ministers of religion. How cruel and unnecessarily stupid it is to deny them the full blessing of society on their sacred union!

For me, it is simply an ethical no brainer. Amending the Marriage Act would be evidence of the social compassion every society needs to survive.

Dr Noel Preston AM is adjunct Professor in the Griffith University Key Centre for Ethics, Justice, Law and Governance and a retired Uniting Church minister.



Connecting with Cambodia



It was June 2008 and John, I and the kids were at 9am Sunday mass. We weren't often seen at mass during rugby season – religion number 1 for certain members of the household - took our devotions. However this Sunday the Easts Under 13's had a bye so at St Mary's we were.

Reading the mass notices I saw that a home for a young Cambodian man, aged 16 was sought. I had been to Cambodia a couple of years before, had a spare room and thought why not? The family agreed and so began our connection with Dr Vuthy Chhoeurn, head of surgery at the National Paediatric Hospital in Phnom Penh, and his family.

Vuthy is committed to improving the lives of his fellow Cambodians. He has particular passion for cleft palate and club foot rectification work where a life can be totally transformed in just one hour. In a country such as Cambodia where health services are limited and social welfare non-existent, if you cannot make your own way, life is very grim.

We found out about his passion when we travelled to Cambodia at the end of 2009. The whole family put their daily lives on hold and escorted us proudly around their wonderful country. I learnt that doctors earned \$100 a month. I learnt that Vuthy travels to regional and rural areas to provide guidance and education to the few doctors or surgeons working there. Each day on the road, we would make a few stops. We would have a look at the local sights and Vuthy would disappear. One night he was showing us some photos of various things. One of them was of a club foot case that he had just dealt

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at \$100 a month, you could almost 'adopt a doctor'
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with that lunch time while we were looking at a temple! A school age child with his legs covered in plaster up to his knees. We had no idea this was what he was up to while we were seeing the sights!

I thought, well at \$100 a month, you could almost 'adopt a doctor'. Why not try to raise some money and help out in some way? My idea was to organise a small group tour to Cambodia, with the participants making a donation and/or raising some funds. With the kind support of Rotary Balmoral and Phnom Penh, Connecting with Cambodia was born and the first group of intrepid women headed out in late November 2010. Another group went in 2011 and altogether the two groups have raised around \$14,000. The money is transmitted to the hospital in Phnom Penh through the two Rotary clubs.

The funds support annual surgical missions made by Vuthy and his team to provincial areas where a case load of children (and sometimes adults) requiring treatment are assembled by the local health centre. In December 2012 a mission to Kratie, in the north of the country, saw Vuthy's team perform 171 consultations and 49 surgeries (including 16 cleft lip/palate) in 2 days at a cost of less than \$5000. The fund is also used to assist children of poor



Vuthy, Katie, Colleen, John, Thavin, Sekar, Raph, Tom.

families presenting at Vuthy's hospital in need of surgery but unable to pay. Normally subject to a waiting list, Vuthy charges the fund \$100 per surgery to provide treatment immediately.

That young man needing accommodation back in 2008 was Vuthy's son, Sekar. The family had been in Brisbane for 6 months while Vuthy undertook study at the Royal Children's Hospital and were about to head home. Sekar was in Year 11 and offered a scholarship

by St James College to stay and complete his senior studies. He is now in his third year at UQ and still with us.

In April this year Vuthy was provided with another opportunity to study briefly in Brisbane . He and his family came back to 9am mass. The community very generously contributed \$555 to the project. We held an afternoon tea that same day and the next night the Balmoral Rotary club held a dinner. All in all that weekend

raised over \$4000 and to date the project has contributed nearly \$20,000 to transforming the lives of young Cambodians in need.

The Connecting with Cambodia tours have so far been once a year, limited to around 8 people and made to measure: the timing and duration and options are designed around the group. Contact me on 0413 140 356 or colleenorange@hotmail.com if you are interested in visiting Cambodia!

Colleen Orange

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Lost and Found

It's not just comfort we find in the kindness of strangers but a powerful and instinctive human connection, as Jon Bauer relates.

In the early hours of July 11, 1999, I lost two very significant people in my life. One of them was my mother, the other was a stranger.

I'd known for a year my mum was dying, and I was dedicated to being there for her when it happened. The hospice promised they'd be able to warn me when the time was close, but they misjudged the signs, so instead of being at her bedside, I was in a stranger's bed.

I understand now that I coped with my mum's long fight against cancer as best I could, sometimes drinking and sleeping around. When the unexpected call came and "hospice" showed up on my mobile screen, the girl lay in bed and watched me take the news. She saw my reaction, muted as it was after a painful year of expecting the worst. Then we hugged as she sobbed. I was too numb to feel anything but her kindness.

Months passed and I didn't really look back. But gradually I started to think about her more and more, dwelling on her tenderness and the way she'd been there for me at one of the most significant moments you can have. It's been 13 years now and yet my quiet fascination with her hasn't abated.



My mum was ill for a whole year, a year in which there were countless acts of kindness offered by her friends, relatives and neighbours - people with whom I had a history. This girl didn't do anything miraculous. So why is it a stranger I want to see again when I've lost touch with every single one of my mother's friends, relatives and neighbours?

I'm not alone in experiencing this seemingly disproportionate reaction. Many of us have had a moment where, at a critical time,

or even just a mildly stressful or lonely one, someone stepped from the shadows and did something. Not necessarily anything heroic or dramatic, but because they're strangers and they act at a particular moment, their kindness takes on extra significance.

My once-housemate, Jane, was in Thailand when the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami hit. "There was a rush of survivors to higher ground, everyone sleeping out in the open in tight rows, all of us strangers and yet all of us holding

hands," she recalls. "For those few days after the tsunami I felt like I was falling in love over and over again, with everyone I met. Every connection was heightened and intense."

Often there's an interpretation of serendipity in the actions of strangers. My friend Carl also lost his mother, but her sudden deterioration meant she was unconscious in a hospice before they'd discussed her last wishes.

"A visitor [Gill] arrived, saying she was a recent acquaintance of Mum's, so I took the opportunity to go out for some air," Carl recalls. "Before Gill left she gave me her phone number." Carl's mum died that night, and after calling friends and family, something made him phone Gill. "Critically, Gill is the vicar of a local church and she told me that Mum had sat on a bench and got talking to her only days before, telling this stranger that the church would be a nice place to be laid to rest. Mum's buried there now, close to that very bench." It also turned out that Carl and Gill share a birthday, just as Carl and his mother did. "So every year I go to see Mum's grave on our birthday, and have lunch with Gill. I still get to wish someone happy birthday on my birthday, as I always did with Mum."

I happened to be in London for the July 7, 2005, bombings, around the corner from Kings Cross. I remember the faces in the office when there was

that unquestionable bang. Our pressing work and deadlines were instantly meaningless; everyone either went home or, if the closed transport networks made it too hard, they piled into the local pub. London isn't exactly open and friendly, but that day there were unprecedented levels of eye contact and conversation between strangers. Yes, the day was tragic, but for those caught up on the sidelines it was memorable also for the way it blurred the imagined

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If your survival's even moderately in question, that ties you to others around you - it forces you to team up with them, depend on them, serve them.

boundaries between us. And it was impossible not to wish it could always be like that.

When travelling to rural Alaska I learnt that people there don't lock their homes. When they're away, especially in winter, they don't just leave them unlocked, they prepare a fire ready to be lit in the hearth, and they stock the cupboards with food and water. I remember an Alaskan seeing my surprise at this and saying, "It's not like where you live; we still need each other here."

Perhaps this is why a stranger's kindness resonates? In cities and suburbs, more so in affluent countries, day-to-day survival isn't an issue any more (even if it doesn't always feel like that). We don't physically need one another

in order to live now. And without needing one another, we're not properly connected. Where would the sense of connection come from?

Alaska made me realise we lost meaning once our survival was secured. The struggle for survival is the meaning, and if your survival's even moderately in question, that ties you to others around you - it forces you to team up with them, depend on them, serve them. Real or imagined danger connects people, and our connection to others is scientifically proven to be the pinnacle of experience.

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It's no surprise then that a stranger's actions become imprinted on us at a time when our survival is called into question. Even if it's just a sense of our emotional survival under threat, like when your mum has just died. It's in this emotional need, and another's kindness, that we find connection. And there's something magical about experiencing that with a stranger. A feeling that stays with us, marks us. So that we carry that stranger and their kindness with us everywhere we go.

This story was published in the Sydney Morning Herald Weekender Magazine 28th July 2012. It is reprinted with permission.

I Heard a Voice Once

Margaret's story tells of when the hearing of voices is no bad thing

Though Margaret comes to the TLC only from time to time she certainly regards us as her church and has done so now for quite a number of years. Recently she shared this part of her story with me.

When she had her first child she was in the outback and unfortunately the baby was premature. Without the possibility of medical assistance, the infant died. As you can imagine, when she found herself pregnant again she ensured that she was in the capital city and made enquires far and wide to try to choose the best obstetrician she could find.

On her first visit she told him that she was suffering severe morning sickness (which as you must know often lasts all day!) "I have just the thing that will help you," he said as he picked up his pen and started writing a prescription. She was feeling quite relaxed and quite willing to accept the professional advice of her doctor when she heard a voice in her head saying, "Mother, Mother, don't take those tablets."

The doctor looked up and said, "You are lucky. These pills have only recently come on the market and all my young women are finding them a great help." Again came that same voice which seemed to come from deep within – "Mother, Mother, don't take those tablets." She sat there

quite stunned for a moment but when she heard for a third time, "Mother, Mother, don't take those tablets," she looked up and blurted out that she had changed her mind and did not want to take any medication.

As he screwed up the prescription he had written and threw it in the basket, he told her testily, "You young girls should take the advice of your doctors," and added that that applied particularly to her as she had already lost one infant. She assured him in no uncertain terms that the loss of her first child was not due to her neglect - but did not have the courage to tell him of the voice. (She could quite imagine him sending her to a different kind of specialist as hearing voices seems to be one of the symptoms of mental illness.)

“ I think we should all entertain the possibility that God will speak to us ”

She made her next appointment with a different doctor and was at home feeding her healthy little daughter when she heard on the radio that after a spate of infants born with limbs not fully formed, a link had been found between Thalidomide and birth defects. As she looked down at the infant at her breast, she realised that without those warnings she too would have been nursing a disabled infant. She thanked God for the warning.



Margaret read my article and said she was happy to have it published and I was even quite free to use her name if I liked. She made only one change - originally I had written 'Mummy' in my account and she corrected me. "If it had been Mummy I would have thought of it as the voice of my unborn child but I heard it as the voice of God addressing me in my role as Mother".

Many mystics have claimed to see visions and hear voices (though not all stories make their heroes or heroines sound quite sane and sensible!). It does seem though that this would be a logical way for God to communicate with us as scientists have found it takes only the electrical stimulation of a certain part of the brain for us to see and hear what is not in fact there. I think we should all entertain the possibility that God will speak to us. If we are really aware of God's presence in us though, we might not have to wait for these rather extraordinary messages. We should be able to discern what is best just by that gut feeling that we get if we already have started to listen to the voice of God in our hearts. We are plugged in at that moment

Continued on next page

Democracy



The other day, my daughter complained that a group of her acquaintances, when chatting about politics, had agreed that democracy does not work as a system of government. She was shocked at the rejection of what she thought was accepted as a core belief by all Australians.

Their disappointment with democracy reminded me of an incident I read about in the memoirs of Pavel Palazhchenko, who was the translator for most of the meetings between Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. In 1989, Gorbachev changed the Soviet Union's electoral laws, so that for the first time ever, they could have a real election, instead of the usual stage-managed one. On the opening day of the new Congress of People's Deputies, people were glued to their TV sets, to see what democracy would bring. The

country was in a desperate state – the centrally managed economic system was literally disintegrating; the political system was going the same way; the government had to form a consensus as to what to do about it. When the

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..they lacked the discernment to pick the opportunists from the candidates who could have addressed their problems.

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much anticipated proceedings began, they were dominated by opportunists, nationalists from various ethnic groups, demagogues and populists – there was no room for discussion of the vital issues amongst all the grandstanding and attention seeking.

So democracy started off on a rather depressing note in the Soviet Union, and has gone downhill from there. Since the voters had no experience with democracy, it is not surprising that they lacked the discernment to pick the opportunists from the candidates who could have addressed their problems.

But we Australians are not in that situation. We have almost more elections than we can handle, and have had now for generations. Yet most of us are seriously disappointed with our politicians – what has gone wrong? I fear the answer is the worst of all possible answers – that we have got the politicians we deserve. We see in them a reflection of the nation's lack of honesty and generosity, and we can't stand it. That is the problem with our democracy – it works too well.

Peter Brown

I Heard a Voice Once

to the Great Awareness who as Being, Truth and Love is outside our time and space but links us to the whole of creation.

Yes, I heard a voice once. It was only six words but was so filled with love that it is an experience

I will never forget. You will have to wait though for that story as Marg usually tells me (nicely) that it might be a good idea to shorten my contribution!

We should not wait though for that actual voice. Let us listen to the

Voice Within. Even when we hear no actual sound let us be open to God's message in whatever way it reaches us. May we suspend our disbelief and put our total trust in a loving God who is with us (and in us) - in our past, our present and our future.

Shar Ryan

“Fishers of Men” Revisited

I am a native of the west of Ireland. In my 20s I backpacked around Australia and in Airlie Beach I met future wife and best friend, Oriana. We lived in Ireland for 4 years before returning to Australia to get married and start a family. I had studied law in Ireland but never practised. When I got to Brisbane I found a job as a law clerk in criminal law with Legal Aid Queensland. It was a dream job for me. My Dad was very ‘St Vincent de Paul’ and my Mother never met a fundraising committee she wouldn’t sit on but here was I being PAID to work with the most marginalised in the community.

I was at LAQ five years when I left to set up as a barrister in private practice in criminal law in Brisbane and I am still going strong six years later. I love what I do. My work mostly involves jury trials and appearing before judges arguing for leniency on sentence.

Recently, I have been involved in representing “people smugglers”, i.e. the Indonesian men who were crew-members of the boats that bring asylum seekers to Christmas Island or Ashmore Reef. I was involved in the first case that discredited the wrist x-rays the AFP were using to decide the age of Indonesian crew. Age is really important in these cases because if the accused is over 18 and convicted he must serve at least 3 years in prison before being considered for parole. We call this mandatory sentencing and it is wrong because a sentencing judge



is not allowed to take into account any mitigation such as a plea of guilty, co-operation with the AFP or the minor role a person might have had on a boat.

I have never heard of any instance where the mandatory sentence served its supposed purpose – deterring people smugglers. Its true purpose was always to give politicians the ability to say that they were ‘tough’ on people smuggling – no matter what the human cost.

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**Dietrich Bonhoeffer
executed by the Nazis for,
amongst other things, the
crime of people smuggling**

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The crews of these boats had historically been prosecuted with near 100% success rates in the Northern Territory and Western Australia but the post-Labor influx of boats created so many trials

that the overflow had to be sent to the East Coast for hearing. I gave a homily at St Marys in June about working with these men. I gave the homily the title, “Fishers of Men” because my clients are usually fishermen, the boats are usually fishing boats and the holds usually full of Afghani and Iraqi men.

Kevin Rudd famously referred to people smugglers as ‘the vilest form of human life’. Mr Rudd is also fond of the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who, ironically, was executed by the Nazis for, amongst other things, the crime of people smuggling. There are worse people around than Mr Rudd but the venom he injected into the public sphere made me fear for the Indonesian clients I, and other very dedicated lawyers, were about to bring before Brisbane juries.

Happily, my fears were unfounded. Jury after jury acquitted our clients as the prosecution repeatedly failed to convince juries that our clients understood that they were bringing people to Australia

illegally. It was fantastic to be part of: the juries refused to put their own knowledge inside the heads of these Indonesian men; the Queensland judiciary were, by-and-large, ferociously independent; the AFP officers showed that their hearts really weren't in it and the assumptions and assertions of the Federal Government were repeatedly rejected by the ordinary people of Brisbane.

On 24 August 2012 the Federal Attorney General announced that mandatory sentencing was over for the crew of these "people smuggling boats". From now on the crew will be treated like

ordinary criminals, with judges allowed to fashion a sentence proportionate to the crime - in most cases this will mean short prison terms before being sent home.

I have no doubt that the change of heart has nothing to do with the Federal Government seeing the light. The cost of these trials was enormous and they were getting hardly any convictions. The U-turn is the direct result of the verdicts of the juries in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. The wisdom and compassion of ordinary Australians has triumphed over the cynical, venal, and opportunistic dishonesty of our politicians.

I am very proud that the criminal justice system showed up the government's dishonesty and ensured that inflicting injustice on impoverished Indonesian fishermen will no longer afford Federal politicians the opportunity for point-scoring or false moral outrage.

To paraphrase Bill Clinton, I've learned that there is not much wrong with Australia that cannot be cured by what is right with Australia. That knowledge should be both a comfort and a challenge to us all!

Eoin Mac Giolla Ri

What People are Reading

We Weren't Told

A handbook on 'Progressive' Christianity
Rex A. E. Hunt & John W. H. Smith (eds)
Polebridge

"This international collection of Cameos and Articles on the themes and issues addressed by 'progressive' Christianity, is a response to the often-heard cry: 'Why weren't we told?'" (From the Introduction by the Editors)

"Progressives see the Christian cultural tradition as an ever evolving one, in which individuals are free to think through and enunciate for themselves the beliefs they find most satisfying" (From the Foreword by Professor Sir Lloyd Geering)

This wide-ranging collection is one you will return to often, while

providing a valuable resource for use in small study groups.

Noel Preston

Dumbo Feather

Where the title comes from I haven't a clue, but the journalists behind this great "new" magazine know their job. The sub-title, "Conversations with Extraordinary People" gives a strong indication of what's inside. I first picked it up in a Sydney cafe and was impressed. Back home later, I bought the next edition. It's expensive at \$15.00 a copy (\$12 if subscribing) so I hesitate to recommend it, but really it's a fantastic magazine, emanating out of Melbourne, offering in-depth interviews with extraordinary and uplifting people. It uses quality paper and production, excellent photography and to balance the longer interviews, shorter commentary as well. Keep your



eye out for it. Maybe it's time for a literary treat! Or perhaps the local library carries it. My "treat" had extensive material on Abigail Disney, peace worker, Rick Amor, artist, Mia Freedman, journalist, to name several, with links to web pages at the end of each article. There was an interesting biography of a person who has contributed to society in the past – in this issue, Maria Montessori, educationalist. No one interviewed was a hugely famous person, certainly no one was interested in celebrity. All were deeply committed, doing what they could to make meaning of their lives for the well-being of all. Anyone who wants to borrow my copy is very welcome to it.

Mary Long



Seen at the
Moonlight Dinner Dance



Thanks to Robyn Mc Donald for these photos.