

# Gratitude St Mary's Matters

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## From the Editor

For years I'd had problems with my image of God that I'd developed in childhood because he seemed such a nasty piece of work. I was told to love him (always him) and ask him to help me when I needed him to. Well, my experience told me this help never eventuated. He seldom came up with the answer to that maths problem, no matter how hard I asked, nor did he help me find the hat I'd lost at school. 'Don't bother coming home without it,' Mother had said.

As I grew up the problem became even more of a worry. I saw people pray for a cure for their loved ones and then to see the loved ones die. I read about famine, earthquake, wars. How could an almighty God let these things happen. And there was the real problem of why this God allowed such terrible things to happen in the world when he could have prevented them quite easily?

So it was a great relief to me when I realised I could toss away this image.

However there was one aspect of the God image that I really missed - and that was having someone I could be grateful to for all the good things that came my way. 'Thank you God' was such a good mantra.

I don't think I have adequately solved this problem. The best I can do is simply be aware and express the fact that I am grateful for everything. For this great mystery called life.

### Cover

This photo was taken by Heather Eckersley. A magic moment as Barbara celebrates her gratitude for the gift of a favourite dish from her friend Annette.



# Friendship

I have known you for a very long time, my friend  
Yet not known you!  
Much water has passed underneath the bridge of our lives  
And still, when I return to our friendship  
It gives me strength and nourishment  
And I discover anew how precious this gift of friendship is

This rare and treasured jewel has been polished  
By the passing years  
and all the ups and downs of our separate lives

When we meet  
It feels like coming home and putting that old, familiar  
jumper on  
I feel warm and relaxed, secure and calm  
It is a place where I can be myself

And yet, sometimes..  
There is a prickle in that jumper  
That can pierce the heart  
This is how our friendship is to me

So thank you for the gift of it  
And the gift of knowing you all these years  
It seems it does not matter  
How much water has passed underneath that bridge  
Nor where you are  
Our friendship remains steadfast  
And for that  
I am truly grateful!

*Penny Wearne*



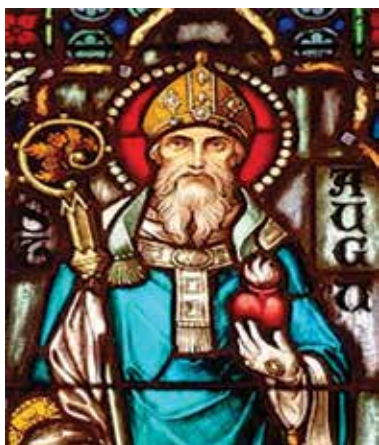
# Gratitude Brings an Invitation to be in the Moment

The Gospel writers have Jesus continually talking about the Kingdom of God.

These writers were writing in Greek and the Greek word that translates as 'Kingdom' is *baseleia*. Many biblical scholars today believe it is better translated as reign or PREVAILING PRESENCE. Because the word Kingdom can lead to the conclusion that this is a specific place, this spiritual reality for Jesus was less a thing than an activity, more a verb than a noun.

The overwhelming sense of it was that it was close at hand, very near, always present. One only had to open one's eyes and see it, embrace it. Once glimpsed it is like the seed thrown into the ground, it grows of its own accord. You see this presence everywhere. It grows from a very tiny seed, such as a mustard seed, into the biggest of all the trees.

The amazing thing is that it has been there all along and all the searching one does has all been in vain. St Augustine in the 4th Century captures this so beautifully in his *Confessions*.



'Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you... You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness.'

In the 12th Century Persian poet Rumi writes,

*I have lived on the lip of insanity, wanting to know reasons, knocking on a door.*

*It opens. I've been knocking from the inside.*

Recently we went to the Brookfield Spirituality Centre. Amidst the beauty of this place an exceptional man and woman and their 4 wonderful children spoke to us about this reality that Jesus spoke so much about. They were Matthew and Diane Ames and their four children Luke, Benjamin, William and Emily. Matthew lost all four limbs when a simple bacterial infection (streptococcal A) went undiagnosed, cannibalising into toxic shock syndrome. Within 24 hours of being admitted to the Mater Hospital Matthew (39 yrs. at the time) was in an induced coma, as his limbs blackened from blood toxicity, his kidneys failed, and his blood pressure dipped dangerously low. His body was producing toxins that ended up killing his extremities. He would have died from the tips up if doctors had not gotten rid of the dead tissue.

Matthew's wife Diane was given a heart-wrenching choice: let her husband die, or fight for a one per cent chance of survival by agreeing to the amputation of his arms and legs. For Diane, it was a simple choice. She and their four children could not bear to see him go, even if it meant he would wake up profoundly disabled.

Matthew reflects on waking up, 'When you are lying there, in a hospital bed with no arms and no legs, you can't lift your head and you have a breathing tube down your throat, and you've got a feeding tube down your nose, and you are on dialysis in an intensive care bed, and you can't talk to anyone, you begin to think a lot and I realized it was the first time in my life I actually truly stopped. I really valued that time to

slow down, and to become aware.' And then to truly appreciate: 'it is a precious thing, life. I didn't realise just how precious until I went through this experience.'

And that 'This experience has forced me to transition from defining myself by what I did, to who I am.'



Matthew told us a simple story to illustrate the most important thing he had learnt thus far from his testing ordeal. He related the story of how the family went to Currimundi, just north of Caloundra, last Christmas holidays for some time at the beach. Eager for Matthew to join the family on the beach they hired one of those special beach wheel chairs, which Diane managed to manoeuvre over the long stretch of beach before being near the water. At Currimundi there is a lake which drains into the sea with the quick flowing receding tide. Matthew found himself alone in the wheelchair while the family were in the lake enjoying the water and the mirthful exuberance of being caressed by a playful ocean.

At this time of being alone he was visited by the gloating melancholic presence of an overwhelming sadness and grief. A dispiriting presence he had been visited by before while in hospital, and a few times at home on his return. This time he was ready.

1. He moved into an attitude of acceptance. Acceptance, he said, is not thinking everything is wonderful and good, but understanding what is around you, being aware of it, and not judging it. Finding ways to accept, and

*Continued on page 7*

# Being Grateful for the 'Bad Bits'

I am a huge fan of gratitude. In fact, my life would be very diminished without gratitude being a part of my daily life. While it can be easy to be grateful for all the good experiences, I have found that I have had to work on finding gratitude for the 'bad bits'. However, it has enriched my life enormously to embrace the negative stuff too.

Back in 2009, I 'ran away from home' after 25 years of marriage. I packed a bootful of belongings, and left a marriage where I had felt unhappy and trapped for many years. I went through a huge amount of stress, anxiety, guilt and fear in the ensuing months. Despite all these swirling emotions, I continued to work as a GP, as if nothing was different.

Just eight months after I had left my marriage, I learnt that I had a very aggressive cancer, with a low survival rate. I remember thinking, 'I am so resentful that I have wasted 25 years of my life in a bad relationship, and now I am going to die prematurely'. That way of thinking stayed with me overnight, but mercifully by the next morning, I was gifted with some clarity. I realized that my marriage had given me my 2 children, then aged 20 and 22. I could not have had 'the good' without 'the bad'. There was no way I would ever hand back my children and wish I had had my family with another man. My 2 children were unique to my union with my ex-husband. This made me realize the enormous gift my ex had given me in our children. I was able to lose my resentment, and focus instead on the positives of our union.

Now, whenever I think of my ex-husband, my next thought is 'Thank God I am no longer with him!' I no longer have to work on it. It is like an acknowledgment of feeling liberated from oppression. Finding gratitude helped me to forgive him. By forgiveness, I mean I was able to release my attachment to the hurt from the past. However, I have not reconciled with him.

My cancer has given me plenty of opportunities to seek and find gratitude. The positives from my cancer are many. I have developed more as a human being. I have become more resilient, done a 'spring clean' of my mind, body, and spirit, and I catch up more often with friends. My connection to the beauty of nature has increased, and I am more mindful. I am also more appreciative of my family's love.

Some things in my life that appeared to be 'bad bits' initially have turned out to be 'good bits' to which I was blind. Over the last five months, I was ungrateful that I was still here on Earth, and had not died as quickly as my medicalized mind had predicted! I felt embarrassed that I had announced to my family, friends, and the SMX Community that I was soon to shed my mortal coil. My decline has been much slower than I expected, and I felt that I had behaved like a Drama Queen! I was apologetic for still being here, and putting my adult children's and my sister's lives 'on hold'. I had accepted dying, but felt that I had 'peaked to die' too early!!

I am greatly relieved to say that, in the last 3 weeks, I finally feel differently. I did a meditation on Loving Kindness when I was in a yoga class and experiencing severe neck pain. I thought of all the loving kindness that was coming to me and then I gave back loving kindness. The meditation was powerful and emotional. The following day, I realized that I no longer felt I needed to apologize for still being here. I started to appreciate how much of a gift it was for me to survive long enough to enjoy the Spring weather, and to have more time with my family. I finally *believed* what my family had been saying all along- that they wanted me around for as long as possible, provided I felt I had quality of life.



What had happened to change my belief system? I believe the powerful mediation finally allowed me to LOVE MYSELF. I was brought up in a strict Catholic household, and had even stricter nuns in primary school. I think the teaching that everyone else is more important than yourself became very ingrained in me. I felt unworthy. Now I feel liberated, and am 'in the loop' on an equal footing with others.

I am so grateful that I was blessed with this gift of self love and extra quality time with my family before I eventually depart from my physical body. I no longer get caught up in thoughts such as 'How much longer is this dying process going to take?' When that thought pops up, my mental response is, 'It will take as long as it will take'.

Life is not about holding a good hand of cards. Life is playing a poor hand well. Gratitude helps us to do that.

*Mary Pease*



# Highlights of the Holy Land

Earlier this year, Greg Jenks offered a tour of the Holy Land for the members of St Mary's in Exile. I was fortunate to be able to participate. The trip was rich in its experiences and its variety. We received warm hospitality from the individuals and groups with whom we interacted and we met some wonderful people. One such interesting person was Wail, our guide in Jordan.

Wail is Jordanian. His grandfather was Palestinian. Back in 1948 when Palestine was declared a land without a people and was given to the Jews, Wail's grandfather was forced to leave his house. He understood it would be for a few days. Sixty seven years later, he and three generations after him have still not returned home, but continue to live in Jordan. Wail, himself, cannot enter Israel because of his grandfather's heritage. Yet, any Jewish person in the world can have Israeli citizenship.

Wail is aware of popular solutions to the situation; but he also has his own. According to Wail, the Qur'an (Surah 17, Verses 4 – 6) explains that Israel will rise twice and fall twice. He says that the current situation is the second rising and that Palestinians just have to wait patiently until they can return peacefully. His interpretation seems to give him hope. Of course, Wail lives in Jordan; he is not living in Palestine being persecuted. Patience might come more easily for him.

The scholars may or may not agree with Wail's understanding of the text; but Wail has found personal inspiration from it. He has found spiritual truth, an interpretation that provides comfort and guidance, but doesn't necessarily rely on scholarly study.

A scholarly approach can provide another way of interpreting scripture by identifying religious truth. This is a concept that I teach in my secondary school classroom. When studying scriptures, my students learn to recognize religious truth as being different from historical or scientific truth. They learn to see scripture as revealing truth rather than recording facts. They need to understand that scripture can be interpreted in many ways. One such interpretation might seek the religious truth of a passage and apply it to a contemporary setting.

My students also learn of a time before technology, indeed before the written word at all; a time when the oral tradition required religious truth to be couched in stories that could easily be remembered and retold; and so needed to be dramatic.

For example, could a startling incident like some women discovering an angel outside an empty tomb be used to capture a complex theology about a transformation to a new way of living?



*Liz at Petra.*

Twenty five years ago, I spent some months at St George's College in Jerusalem. From there, we visited places where we remembered parts of our story. There were no claims that the incidents really happened at those places, or indeed happened at all, or that the people involved even existed. But we remembered the stories that inform our beliefs and we remembered the religious truths that direct our living today.

On this year's tour I visited Magdala for the first time. I learnt that there is no scriptural evidence that Mary Magdalene came from there. The word migdal means tower and there are several marked on the map of Israel. The suggestion is that the origin of our word Magdalene came from a nickname. Perhaps Mary was a tall lady! The Greek word translates as outstanding leader. The religious truth about Mary Magdalene remains. She was an important person in Jesus' ministry. Jesus did not exclude women. We, too, are called upon to treat all people with dignity and respect. This is a valid religious truth wherever this Mary came from and however tall or short she was.

At the Mount of Beatitudes we remembered the Sermon on the Mount, or on the plain as one Gospel reports.



*Near the Damascus Gate*



*At Tony's Spice Mill*



*Greg and his wife Eve on the Sea of Gallilee*

We reflected on the text as a collection of the wisdoms of Jesus, which are today's religious truths - the call to live well, to show mercy, to foster peace. They remain valid religious truths whether they were proclaimed on a mountain top, or on a plain; whether they were said in one teaching or over several years and whether or not they were said like that at all.

In his book, *Jesus Then and Jesus Now*, Greg Jenks points out that, while his scholarship aspires to the best knowledge of Jesus that is possible, what he values most is the wisdom needed for an authentic human life. (Jenks 2014:15) That wisdom is what I call, in my classroom, religious truth.

Personally, I am highly energized by the scholarly examination of scripture and the search for religious truth; but I am also inspired by the hope that Wail's spiritual truth brings to him and to his four generations of family in exile. I'm sure there is a place for both spiritual truth and religious truth in the search for the wisdom needed for an authentic human life.

*Liz Little*

## Gratitude

Brings an Invitation to be in the Moment

*Continued from page 4*

not judge, is something that has really helped him to be at peace, both within himself and others.

2. Making room was Matthew's second strategy to deal with these unfriendly guests. Making room for whatever feeling you are experiencing, acknowledging it, seeing it, feeling it, but not letting it consume you. Finding a deep place inside you, more letting it wash over you, seeing it, feeling it, realizing it is normal, that this is to be expected, and to let it go, let it flow on past you. Like the grief and sadness he was feeling in not being able to be in the water with his children. To let them flow on by.

3. In the moment (ARM. Acceptance, Room, Moment) 'Moment' is a good way to remember this valuable life skill

from Matthew. When Matthew had done the clearing with his acceptance and making room, he could now enter into the moment as it was now presenting itself to him. He could sit in his wheelchair and feel the sun on his face and the wind in his hair, the smell of the salty sea air in his nostrils, the gritty sand under his chin and the sound of the waves caressing the beach. He could enter the present moment and truly begin to enjoy it. Whereas before when consumed by grief and sadness this was not possible. He found himself being truly grateful for the life that he had, with all its limitations. This simple gratitude brought with it a profound joy.

I imagine it is the same joy St Augustine and Rumi experienced when they discovered what they had been searching so diligently for most of their lives.

This Reign, this prevailing presence Jesus spoke of is always there, always available. Ready for us to open our hearts and eyes to every moment of our lives. It is what Matthew discovered and shared so beautifully with us.

I would like to finish with a short quotation from a DVD of Brother David Steindl-Rast called *A Good Day* where he invites us in his words:

'Let the gratefulness overflow into blessing all around you, and then it will really be **A Good Day.**'

*Terry Fitzpatrick*



# Nauru

The centrepiece of the government's asylum seeker policy is detention on Nauru. They also have detention on Manus and transferring asylum seekers to lifeboats and sending them back, but from a political publicity point of view, Nauru is the centrepiece.

Nauru has few sources of income, so the government there accepted the arrangement happily enough, and asylum seekers have been detained there from 2001 to 2008, and 2012 to the present.

The presence of all these Australians, Afghans, Sri Lankans, etc on the small island has not been without controversy amongst the locals. Fourteen years is a long time, and people tend to resent so many foreigners in their midst, especially when they are using your country as a prison and not a tourist resort. Australians are not the only ones who suffer from racism and xenophobia.

In addition, many locals have not benefited from the arrangement, since

the Australians tend to ship in all the equipment and most of the jobs. And there has been an up-surge in violence in the country. Many assaults and rapes of asylum seekers have gone un-punished, since the Nauruans take a common sense point of view and regard them as an Australian problem, and the Australians point out that they are in a foreign country where they have no role in law enforcement.

Nauru has been a democracy since 1968, and the disillusionment of the voters with the detention centre provides an obvious opportunity for ambitious Nauruan opposition politicians. With the Australian government giving an impression of lurching from one fiasco to the next, the Nauruans deciding to close the detention centre there would be something the government could really do without.

A news item that has not received much publicity in Australia is the effective demise of democracy in Nauru in the last year. The independence of the



court system has been destroyed, and this independence is one of the pillars on which democracy rests. The opposition leader has been exiled. (At least in Nauru, he can spend his exile on the Gold Coast, or Tahiti or somewhere, rather than Siberia.) Suddenly, Nauru is no longer a democracy as we understand democracy.

The existing Nauru government is in favour of continuing with the detention centre, so the end of democracy means that the Australian government can stop worrying about the negative publicity if an election in Nauru, over which they have no control, lost them one of their most prominent and easy to understand political slogans. It is a lucky coincidence for them really.

The trouble is, as the detectives say in the TV police shows, I don't believe in coincidences.

I suppose that once you step onto the slippery slope of screwing about people's lives for the sake of a few votes, it is hard to find a point at which you should stop sliding down.

My poor country. I feel appalled and ashamed, and I fear where we will finish up.

*Peter Brown*





# Marriage Equality

## an ethical no brainer

This opinion piece was published in the Courier Mail, 30th June, 2015.

Forty years ago the cruelty of homophobia significantly shaped social mores in Australia. Happily, as repeated polls demonstrate, most Australians have moved past these discriminatory attitudes while the laws which legitimated them have largely been removed by our Parliaments.

However, when it comes to marriage equality (or so called gay marriage) there is still one bridge too far. This is a direct consequence of Prime Minister Tony Abbott's reluctance to allow his members a conscience vote on the question, thereby demonstrating his disregard for the liberal philosophy his political party claims as its founding doctrine.

As ever, leading the charge to save us from the social ravages of faithful, life committed same sex partnerships are certain Christians and their conservative churches. They choose to overlook the reality supported by science that a diversity of sexual preferences is normal within our species. Consequently, their intolerance is now cloaked by the question of 'defining marriage'. Marriage, they say, is only for a man and a woman, demanding that our Parliaments in this secular democracy protect their minority view.

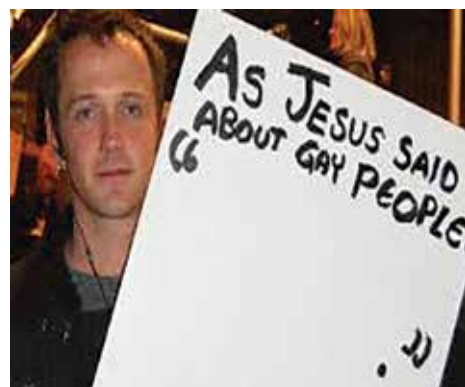
Personally, I find a disturbing *deja vu* in all this. Over forty years ago this newspaper carried a prominent page three story quoting me under the banner, 'Cleric tips 'blessing' for man marriages'.

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. The years have taught me that sexuality is an area which must be approached with compassion while the matter we now refer to as 'marriage equality' sits high on my social justice bucket list!

In that news report long ago I was quoted saying: '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.'

I lamented then, and still do, the hurt and pain caused to so many (in the LGBTI community) who simply want their love to be publicly recognised as it is for heterosexual couples. Others may lament changed attitudes to marriage and family in recent decades. Though, as the present Dean of St John's Cathedral, Dr Peter Catt, a supporter of marriage equality, recently reported: 'a significant majority of Christians surveyed by Crosby Textor in 2014 support marriage equality'.

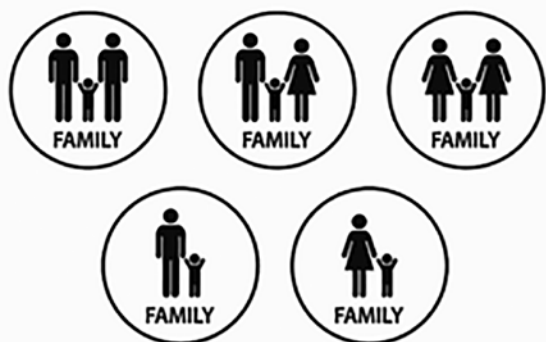


We all know of high profile same sex couples who practise such 'marriage' – former High Court judge Michael Kirby, former Senator Bob Brown, Senator Penny Wong. To that list most of us can name members of our extended family, political persuasion or even ministers of religion. How cruel and unnecessarily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

However, as many MPs sound out constituents on this matter during the forthcoming Parliamentary winter recess, there is a danger that various devices will be proposed to circumvent a straight forward decision on this matter. The costly and unnecessary process of a popular plebiscite is one likely avoidance mechanism. Then there is the so called 'French solution' which separates the civil and religious aspects of marriage, again unnecessary for no religious organisation is forced to forsake marrying under their particular rites.

A simple and just amendment by the Parliament to The Marriage Act will achieve marriage equality: 'two persons' instead of 'a man and a woman'. It really is an ethical no brainer!

*Noel Preston, ethicist, retired Uniting Church minister and adjunct Professor, Griffith University*



Common sense, let alone Christian or humanitarian ethics dictate that self-discipline, love, commitment and faithfulness in relationships – the hall marks enshrined in the institution of marriage – should not be denied to people simply because of sexual preference.

# SMX Camp at Natural Bridge

Our Log Cabin weekend was wonderful. Such nice people, such a warm fire, beautiful weather and nice food. The feast on Saturday night was fantastic and of course the talent that emerged at the after-meal party! What can I say? Piano playing, flute playing, ukulele playing, short story reading, and action-based poetry followed by watching an episode of Father Ted, wow! During the sunlight hours there was Tai Chi; there was Nia dancing; there was a visit to Sally Wattle and Peter's flock; and Greg Jenks' slide presentation about his archaeological work on coins, rocks and other artefacts at locations in Nazareth and Jerusalem. It was very enlightening. Doc's ability to keep the indoor fire burning and Brendon's perpetual ability to be kneading flour and water in preparation for baking bread showed determination way beyond the call of duty.

I undertook three sessions: Active Listening, Meditation, and a Feldenkrais awareness through movement lesson. Indeed each of these sessions had at its core an experience of awareness.

Sunday Eucharist in the hall was a real joy with a number of people coming especially.

Thanks to Marg for organising the weekend, Heather for looking after rosters and Donna for planning the activities. And a special thank you to the people who presented activities and entertainment and to everyone who came and made the weekend so very good.

*Brian O'Hanlon*

*Thanks to Luisa Sala for these great pictures.*



*Brendan gets some help from Orlando as he makes bread rolls.*



*Thai Chi in the morning - led by Jude.*



*Louise and Orlando.*



*Terry and Claire (on ukelele) lead the singing - to kick off an evening of fun.*







*Visiting Peter's flock.*



*Chilling out in front of the fire.*



*Greg combines erudition and humour in his presentation - 'Nazareth at the time of Jesus'.*

*We celebrate Eucharist - presided over by David and Heather Eckersley.*



*Peter and friends.*



# What People are Reading

## A reflection written after reading *From Science to God - A Physicist's Journey into the Mystery of Consciousness.*

'Who are you?' they asked. Jesus replied, 'Just what I have been telling you from the beginning I am'. John Ch 8

Of course to many of us brought up in a conservative religion, the statement 'I am' is blasphemous. For example in the book of Exodus Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you" and they ask, "What is his name?" Then what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses 'I am who I am. That is what you are to say to the Israelites. I am has sent me to you'. And when the Pharisees asked Jesus 'Who are you?' Jesus replied 'What have I been telling you from the beginning? I am'.

In Chapters seven and eight of Peter Russell's book, *From Science to God – A Physicist's Journey into the Mystery of Consciousness*, he speaks about Consciousness as God.

In the fourteenth century the catholic priest and mystic Meister Eckhart said 'God and I are One'. He was forced to recant. Not so lucky was the Islamic Mansur Al-Hallaj. He was crucified for using similar language.

When the mystic says 'I am', or 'I am God', or words to that effect, they are not talking of an individual person. Their inner explorations have revealed the true nature of the self, and it is this, their essence that they identify with God. They claim that the essence of self, the sense of 'I am' without any personal attributes is God.



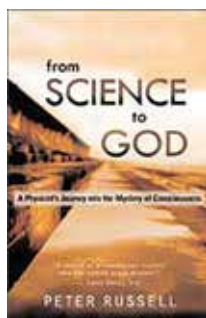
The contemporary scholar and mystic Thomas Merton put it this way. He wrote 'If I penetrate to the depths of my own existence, the indefinable I am that is myself in its deepest roots, then through this deep centre I pass into the infinite I am which is the very name of the Almighty'.

This sheds new light on the Biblical injunction 'Be still and know that I am God.' It does not mean 'Stop fidgeting and recognise that the person who is speaking to you is the Almighty God of all creation'. It makes much more sense as an encouragement to still the mind and know, not as an intellectual understanding, but as a direct realisation, that the 'I am' is your Essential Self – Pure Consciousness, Pure Beingness.

This concept of God is not of a separate Being, beyond us in some other realm, overlooking human affairs, and loving or judging us according to our deeds. Rather it is seen, known, that God appears in each and every one of us as the most intimate and undeniable aspect of ourselves, the Consciousness of I am.

The great Indian sage Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj wrote, 'When I say "I am" I do not mean a separate entity with a body as its nucleus, I mean the totality of Being, the Ocean of Consciousness, the entire Universe of all that is and knows. He wrote a seminal work entitled *I am That, You are That, Everything is That.*'

Bob Anderson who is in his eighties and lives in Melbourne was a student of Nisargadatta, who told him that he was the 'I Am'. Bob says he came to understand that, not as an intellectual understanding but as a knowing, a



certitude. The kind of certitude we also know, namely that we are, that we exist and that we are aware. You don't have to think about that, you know that before the mind comes into play. Bob has written several books. One is entitled *What is Wrong with Right Now, Unless we Think About It*. I find this very helpful at times of anxiety, worry, jealousy, regret, anger, because asking that question moves it into a stillness and eventually the thoughts vanish like the clouds in the sky.

Let me finish with three quotes:

*You are loving awareness in which all this arises. You are quiet  
Compassionate space in which the life that you think of as 'yourself' enfolds.*  
David Carse

*Those wise ones, who see that the consciousness within themselves is the same consciousness within all conscious beings, attain eternal peace.*  
Katha Upanishad

*Your vision will become clear when you look into your heart, Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakens.*  
Carl Yung

Peter Kennedy

What you  
dream  
Where you  
dream  
Is to know  
Life.

Ted



# What People are Reading

## The Reader on the 6.27

Jean-Paul Didierlaurent

Mantle; Main Market Ed. edition (2015)



**T**he Reader on the 6.27 explores the power of books through the lives of the people they save. It is sure to capture the hearts of book lovers everywhere.

Guylain Vignolles lives on the edge of existence. Working at a book pulping factory in a job he hates, he has but one pleasure in life . . .

Sitting on the 6.27 train each day, Guylain recites aloud from pages he has saved from the jaws of his monstrous pulping machine. And it's this release of words into the world that starts our hero on a journey that will finally bring meaning into his life.

For one morning, Guylain discovers the diary of a lonely young woman: Julie. A woman who feels as lost in the world as he does. As he reads from these pages to a rapt audience, Guylain finds himself falling hopelessly in love with their enchanting author . . .

The Reader on the 6.27 is a tale bursting with larger-than-life characters, each of whom touches Guylain's life for the

better. This captivating novel is a warm, funny fable about literature's power to uplift even the most downtrodden of lives.

<https://fromfirstpagetolast.wordpress.com>

*I read this review which motivated me to read the book. I found it quite enchanting and can recommend it to anyone who enjoys a somewhat quirky read, a read that is full of gentle good humour and compassion.*

Marg Ortiz

## Inclusive Catholics

**We welcome all people, especially catholics who are disenfranchised, disillusioned or excluded by the institutional church.**

Masses are held at:  
Glen Iris Road Uniting Church  
200 Glen Iris Road.  
GLEN IRIS.  
EVERY Sunday at 5pm.  
Presider: Fr Greg Reynolds



# A Fragment of Bread

A fragment of bread  
cupped in my hand  
torn off from the whole  
cupped in my hand  
passed to me

And I too must tear the body  
to share with my neighbour  
a fragment of bread  
to embody me with them  
and he with us

A piece of bread  
a bread of peace  
scattered, grown  
cut down, mown  
gathered, ground  
mixed and pummeled  
risen, fired and found

A piece of bread  
a bread of peace  
sliced and toasted  
broken, shared  
around a table  
to give us life.



*© Kate McIlhagga from 'The Green Heart of the Snowdrop', published by Wild Goose Publications, 4th Floor, Savoy House, 140 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow G2 3DH, UK.'*



# Faith Council

## looking back on the Year

*Annual Report of St Mary's in Exile  
Community Faith Council  
(1 July 2014 – 30 June 2015)*

The members of the Community Faith Council for the period from July 2014 to June 2015 were Pam Krueger, Andrew Kennelly, Terry Fitzpatrick, Brian O'Hanlon, Ingerid Meagher, Chris Harkin, Marg Ortiz and Margaret Clifford.

Members agreed at the first Meeting on 20 July 2014 that Margaret Clifford would act as Chair for the year, Chris Harkin and Pam Krueger would share the role of Minute Secretary, Terry Fitzpatrick would be the Community Faith Council's representative on the St Mary's in Exile Board and on the Liturgy Committee and that consensus would continue to be the model of decision making for the Community Faith Council.

The Terms of Reference for St Mary's in Exile Community Faith Council that were adopted in 2013 continued to provide the framework for the Council's role and responsibilities. Meetings were conducted on a monthly basis, with additional meetings as required and Committee members communicated regularly via email. Brief reports of Meetings were provided at liturgies and included in the Parish Bulletins.

One of the first tasks for the Community Faith Council was to implement the recommendations that came out of the Community Forum on Liturgy conducted on 23 March 2013. The process and timing for introducing changes were discussed at meetings and clarified. Decisions about the Liturgy of the Word were published in the Parish Bulletin and then implemented. Meetings were conducted with the representatives from the Liturgy Committee to discuss the recommendations for changes to the Liturgy of the Eucharist and over a period of time, changes were introduced.

The Community Faith Council played an important role in providing an



*Finding ways to involve the children and young people has been one of the challenges of the year..*

on-going forum for community members' concerns and suggestions about changes to the Liturgy. Council members received a great deal of positive feedback about the changes as well as deeply held concerns about omissions and change of emphasis especially to the Eucharistic Prayer. Members of the Council met with many of those expressing concerns to gain a fuller understanding of their perspective and gave serious consideration to all views expressed.

The Community Faith Council, in collaboration with the Liturgy Committee, continued to make small changes to the Liturgy for several months as we gained greater understanding from our deliberations and from experiencing the Liturgy as changes were introduced. We are grateful to those who provided feedback about the implementation of the Community Forum recommendations and also to the hard working members of the Liturgy Committee who continue to provide us with creative and inspiring liturgies.

A number of other initiatives concerning liturgy were implemented by the Community Faith Council throughout the year.

- A document, Guidelines for Homilies, was developed to capture the recommendations from the Community Forum about the Liturgy of the Word. It is available to assist homilists with organisational details and is on the SMX website.

- Members of the community were invited to express an interest in

presiding at the Eucharist and, after training, several new presiders took up the role.

- New words were suggested for those distributing communion so that the words used at the distribution of the bread and wine reflected the theology of the Liturgy.

- A renewed emphasis was placed on forgiveness (forgiving others as we are forgiven) and this was included with the Sign of Peace.

- Several initiatives to involve children more in the Liturgy were considered and offered.

- Some practical suggestions, such as improving lighting, were acted on and several other suggestions arising from Community Faith Council discussions were communicated to the Liturgy Committee.

Networking with other groups was a focus for the Community Faith Council this year. Members of the Council agreed to support and to be involved in groups such as the Queensland Community Alliance to help build capacity for change at the community level and to raise awareness about social justice issues. It was agreed that regular communication would be provided about the Queensland Community Alliance in the Parish Bulletin and that members of the St Mary's in Exile community would be encouraged to attend their training for community building.

*Margaret Clifford*

# Spring Chicken Liturgy

where the young people provided us with a great liturgy.

Welcoming, inclusive, thoughtful homily, bright music. This liturgy had such an wonderful energy and was clearly appreciated by all of us.



*Reader - Charlotte.*



*Homilist - Rebecca.*



*Cantor - Sophia.*



*Young people preside with Geoff and Annette.*



*It all got a bit much for Hudson.*







## Messenger

My work is loving the world.

Here the sunflowers, there the  
hummingbird

equal seekers of sweetness.

Here the quickening yeast; there the  
blue plums.

Here the clam deep in the speckled  
sand.

Are my boots old?

Is my coat torn?

Am I no longer young, and still not half-  
perfect?

Let me keep my mind on what matters,  
which is my work,

which is mostly standing still and  
learning to be astonished.

The phoebe, the delphinium.

The sheep in the pasture, and the  
pasture.

Which is mostly rejoicing, since all the  
ingredients are here,

which is gratitude, to be given a mind  
and a heart

and these body-clothes,

a mouth with which to give shouts of  
joy

to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy  
dug-up clam,

telling them all, over and over, how it is  
that we live forever.

*Mary Oliver  
submitted by Peter Kennedy*





## *Gratitude*

*An intoxicating  
knowing  
that the universe  
is gratis  
freely given.*

*A daily gesture  
of receiving  
life and each  
given moment  
as gift.*

*A limitless  
response  
a total, endless  
gift of self  
come what may.*

*A reckless  
surrender  
to the heart  
which knows  
all belong to all.*

*A trusting  
fearless giving  
giving-up  
for-giving  
thanksgiving.*

*A seeing  
with sharp eyes  
an openness  
to surprise  
and joy-filled days.*

*Gratitude –  
it's a dangerous  
way of living!*

*You could lose your heart  
and your life!*

*Margaret Clifford (Sept 2015)  
(A poem inspired by the writings of David Steindl-Rast)*



# My Story

*Continued from our last edition.*

## Brisbane

So, for the second time I came back to Brisbane because it is a smaller city than Sydney with a better climate. My Case Manager in Brisbane is Adam. He picked me up at the airport and I went to the Spring Hill Community Hotel, Spring Hill for three months. So I can now live in Australia and I am now very happy because Adam and Sadeh his assistant can help me with many things, such as English class in TAFE, medical matters, Centrelink, and shopping.

Sometimes I am sad that Iran my country of birth is not a country where people are able to live in peace and harmony enjoying life and living well. Why can't the government help the people who live in Iran? Sometimes I think about my future and my family in Iran.

When I was living in the motel at Spring Hill, my case manager, Adam, gave me a mobile phone and some money. He said if you have a problem contact me with this number. After two days Adam came with me to go together to the Australian law class at MDA. MDA is a very big company who help people who come to Australia as a refugee. Police, Consultants and teachers spoke to all refugees who received an Australian permanent visa. They tell us to respect the law and to be responsible citizens.

After one week I started to study at Southbank TAFE for Education. Although I was missing my family, I was very happy for this opportunity in my new life. When I went to class, I found lots of friends from different countries and cultures. I was very excited because my teacher and classmates were friendly. If I had a problem they would help me. They were young and I am the eldest in the class. My teacher said 'If you do not understand, please ask me again. Don't be shy in the class'. She helped me throughout the term. She said, 'I understand why and for what reason you and the others would leave



*Ahmad with friends Jay and Kathy.*

your country', because my teacher explained that she came from Singapore when she was three years old with her parents. She had similar circumstances. I remained at the Southbank TAFE for two years.

On 11th August 2011, I talk to my case manager Adam about my family case. He makes an appointment with the immigration lawyer service. A form was completed and sent to the Melbourne Immigration Lawyer Service. After three years I am still waiting for this result. January 2014 was a very bad month for me because the new government refused to consider all family cases and my family as well. These circumstances cause a very big problem in my life.

Another problem was when I went to Southbank TAFE for an examination about next term, my manager in the office said that the term class was full and that I must wait until the next one. I gave them my phone number but they never contacted me.

When I went to the employment service to find a job, a woman arranged my resume and gave me some copies. She sent the resumes to some factories, offices, and shops to find a job for me. For such a long time I waited to be contacted, wondering about my situation and what will happen to me.

Although at that time I did not have a job, every day I go to the English class for Education. I was very upset regarding my situation, so I talk with my doctor in West End. The doctor made an appointment for me with a psychologist. She is very good and

friendly with all her clients including me. The first time I met her and we talked together and she said she could help me. After two weeks visiting her, she told me she had found a very good man in Brisbane. His name is Peter Kennedy. Peter is the leader at St. Mary's Community in Exile, South Brisbane. This man could help me because he is very famous in the St. Mary's community. The St. Mary's community has many humanist people. They would help me, so she would make contact with Peter Kennedy and make an appointment with him for me.

Whilst the psychologist was making contact with Peter I sat there thinking about God and then felt that I had a family that would help me in the future. So she told me that I could talk with Peter on Thursday afternoon at 3.30pm near St. Mary's Church in Peel Street. At the arranged time I went there and waited for one hour and then Peter and Terry came with a car. I was very happy because I knew he was kindhearted and humanity is very important to him. Peter hugged me and asked what he could do to help me. I talked with Peter for 15 minutes. After our conversation I gave him some papers about my family. He said he would read my details and contact me after that.

On Saturday Peter gave me an address in Peel Street for the first time. When I went there I found many people who were friendly and happy. Although it was the first time I attended mass, Peter said, 'This man is from Iran he came to Australia as a refugee on a boat.' Some people talked to me about my situation and said I was welcome to come back to Mass. It changed my life. I wished for peace for the population of the world. After that, every Saturday and Sunday afternoon, I went to Mass to help the other guys to arrange things.

In September 2013 I found an aged care course in Beenleigh, covering work in aged care and disability. The first time I went to class I introduced myself, talked



with others giving some information about myself and why I had come to class. All the other students in this class were Australian. The teacher said as English is my second language she could help me, if I was happy for her to do so. When I went to class I talked about my two sons. I have two sons, my eldest son has Thalassaemia and my youngest son a disability. Some people can help my family in my previous county. I decided I wanted to help people.

After four weeks I asked if she can help me in class. Sometimes the teacher would say, 'This man has problems in this class. You can't pass and you can't get a certificate in aged care'. I told her this certificate is very important for my life. The teacher was very strict. She said that I need to be able to write. After eleven weeks I felt upset with my teacher, because she spoke about my situation in the class. I felt very embarrassed. I decided to talk with another friend, Carmen. Carmen spoke with my teacher twice and as there was no result I stopped the course. The teacher did not consider my age or my situation. But I liked the course. I needed encouragement to continue the study. I was very upset.

One day, I talked with Peter Kennedy about my English not improving and how I cannot pass, that I have stopped the course and that I was very upset. Peter said not to worry, that it could be discussed at Mass and that many people could help me. On Saturday at Mass, I saw many people who offered to help and find another teacher to help me. I was very happy as people offered their assistance and asked me to call them. It was an incredible time for as I had not seen this in my previous country when I lived there. When I returned to my unit that night I felt better, relaxed and more hopeful for my future.

The following week, one lady and gentleman said to me, 'we will come to your house on Monday at 3.30pm'. On Monday they came and we talked together and they read my writing. My writing had some mistakes. After that they corrected my writing and gave me some assistance. They said, what you need to do to help in learning English is to write your story as to how you came to Australia and learn from this experience.

This encouragement and guidance led me back to the age care course. My

new friends Kaye, Alan and Kathy came to my home each week and helped me complete the aged care program.

I also attended English classes at Paddington and later on at a church in West End and the city.

At a time when I was starting to look for work Angela, from the Narbethong Special School spoke to us and this has resulted in my obtaining some contract work as a teacher aide working with children. The skills I have learned during my course are of great assistance in this job.

I am very grateful to the many people in Australia who have helped me so much.

It is now November 2014 and I feel my life in Australia has a future. I have completed my course, and will soon get my driver's licence. My next challenge is how to see my family in Iran.

*PS from his friend Kathy.*

*In the last two years, Ahmad has completed his Certificate 3 in Aged Care and Disability, got a job, moved into new accommodation at Common Ground and applied for Australian Citizenship.*



*Ahmad with his friends Kathy and Allan*

# In Defence of the Mind

*To love. To be loved. To never forget your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never to forget.*  
Arundhati Roy's book, *The Cost of Living*

*I have been increasingly conscious ... of deaths among my contemporaries. My generation is on the way out, and each death I have felt as an abruption, a tearing away a part of myself. There will be no one like us when we are gone, but then there is no one like anyone else, ever. When people die, they cannot be replaced. They leave holes that cannot be filled, for it is the fate – the genetic and neural fate – of every human being to be a unique individual, to find his own path, to live her own life, to die his own death. I cannot pretend I am without fear. But my predominant feeling is one of gratitude. I have loved and been loved; I have been given much and I have given something in return; I have read and travelled and thought and written. Above all, I have been a sentient being, a thinking animal, on this beautiful planet, and that in itself has been an enormous privilege and adventure.*  
Article in *New York Times* by Oliver Sacks, *The article was written after Sacks, 81, learned he had only months to live.*

## In Defence of the Mind

Many years ago I had a sixth share in a racehorse. Her first race was in a three-year-old maiden. Everyone was very excited. The horses left the barrier but as they got closer to the winning post, it became clear our big hope was going to run stone motherless last.

When the jockey dismounted, our agitated trainer said to him: 'Look there was a good gap back there at the 400, why didn't you push her through?'

The jockey looked up at the trainer and said: 'Because the bloody gap was travelling faster than we were.'

This is not unlike the way I feel when listening to some of the more esoteric readings and homilies at St Mary's.

Even when I was little, I never understood why religious people tried to rationally explain something which was a mystery, and therefore, by definition, irrational and inexplicable. The emergence of new age spiritual movements has not changed this view. Old or new, much of the terminology and language used to explain spiritual concepts is often impenetrable.

To illustrate, let me use a sentence by the new age spiritual guru, Deepak Chopra. Chopra was responding on his website to a question from a follower about meditation. This is a small part of what he wrote:

*I think you were contemplating the homogenous, monochromatic nature of unbounded awareness in its state of pure potentiality, not making the connection that every actual manifestation of creation implies that it existed in an unmanifest state of potentiality beforehand.*

Maybe I'm not making enough of an effort, but, to me, that is a car crash of a sentence. It may also be deliberate obfuscation. Like the colonel's secret ingredient; if everyone knew what was in the chicken, it may no longer have the same appeal. Chopra may be a guru, but in our increasingly commodified society, he is also a brand and a



product. If marketing is about anything, it is about protecting the brand and imbuing each individual product with magical properties even when the contents of those products are the same.

Most new age spirituality is, in essence, a re-packaging of concepts from a diverse range of ancient non-English texts sometimes with a bit of pop psychology thrown in. In the process of translation the original concept often gets lost in the new language.

For example the term 'non-dual'. Non-dual is an attempt to describe the Hindu concept of 'the middle way'. But I don't think the words 'non-dual', not two, capture the elegance or depth of the original concept. In Hindu and Buddhist thought the middle way is the path of moderation between extremes. My problem with the term 'non-dual' is I don't see any middle there. 'Not' is oppositional and, therefore, the very thing it purports not to be: dual.

This difficulty with translation also exists in Christian texts. The original word for 'sin' from the Greek scriptures is 'amartia'. 'Amartia' is an archery term, which means 'to miss the mark'. In ancient Greece, markers stood near the target. The archers fired their arrows. If the arrow hit a small gold mark in the centre of the target the marker shouted 'martia' meaning you've hit the mark. If the arrow hit the target outside the gold mark the marker shouted 'amartia' or you've missed the mark.

How and when did this forgiving metaphor of missing the mark become



*The yin yang, the middle way, symbol of the Tao.*

'sin' punishable by the eternal flames of hell? But, I am neither a theologian nor an etymologist, so I shall leave these questions to others.

I'm here for two reasons. Firstly, to defend the mind and thinking which I feel often gets a bad rap here. The mind is sometimes spoken of as if it were an enemy or some alien creature inhabiting us. As if it wasn't real. As if our grey matter was not a body part. The second reason is to explain why I come to St Mary's despite sometimes not identifying with the messages.

Between 2003 and 2007, I undertook weekly psychoanalysis (or talk therapy) with a wonderful old Klienian-inclined psychiatrist.

One of the things I discovered from my sessions with him is how often in my life, faced with powerful feelings—feelings like fear, anger, envy, shame, as well as desire or joy for that matter, my thinking appeared to race off into a fantasy world of its own. The problem was whenever the fantasy proved to be just that, the powerful feelings which propelled it were still there, more powerful than ever. Consequently, fear became anxiety; anger, resentment; envy, a kind of resigned despair; desire, obsession, and so on.

This was the first time my therapist said to me, 'Robert, it's about the capacity to think and feel at the one time.'

Coincidentally, around the same time, I also began going to the mindful meditation group which met in the old church. The group based its practice on the Thich Nhat Hahn Plum Village tradition. The first words I heard there were 'now is the time to bring our minds back to our bodies'. Because of my therapeutic work, I knew immediately what that metaphor meant and I felt its significance.

The metaphor breaks down of course, as all metaphors will, because anything created by my thinking is not separate from me at all. My thoughts are not out there. They're in here. In my mind. In

this body. And because they are in this body and of this body, if my thinking gets hooked on to, or, worse, locked into a fantasy there can be no end of trouble. The most extreme version of this is suicide bombing – the romantic idea that through religious martyrdom (and murder) I will find eternal happiness in God's kingdom.

I practise meditation because it gives me the means by which I can accomplish what my therapist was challenging me to do: to develop my capacity to think and feel at the one time. To genuine practitioners/teachers like Thich Nhat Hahn, who has not succumbed to delusions of grandeur or material ambition, there is nothing mysterious about meditation. It is no more or no less than a practice anyone can use, at any time, in any situation, for any length of time.

Just as the archer practises looping her arrow so she is able to hit the mark more often than miss it, so, too, is meditation the practice of bringing the mind's attention back to the body so it can deal with what is real rather than what is imagined.

I have no desire or need to mystify the practice by wrapping it up in some homogenous, monochromatic unbounded awareness of pure potentiality.

One of Thich Nhat Hahn's guided meditation mantras says: 'Breathing in, thoughts and feelings come and go.' This is plain language and an accurate description of what happens in my mind. And I know I am at my healthiest when I allow those two lovers of thought and feeling to embrace each other, take to life's dance floor and trip the light fantastic in their unique, sometimes dazzling, sometimes fumbling, little fandango.

It's a dance to death.

The thing is, it nearly never happened. One microsecond before or after conception and I wouldn't be here. By a twist of fate or providence, time fused with the universe. I slipped through a breach in oblivion and in the dark heaven of my mother's womb a single cell split, and became two, then four, then eight, then sixteen, then everything else was extension until I was 37.2 trillion cells.

You want magic? Now that—that really is magic. There is enough mystery in a mother's womb to last a lifetime. All of our lifetimes. And, for me, it begs a question: Why would we want a greater mystery than that? To answer this question perhaps we need to stop looking beyond us and instead look within. Is it possible that all these religious texts, written, translated and interpreted, primarily by men about a man's creation, come out of an unconscious primal sense of powerlessness? Men can never be mothers. Unlike women, men can never feel, and therefore never truly know, the fundamental mystery of creation.

When I look at the world throughout history and today, I don't see much evidence that my gender, collectively, has the humility even to contemplate that question. It takes a woman like Arundhati Roy to remind us of the fundamentals: 'To love, to be loved. To never forget your own insignificance.'

We may all just be remnants of the big bang. I understand that. But, insignificant as we are, we are no less



*'We come to this table to renew our unity with one another.'*



interesting for being so. As Oliver Sacks says we are sentient beings, thinking animals on a beautiful planet. We have been given much and we have the capacity to give in return. We can love and be loved. But, this is what I think

is truly breathtaking, we can be aware of all these things and reflect on them. We can find ways to describe and share what we see and hear and taste and touch and feel and think with each other.

A decade or more ago I walked into the old St Mary's. A large circle of people from diverse spiritual and non-spiritual backgrounds crowded around a table and said, not to a male authority on high, but to each other: 'We come to this table to renew our unity with one another.' After that I couldn't get enough of you.

I was fascinated by the theology (or, some might say, lack of it), but, as a humanist, I didn't come for that. I wasn't looking for spiritual answers. I came back, and I'll keep coming

back, because of you. Because you were then, and you continue to be, a loving, caring, empathic, thoughtful, engaged community in a society where community is becoming more and more an endangered species. I'm here because I don't want my dance to be alone. I want my dance to be with others. I'm here because I want my fandango to intermingle with all of your fandangos.

*Robert Perrier*

Oliver Sacks, who is mentioned in this piece died recently.



## Letters to the Editor

Your feedback is very welcome - email to [Ortizmargaret506@gmail.com](mailto:Ortizmargaret506@gmail.com)



Dear Marg,  
Enjoying this edition of the magazine entitled 'Identity'. What a complicated and diverse concept that is. And quite a variety of approaches suggested in this edition.

What I really want to do is to congratulate the Tarragindi cluster who presented the fruit of their discussion in this series over a few editions about women. Each of the entries has been fascinating and succinct. There have been women I had barely heard of and who were clearly worth more investigation.

Keep up the good work - all of you.

*Peter (Launceston)*

To the Editor  
I was under the impression that the St Mary's Community was of Catholic

origins. However I find very little in this magazine to locate the theology in the doctrine of our Mother Church. Where are there references to the Sacrifice of the Mass, where some attention to the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God.

While I admit to enjoying reading your articles, and I find the poetry very moving, I feel a little worried about your orthodoxy.

*Mary Theresa O'Flannery (Perth)*

Thank you Marg for all the work you do to make this wonderful magazine happen.

Can I sneak in another thank you - to you and to Doc for the many things you do to help St Mary's keep on being the well-run, ever-loving, inclusive community that it is.

*Merlin (Mullumbimby)*

Hey Marg,  
Love this cover of the mag. Who is the creative genius who thought up that one?

Keep 'em rolling along. We love 'em.

*Anon (probably Marg's mum)*



*The image originally came from a refugee website which encouraged its use.*  
*Ed.*

# Women Who Influenced Their Times

This is the third of the series written by the Tarragindi Cluster on the subject of women who influenced their times and who continue to be relevant today.

Members chose one from each of three general periods: BCE to 13th century, 14th century to 18th century and 1900s to the present. Our fourth meeting drew our discussions together. The varied and various selection surprised and delighted us.

We explored, discussed and reflected upon the contributions of these women in the advancement and awakening of spiritual and practical forces within their communities. It was never intended to be an exhaustive list and reflects the freedom of choice and democratic/demographic characteristics of our group.



## EDITH STEIN 1891-1942

Edith was German intellectual from a Jewish family who converted to Catholicism in 1934, an ominous time.

She taught, she lectured, she wrote, she translated and studied phenomenology - all we know is subjective reality and psychology is still in its infancy.

On reading the autobiography of Theresa of Avila she entered the Carmelites. She was deeply committed to philosophy. Despite her conversion to Christianity and her membership of a religious order she was arrested, deported and executed. She is revered not so much for her writings but as a symbol of catholic solidarity with the Jews who had been murdered by the Nazis.



## DOROTHY DAY 1897-1980

Dorothy Day was born in 1897 into an Episcopalian, middle class family. Experience of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and the response of the community aroused her interest in social justice.

After a couple of years at University she wrote earnestly on women's rights. She lived a bohemian life, took several lovers, had an abortion, became a mother and took passionately to journalism, motherhood and religion, becoming a Catholic in the process.

With Peter Maurin, a devotee of St Francis of Assisi, they founded the Catholic Worker Movement in New York. Their paper supported pacifism and women's suffrage, it covered strikes, explored the working conditions of women and Afro-Americans, and homelessness. The Catholic Worker clashed with the Catholic Church over its support of Franco. Funds from the paper supported social justice initiatives. Her Houses of Hospitality are spread throughout the US and care for the homeless and hungry. Today her life inspires all who strive for justice for the poor, those who promote world peace and all who denounce nuclear warfare.



## SISTER ELIZABETH JOHNSON Contemporary leader of women religious in the US

A professor of Theology at Fordham University New York, she came to prominence in 1990 with her criticism

of the Vatican draft of the New Catechism. Her 1991 book *The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* interprets feminist categories such as experience and emancipation in Catholic teaching. In 2007 her book *A Quest for The Living God* was criticised by the US Conference of Bishops. In this book she writes:

*The symbol of God functions. It is never neutral in its effects but expresses and moulds a community's bed rock convictions and actions. Women's ground breaking work on this subject has made it piercingly clear that the practice of naming God exclusively in the image of powerful men...reduces the living God to an idol... God is not literally a father, or a king or a lord but something ever so much greater. Thus is the truth more greatly honoured.*

Sister Johnston believes that the Bishops misrepresented her teaching; and in accepting her award at this year's Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) stated, 'To this day, no one, not myself or the theological community, the media or the general public knows what doctrinal issues are at stake'. The standoff continues...



## SISTER ILIA DELIO OFM Another inspiring nun in today's USA

A Franciscan visiting professor and Director of Catholic Studies at Georgetown University. Coming from a migrant Sicilian family in New Jersey, she views theology through her mastery of physical sciences as an open system. Her interests lie in theology, ethics and physical sciences. Her 2013 book *The Unbelievable Wholeness of Being* was presented to the LCWR Conference this year. It traces decades of theological discernment from St

Bonaventure, through Thomas Merton to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and his concept of the omega point. Currently Sr Delio is engaged on the major task of attempting to expand a theological understanding of integration and change in her editing of *Catholicity and the Evolving Universe*, the first in a series of books.

For further reading on Sr. Ilia Delio, a good source is *To the Evolution of Ilia Delio*, by Jamie Mason NCR July 16, 2014



#### **MARY PHILOMENE TIERNAN** 1937-2014

Among the passengers on Flight MA17 downed in the Ukraine last year was an Australian RSCJ who was remembered with great affection by family, fellow religious, friends and former pupils. This article is drawn from the words of those who knew her well and the eulogies at the celebrations of her life. At this stage her remains have not been identified or recovered from the wreckage.

Sister Phil, as she was often called, came from a country town in Queensland, one of two daughters of the Irish-descended family who ran the Australia hotel in Murgon, Queensland. She was educated at Stuartholme School, Brisbane and joined the RSCJs after completing her studies. Apart from her family the Society founded by Madeleine Sophie Barat, became her life. Many tributes at her memorials reveal a woman whose identity was fashioned by the love which she shared so fully and faithfully with everyone she met.

Starting as a classroom teacher at Rose Bay Convent, [now called Kincoppal Rose Bay] she fulfilled a variety of roles throughout her tragically abbreviated religious life being a boarder mistress,

the mistress of novices and eventually, Provincial of the Australian-New Zealand province of the RSCJs. Many testified that Sister Phil gave herself unselfishly to all she met, especially bringing comfort and light to those in the darkness of loneliness or sorrow. They felt 'taller and stronger' for having known her.

She was a retreat director and spiritual guide and deepened her study of theology and spirituality where possible in centres of learning across the world. She was a teacher, a leader and a spiritual counsellor with specialities in liturgy and retreats. When she entered the RSCJs in 1957 they were a semi-enclosed religious order. However she embraced the new openness after Vatican 11, the coming out of the religious habit and the mass in the vernacular even with guitars! She was excited by the new theologies. Despite her extended studies in Rome, France, Chicago, Boston and her visitation to all parts of the ANZ province, plus her travels throughout Asia, Latin America and the Pacific Phil never lost the common touch. She was found cooking at places of care for those in need and visiting the marginalised wherever her journeys took her. Her interactions with strangers on her travels are legendary.

She was appointed Chancellor of the Broken Bay Diocese and after her retiring from that position the Bishop made her the Vicar for Ecclesial Women, no doubt a first in Australian church history.

Her sister Madeleine's words at the celebration of her life in Sydney are a fitting conclusion to this reflection. Many of these sentiments can be applied to the women we have chosen.

'The circumstances of Phil's death were random, tragic and violent. In contrast... Phil's life was ordered, directed, peaceful and joy filled... She loved, she listened and she guided... We have been so very lucky to have had her in our lives. She was beautiful, clever, strong and determined. She was full of love... She made people happy. She helped.

She listened. She forgave, she forgot, but, most of all, she loved.'

### **Drawing it all together**

Our exploration of women of influence throughout the ages gave us insights into their strengths to counter the blockage to the full participation of women in the spiritual, political and social life of their community.

The ways in which we approached the reforms varied but all acted as agents of change. We appreciated how many of the issues are relevant today:

- the education of women is not universal, we only have to think of Malala in Pakistan.
- homelessness is an ever growing problem, locally and where famine and war have destroyed domestic life.
- refugees, a global phenomenon, do not receive the same welcome and support as Ruth.
- too many people in authority are not open to the Spirit.

Prayer as exercised through meditation, reflection, centring and presence is modelled in the lives of many of the women we encountered. There is a deep-seated need for time in our lives to develop these aspects of spirituality and experience the discernment that follows.

Action often follows from periods of reflection and prayer and can be accompanied by intense suffering as in the case of Theresa of Avila and Catherine of Sienna.

Many paths are taken, many traditions are drawn upon and secular and psychological tools are available through books, retreats, lectures etc.

In these days of climate change Hildegard reminds us we are custodians of our world and to ignore her Earth wisdom guarantees the obliteration of Mother Earth and all her inhabitants( Matthew Fox).



# I Remember Kitty

**A**t the age of eight I was in the Brisbane Children's Hospital with a diagnosis of suspected polio. I believe it is impossible for anyone born after 1960 to understand truly what a dread disease polio was then. There was no vaccine, no prevention and only limited treatment. Children tended to be more severely affected than adults and the disease could be fatal or result in crippling disability.

Even after sixty years I can see the ward with its lines of cream painted cots and remember the odd metallic taste of the enamel mugs of cocoa we were given before the lights were dimmed at night. I cannot remember arriving at the ward, but after several days as I began to understand where I was, one fact dominated my mind. Visiting times were Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, no after hours visits were allowed, and Wednesday was coming up. Now it seems extraordinarily cruel that visiting was so limited, for such small children - there was a baby with

a dreadful skin disease in the next cot - but that was how it was.

I knew both my parents would be at work on Wednesday and did not imagine that they would be able to come. My grandmother had poor eyesight and did not travel alone. The time came and visitors started to move through the ward. I resigned myself to being alone and closed my eyes.

A familiar voice. My grandmother, accompanied by our family friend Kitty, was beside my bed. My grandmother in her hat and best dress, Kitty with her crisp wavy hair and soft English voice. Relief washed through me like a wave.

Long after I worked out how this visit had happened. Kitty had no car, most people didn't at that time. She would have taken a tram and then a train to collect my grandmother; the two of them would have taken a train followed by a tram to get to the hospital. After visiting me, Kitty would have taken my

grandmother home by tram and train - after which I hope my grandmother turned on a good afternoon tea. Then Kitty had another train and tram trip home to her husband Stan, a quiet grey faced man who - another realisation much later - was in the last stages of TB. Effective treatment through antibiotics came too late for him.

I was much luckier. I didn't have polio but another viral illness with very similar early symptoms. I improved rapidly. Knowing my parents would come on Saturday helped, and I was soon back at school. Exactly sixty two years later I remember Kitty with love.

*Jay Keys*



*Jay is the girl in the middle holding the slate.*

# I am Grateful for...

**M**y first 'thank you' is for a remarkably gentle father. Local children joined him on the short walk from the bus to his home and on Saturday mornings it was not unusual to see one or two of these youngsters following him up and down the backyard chatting as he pushed the old mower. From his cot the toddler next door could see Dad at the sink each evening. It became a ritual for Roy to call out 'Good night' to 'Mr Bill'. A number of times we were sitting in the lounge with visitors when Dad excused himself with, 'I won't be a minute but I must say good night to Roy'.

My second thank you is for having Mother's father as a grandad. He was a very conservative gentleman. When there was a fire at the local shops and half the citizens of Clifton were there in their pyjamas, he took the time to don his three piece suit! Occasionally I stayed with him on a freezing Sunday morning and was told stories about 'Tizzy-wizzy-woo, Foozle-doo and the Kangaroo.' I do not know if these were the product of his imagination but these two aboriginal children were, according to my mother, the actors in tales he used to tell his own children.

Another prayer of gratitude is for his wife. I can still see Grandma Twomum mixing the ingredients for a cake as she assured me, 'If I said I would like Alf to become a Catholic he would, but it cannot be just to please me.' There was absolutely no worry that he would be turned away at the pearly gates



and her certainty meant I always had a more open mind for the rules handed down from those in cassocks. I clearly remember her asking God for 'Twodad' to become a Catholic. I suspect he was already having instructions as he was baptised shortly after.

I am grateful too for the chance to go to university and to become involved in the Newman Society which provided a great social life. Even more important, it was a venue for talks and discussion and the University Conferences where we met others who were staunch but often questioning Catholics.

We had just buried our baby, Stephen, when six year old Catherine came home from school very upset that they had been told about 'Limbo'. Fr Durrell had spoken on this topic at UQ so I visited the school to assure her teacher that Limbo was purely an attempt to

modify a belief that only the baptised could enter Heaven. I was apparently an interfering woman who had the audacity to tell these holy nuns who had dedicated their lives to God, that I understood my religion better than they did. However I am grateful I had the strength to make the protest!

Gratitude for meeting and marrying Brendan. Gratitude for eleven children; for our 22 grandchildren who are facing a world so different from ours.

But more than anything I am amazed at the things others, who may not have had all my advantages, are able to do. When I see them, especially here at the TLC, I am humbled and grateful for the inspiration of their lives!

*Shar Ryan*

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Gratitude turns what we have into  
enough. Anon

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# I Walk in Gratitude

When the Love within  
Is seen everywhere  
I walk in gratitude

When I do what I Love  
And Love what I do  
I walk in gratitude

When a lesson occurs  
That shakes me awake  
I walk in gratitude

When I see Who you Are  
And cherish the sight  
I walk in gratitude

When the Beauty I see  
Gives Joy to the Heart  
I walk in gratitude

When all I want  
Is already within  
I walk in gratitude

When the Joy of joining  
Is Oneness in motion  
I walk in gratitude

When Freedom and Peace  
Is within every gift  
I walk in gratitude  
Being That

*Barbara Fingleton*

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