

Spirituality and the Older Person

Like many people in Wellspring, Michael Hillier (Burra SA, Day 10) wears many hats. Within the Anglican Church, he is Archdeacon with Responsibility as Director of Spirituality, Vicar General, Administrator of the Diocese of Willochra, and Parish Priest of Burra. Through the Ministry in Spirituality, Michael assists people in South Australia to be led more deeply into their relationship with God. People from other denominations and other dioceses are welcome to participate along with Anglicans from the Diocese of Willochra. Michael is available for individual spiritual direction, teaching prayer, reflection and meditation, quiet chats in person or by phone, resource advice, and for conducting and organizing quiet days and retreats to meet the spiritual needs of people in diverse ways. For further information on Michael's work go to <http://bit.ly/1ab0aJv>



Michael Hillier

I have not read the whole book, but a number of years ago I remember reading an extract from Morris West's autobiography. If I remember rightly, he used the concept of a mountain as a metaphor. He saw himself standing on the high mountain, with the ability to cast his eyes in opposite directions. First, he could look back on his life and see where he had been and all that he had done. Then, he could look the other way – into the future. It was somewhat misty and he could not see clearly, but he knew there was more behind him than lay before him. I use that mountain as a metaphor for each one of us on our journey.

THE PAST

Think back over the years of your life and all that has happened. By now, there is too much information to do this really thoroughly and anyway, that is not the point. What I want you to do is to notice what rises to the surface, and, to mix metaphors, see that which “jumps out at you”. What have you become? What do you want to give thanks for? What do you need to be forgiven for – by God, by others, yourself? What are you still struggling with that you have been unable to resolve? Many other questions may come to mind.

FORGIVENESS

This particular area gives many people much grief and pain if it lies

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unresolved. They look back on it from a distance: the forgiveness of others and the forgiveness of self. And maybe to even forgive God! That may seem strange, but numbers of people harbour resentment towards God about perceived grievances, whether real or imagined.

A real question for each of us is: have we dealt with this issue of forgiveness – both giving it and being forgiven? If there are unresolved issues in this area, we will not grow spiritually. We will stagnate. We need to realise that real forgiveness is a work of God's grace and brings healing in some way or other. It does not happen by chance and prayer is the best way of facilitating it. Think of the parables of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15.11-32) and the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18.23-35).

CHARACTER

Another major issue as we look back over our life might be one of character and by this, I mean what could be called a character ethic.

Have you ever noticed the way some people look shifty, and dishonest, and so consequently you wouldn't trust them? There are also those who are just tricky and difficult to get along with as human beings, perhaps with a 'chip on their shoulders'. There are also those who are narcissistic and who think 'life is all about me'. Jealousy can be deeply ingrained in people's characters, as can anger and bitterness that relate to the past.

As we look back over our life, we may notice a trace of one of these traits in ourselves and if so, once more the issue of forgiveness comes into play.

No doubt, there are many other issues relating to our past, but these are two that we must face and deal with as the years go by.

THE PRESENT

As we stand on our mountaintop, look down at the ground on which we are standing. The attitudes and approaches we develop now will

influence our future life. Daniel Klein in his book *Travels with Epicurus* writes of those who embrace the 'forever young' credo. They squeeze in as much as they can and with advanced medication and a better diet we are told that 60 is the new 50, and so on.

Nevertheless, as he points out, the danger is that we are moving from middle age to old-old age and skipping old age, as he calls it, in between. We are skipping our early senior years. In the process, we miss much that is significant and important in our psychological and spiritual development. It would be like moving from childhood to adulthood and skipping the teenage years.

Facing the future by living in the now
If we are able to move graciously from middle-age into our early senior years, then I think we will be better placed to deal with old-old age when and if it comes to us. Here I would suggest three things to help.

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

In our younger years we were deeply engaged with life via the affairs of the world and rightly so. Now, as we grow towards our senior years, an interior shift occurs. We become more reflective, not as hasty in our judgements, more accepting of life and others. There are questions we begin to ask ourselves on meaning and purpose in life that would never have occurred to us in our earlier years when we thought we would live forever. This is a healthy development and needs to be fostered. Of course, many will resist it and for them, nothing will happen and they will remain suspended in the issues and attitudes from the first half of life. This is the issue of transcendence; that there is something greater than me.

We must see this as a work in progress and it is one reason why spiritually, the stage of our early senior years is important. In this way, we don't arrive at the end of our life and in old-old age, wondering what it was supposed to have all been about.

LOSING CONTROL

As we move into our senior years, a process begins that could best be described as a stripping-away. We may find ourselves wanting to move to a smaller house and garden, off-loading some of our personal effects and generally simplifying our life in various ways. In some ways, this is similar to the stripping away that occurs on the mystical path. We don't mind this, even if it saddens us, because we are in charge of what we are doing.

However, there is another stripping away over which we have limited, if any control – increasing physical frailty and dementia.

There is no easy answer to this and we all have to live with these possibilities. It is a reminder of our mortality; realising that we are simply passing through this life and one day will not be here and yet the world will still go on. It is a humbling experience. We are being reminded that we are of the earth. 2 Corinthians 4.16-17 and Romans 8.22-23 can be of help with regard to this.

LIVING IN THE MOMENT

In the busyness and hectic rush of our earlier life, it was not possible to notice life in its infinite detail and we missed so much. But now as the years go by, we can have the gift of time – if we so choose. We seek to respond to the prayer of the psalmist to God: "Teach us so to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom." (90.12)

This is a movement from doing to being. The world is interested in doing rather than being and so we are likely to slip below the radar, though this will also mean we do not have to prove ourselves. We will find a new freedom. We may also discover that less is more. We may begin to see things in a new way, noticing what we had never noticed before. We now have the time to think and read, and a new freedom of expression may emerge as we are willing to entertain

thoughts and ideas we would never have dared to do in our younger years. We find ourselves willing to live with and be comfortable with paradox, something we could not do earlier in life.

A PLACE FOR OTHERS

This can also be a time when, if we're not careful, we can end up being too focused on self. Age and increasing infirmity can narrow our horizons, but it need not be so.

There are now two things we can especially do for others, though of

course, this may have been done earlier. The first is mentoring. On the basis of lived experiences, we have much to pass on to the next generation. Old people in particular have a rapport with the very young. They both have the time and both have an interest in the particular.

The second thing that we can offer at this stage of our life is the gift of prayer for others. We have the time in a way that the harried young mothers or fathers do not have. This is particularly so if the older person

is either housebound or in a nursing home.

CONCLUSION

If we live these later years of life with integrity and generosity, with hope and joy, and a willingness to embrace the next step whatever that might be, we will discover a spiritual maturity that can slip into our life, almost unbeknown to us. It will bring richness to us and those around us.

Our lives will become life-giving to others in ways that were not possible before.

A Brief Personal Reflection on Ageing

Leslie Underwood (Brompton SA, Day 1) is the Minister, UnitingCare Wesley, Port Adelaide in South Australia. Previously, as Pastoral Care Director for Lottie Stewart Hospital, an activity of Wesley Mission and part of the Western Sydney Area Health Service, his ministry involved palliative care, the Huntington's disease ward and the oncology wards. A Uniting Church minister for over 30 years, he has worked in parish ministry, coordinated chaplaincy, directed pastoral care and supervised Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).

To "age with dignity" is a phrase or comment with which I have never felt entirely comfortable.

While we may all seek to behave appropriately there is the suggestion that dignified ageing has a hint of comfortable conformity or the desire to not cause any trouble to anybody.

My strong preference is to age with "integrity". This is potentially a stronger word or concept that has many facets:

Erik Erikson in his eight stage Life Cycle Theory contrasts "Integrity" with "Despair" as the final stage of ageing. A sense of "integration"

or arriving at this time of life as a gathering all things together – integrating our lifetime of experiences – which can offer a sense of satisfaction and achievement of a life "well-lived".

Viktor Frankl in his book *Man's Search For Meaning* claims that "He who has a why to live can live with almost any how".

Unlike Freud who says that, "our greatest drive is the will to pleasure", Frankl maintains that "our strongest drive is the will to meaning". It is this will to meaning that is at the heart of spirituality: our need and desire to find purpose in life and relationships, seeking to live out our uniqueness and as the person we were created to potentially become. This enables us to live with "authenticity".

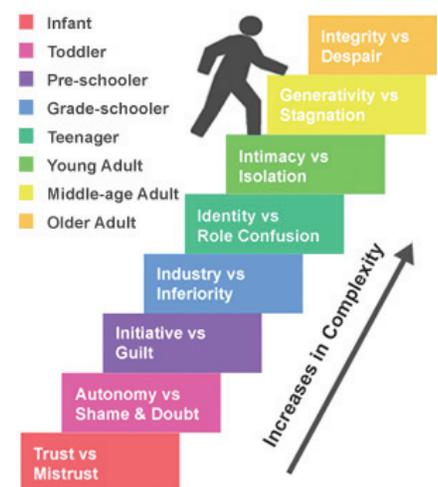
As we seek to make sense of our life's hopes and hurts, we are encouraged to find "closure" for our losses and griefs.

While this sounds good in theory I prefer to encourage "integration", a gradual capacity to acknowledge and include such painful experiences in a healthy way into our recognition that all experiences have combined to influence and shape our life to

this present moment and might even inform us as to how we might approach and embrace the future with maturity and hope.

Dag Hammarskjold, the first Secretary General of the United Nations kept a diary that was discovered after he was tragically killed in an aircraft accident. Extracts were published as "Markings" in 1965.

An entry on page 18 says, "The hardest thing of all - is to die rightly – an exam nobody is spared – and how many pass it? You pray for strength to meet the test – but also for leniency on the part of the Examiner."



*Erikson's Eight Stages
(from bit.ly/1iOf1OF)*

Amazing Grace

*Helen Barnes RSJ (Galong NSW, Day 15) is the Artist-in-residence at St. Clement's Monastery in Galong NSW. A year's Sabbatical "Spirituality and Worship" in 1993 uncovered the Artist within. Over the past 7 years, Helen has searched for meaning in today's world through deepening awareness of the sacred in our lives. St Clement's Artspace focuses on releasing and making visible our Australian Spirituality in paintings, poetry, creative writing and the Zen of drawing. She is also the author and artist of *The cross: an Australian journey* (see review <http://bit.ly/17hxJ9q>)*



Helen Barnes

"The world cannot ruffle the dignity of a soul that dwells in its own tranquillity. Gradually, this serenity

will begin to pervade our seeing and change the way we look at things" John O'Donohue.

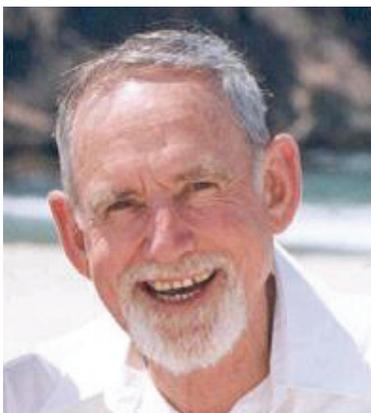
As our bodies begin to slow down and we realise we cannot do the things we once managed in our earlier years we are invited to see the world differently. Walking slower, sitting longer, moving carefully we begin to see, and hear and touch the world at a deeper level. The sunrises welcome us to another day of living and beauty steals to the core of our being. Again, it was John O'Donohue, the Irish Poet and writer, who says, "When we awaken to the call of beauty we become aware of new ways of living in the world"

Last week in the waiting room, I noticed an old man as he idly flicked through a magazine. He did not see a woman pass him with two children in tow. He did not see the toddler tailing behind who leant against the chair beside him who fixed his gaze on the man's face.

Gradually the old man felt he was being watched but he went back to his magazine. The child continued to gaze so the man gave him a faint smile face. Suddenly the door opened and the mother raced in whipped up the child

in her arms and yelled abuse at him. The small boy eyes remained fixed upon the man and as he was carried away, the child turned and gave a little wave. The old man slowly waved, too. What did the small boy see? A person whose presence drew him to a peace he clearly enjoyed? No words were exchanged between them but the connection was made. Hopefully, the child will find the peace he felt that day. Hopefully, he will experience the sacred in the beauty of soul in the people that he meets. Grand- parents often fill this role. Lately I find myself drawn to children. I see something of the presence of God in each of them. The electronic media will desensitise all of us at times but people who experienced loving, natural childhood have an opportunity to recall the memories of childhood when the pace was slower and the world a safer place. In those times, people knew their neighbours and communities formed in towns and villages. Older people have so much to share; so much love to give, so many skills in living. When we stay connected to our spiritual core the path ahead is beyond our dreams for it opens up to the eternal that we are living now.

Information, Formation and Transformation Neil Holm Leader's Letter



Neil Holm

The 2013 Wellspring AGM endorsed a proposal to develop a process of induction or formation into Wellspring. Since then I have had five meetings in five locations that have given some shape to a process of formation (or transformation). The following people have been very helpful: Helen and Keith Weavers, Doug and Isabel Hewitt, Cec and Val Shevels, Sheila Bourne, Peggy Goldsmith, Jim Tulip, Alex Nelson, Judith Kohlhagen, Mary and Mark

Hurst, Justin and Jenny Duckworth (Founders of Urban Vision, a contemporary Order following Jesus on the margins in NZ. Justin is the newly appointed Anglican Bishop of Wellington), Sally Longley (Spiritual Director and Team Member of Canisius Centre of Ignatian Spirituality), and David and Lynona Hawkins. These people represent a wide range of traditions and some have had long experience with Wellspring. I have asked Members and Friends in

WA to suggest a time when I might meet with them as well. I am also keen to engage others in the process. I would welcome an invitation to visit or to engage in a phone or Skype discussion.

Each meeting has the following shape.

1. We start by discussing eight open-ended questions. This elicits fresh and personal ideas on the formation process without influence by my ideas or the ideas from other discussions.

2. I then give the group a copy of the distilled wisdom from the previous groups. We read and discuss the document and I seek advice of changes that the group would like to see.

3. After the meeting, I redraft the document to take account of the responses from the group. I send the redrafted document back to the group for endorsement. This document forms the basis for the discussion with the next group.

Because I will meet with more groups and I want to continue the open process above, I'd rather not reveal too much of the proposals at this stage. If you would like to see the proposals and to have some input, please contact me I will set up a group near you. I am aiming to have the final report available before the 2014 AGM on Saturday 10 May 2014. However, some associated issues have arisen from the discussions and I would like to share the latest drafts:

WHY JOIN WELLSPRING COMMUNITY?

WHEN YOU JOIN WELLSPRING COMMUNITY YOU BECOME PART OF AN AUSTRALIA-WIDE PROPHETIC COMMUNITY OF FOLLOWERS OF JESUS WHO

Support and encourage each other to lead lives that are transformed personally and socially.

Are committed to transformation of our relationship with ourselves, with our communities, with society, with culture, with creation, and with God.

Seek to live actively as disciples of Jesus and in so doing we contribute to a world (and to Australia) where:

- We and all people (particularly the poor and marginalised) live at peace and with justice.

- We grow in spiritual practices that develop an Australian spirituality that allows us to worship God in ways that fit the diverse, and in many ways unique, Australian environment.

- We are reconciled to God, to each other, and we work for mutual respect and recognition between Aboriginal Australians and all other Australians.

- We lead sustainable lives in God's incredibly complex and beautiful Creation that we respect, love, and care for.

- We respect, value, and learn from other Christian traditions and other faiths.

- We are generous in our dealings with everyone we meet by offering hospitality to friends and strangers alike and bringing healing through prayer and practical action.

Acknowledge that living as disciples in these ways will contribute to the transformation of our lives, the lives of those we meet, and the wider social and cultural structures.

Acknowledge also that these actions are prophetic like the actions of Jesus. They will often result in a challenge to an economic or political power structure at one level or another.

Acknowledge that these actions may well lead to resistance against the message from other citizens, from community leaders, and from government. These actions may lead to suffering for Wellspring Community. Nevertheless, as a prophetic community, we must speak the good news of Jesus and hold citizens, community leaders, and government to account by reminding them of their God-given responsibilities.

WHY SEEK TRANSFORMATION?

The people of Wellspring Community support and encourage each other as disciples of Jesus to lead lives that are transformed personally and socially.

In joining Wellspring Community, you acknowledge that you are capable

of further growth, that you want to grow, and that you would like to be supported and encouraged in your growth.

Experienced and committed members of Wellspring Community accompany you as proceed along the path of transformation. They offer a guided and supported process that assists you to become more intentional in your discipleship and to transform your relationship with yourself, your community, the broader society and culture, creation, and with God.

The transformation process offers you an opportunity to gain:

- a broad understanding of the history and purpose of Wellspring Community.

- deeper understanding of life as a disciple of Jesus.

- a broad understanding of the six central Wellspring Community commitments combined with a deeper understanding of a special commitment chosen from the list below.

WELLSPRING COMMUNITY CENTRAL COMMITMENTS

- Working for Justice and Peace in local and global contexts.

- Deeper engagement with Spirituality and Worship in our Australian setting.

- Deeper connection with the movement for greater mutual respect, recognition and reconciliation between Aboriginal Australians and all other Australians.

- Leading sustainable lives that honour God's creation.

- Contributing to ecumenical and inter-faith relationships in order to respect, value, and learn from other traditions.

- Offering hospitality and healing with prayer and generosity.

GUIDELINES FOR MEMBER ACCOUNTABILITY IN WELLSPRING COMMUNITY

Although Member accountability is not a formal part of the formation discussions it is a related idea. To assist Members (as opposed to friends)

engage in their accountability exercise, I prepared some guidelines. They were not binding. They were indicative of a process that might be followed.

As Members of the Wellspring Community, we have each covenanted to seek to live according to the Rule of the Community:

- I will seek to be open to God in every way I can.
- I will use the Prayer Diary and pray regularly for Members and Friends.
- I will be involved in action for peace and justice.
- I will meet regularly with a Wellspring Community Group **OR** I will communicate regularly with another Community member.
- I will account for the use of my time and my money and I will contribute 1 % of my net income to Wellspring Community.

The last dot point challenges most of us. When we renew our membership each year, some Members set aside some time for a discussion with another Member or group of Members. In this discussion, they review their commitment to Wellspring.

PREPARATION

In the period before the meeting, spend some time to review the suggestions below. Think about what you might say when you meet with others.

PRAYER

Pray for discernment. Pray daily in the week leading up to the meeting. You might find this prayer helpful. *Good and gracious God, all that we have comes from you and we give you praise! We seek your guidance and wisdom as we discern the efforts of our life and our work. We surrender every area of our lives to you. In your love send forth your Holy Spirit to us, your people. Open our hearts to hear your words. Transform our minds to see possibilities, to be visionaries and prophets. Lead us to a vision that will strengthen our families, our communities, and our world. May we always be a sign of faith, hope, and charity, a refuge where all are welcomed*

in Jesus' name. Amen (From a prayer by Rochelle Valsaint '95)

DISCUSSION GUIDES

Open to God

I have been open to God in the following ways:

Prayer

My prayer routine is as follows:

Prayer Diary: I use the prayer diary in this way . . . ;

Other daily prayer routines include . . . ;

Special or particular prayer times during the year . . . ;

In the last year, my prayer has led to some surprising or unexpected outcomes:

Spirituality and Justice Issues

Spirituality and worship

In the last year, my spirituality and worship practices or disciplines have developed as follows:

In the last year, my spirituality and worship commitment has led to some surprising or unexpected outcomes:

Reconciliation

In the last year, I have expressed my commitment to reconciliation as follows:

In the last year, my reconciliation commitment has led to some surprising or unexpected outcomes:

Sustainability

In the last year, I have expressed my commitment to sustainability as follows:

I have calculated the carbon footprint for our household (see <http://bit.ly/HQuf74> as an example). It is currently: _____ tonnes of CO2 per annum. I hope to reduce this by ____% in the next year.

In the last year, my sustainability commitment has led to some surprising or unexpected outcomes:

Peace and Justice

In the last year, I have expressed my commitment to peace and justice as follows:

In the last year, my peace and justice commitment has led to some surprising or unexpected outcomes:

Ecumenical and Interfaith

In the last year, I have expressed my commitment to ecumenical and interfaith concerns as follows:

In the last year, my ecumenical and interfaith commitment has led to some surprising or unexpected outcomes:

Healing and Hospitality

In the last year, I have expressed my commitment to healing and hospitality as follows:

In the last year, my healing and hospitality commitment has led to some surprising or unexpected outcomes:

Community Engagement

In the last year, I have expressed my engagement with Wellspring Community as follows:

In the last year, my Wellspring Community engagement has led to some surprising or unexpected outcomes:

Accountability

Time

I have reviewed my use of time. I have considered the time allocation I have given to:

1. Personal, physical and spiritual restoration.
2. Family commitments.
3. Engagement with my local community or with state and federal matters.
4. Church commitments
5. Wellspring Community Rule commitments.

In the year ahead, I seek to adjust my use of time as follows:

Money

I have reviewed my use of money. I have considered the financial allocation I have given to (the following are ordered alphabetically – not in priority order!): Christian commitments; Entertainment, eating out, holidays; Home improvements; Other worthy causes; Sustaining life (food, power, water, clothes, medical etc); Wellspring Community Rule commitments.

In the year ahead, I seek to adjust my use of money as follows:

BAMM: BOOKS, ART, MUSIC, MOVIES



BAMM is a place where Members and Friends reflect on their recent viewing, hearing, creating, and reading in ways that engage the central concerns of the Wellspring community.

BAMM: BOOKS

In Praise of Ageing by Patricia Edgar (Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2013) is reviewed by John O Martin (Faulconbridge NSW, Day 3), a former Wellspring Leader who serves as Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy Coordinator, UnitingCare Ageing – West.



John O Martin

Every year I receive from my Superannuation Fund a statement telling me what my lump sum and annual pension would be if I retired at 65. Well here I am, writing these words on my 65th birthday, still working full time and wondering what the next statement will say.

Our culture is locked into various mindsets about retirement and ageing. Patricia Edgar's book turns our attitudes to ageing around and helps us to look at the process from new angles. The first 65 pages of the book contain an excellent analysis of ageism in the Australian Culture. The author takes swipes at the medical profession, government policies, the Productivity Commission, the aged care industry and employers in general. She questions a culture that says that because people have reached a certain age they no longer are required to have tests such as colonoscopies or mammograms.

Her thesis has a lot to do with our attitudes to ageing, where much of our thinking and legislation today is locked into a past era when people rarely lived past their 80th birthday. These pages are full of 'shoulds' and 'musts' aimed at legislators and those who work with the aged. There is a helpful section on the importance of investing in preventative medicine in order to reduce the financial burden of the aged on the health sector of society.

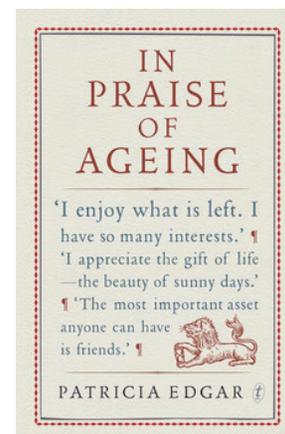
The last 180 pages contain the stories of 'The Elders', mini-biographies of eight people known to the author, including her own father. These are highly intelligent, energetic people who disregarded such landmarks as retirement ages and worked in a paid or voluntary capacity well into their older years. They are stories similar to the ABC programme 'Australian Stories', bordering on hagiography. (I am completing this review on All Saints Day).

I read this book through the eyes of a chaplain of a 130 bed aged care facility. As I read, I thought of our residents, most of whom struggle with life. They would agree with Spike Milligan who said, "old age is not for sissies." In spite of the stereotype of aged care facilities, which sometimes comes through in this book, as 'God's waiting room', our residents are there to live. We once had 'diversional therapists'. Now we call these people 'recreational activities officers' under

the heading of 'lifestyle and leisure' because residents come to live fully the closing years and months of their lives.

Patricia Edgar is critical of the inflexibility of aged care facilities in meeting the needs of individuals. We only hear one side of this story. We have to balance any criticisms against the cost of providing quality aged care with budgets which are inadequate and a workforce who are woefully underpaid, to increasing numbers of people. A question we should ask is why does our society pay people more to look after our money than we pay to look after our old people?

A thoughtful book like this would have been enhanced if there had been fewer stories of 'The Elders' and a little about spirituality and ageing. This book is a useful discussion starter if we are serious about thinking in fresh ways about the issues relating to ageing in Australia today.



BAMM: ART

Merilyn Tandukar (Wanniassa ACT, Day 1) helps us to see beauty in clouds.



Merilyn Tandukar

CLOUD WATCHING



Ever since I was a child, I have loved watching clouds. I know many kids do, so there's nothing unusual about that. As I'm growing older though, I just love watching them more and more, not as a scientific interest, but as a joyful and creative endeavour. Some of my friends might say "oh there she goes, talking about clouds again", but I really enjoy it so much.

So much that when a friend gave me a book called "The Pig with Six Legs", I discovered the Cloud Appreciation Society in the UK and eventually joined it. It has a website (cloudappreciationsociety.org) and you can log in and share your photos of clouds with thousands of others across the world: lenticular or crepuscular rays, cumulous or cirrus, clouds that look like dragons, sheep, ships, or any other imaginary character you like.

Some members of the Society have aided scientists in identifying clouds in particular regions, and have assisted with meteorological events. Much the same as local people reading rain

gauges, people engage in cloud and weather watching.

Clouds have had a bad rap in the past, and it's time they were treated with respect! There's always a negative connotation, particularly when talking about weather. Phrases like "ominous, threatening" and the like make them seem almost human when they are after all a simple phenomenon of nature. Terms like "head in the clouds" or "under a cloud" also cast aspersions on people who might be simply preoccupied.

It's such an innocent occupation. You can do it walking, riding, driving a car (although it's good to stop when you get overwhelmed), or just watering the garden, hanging out the clothes.... It costs nothing, and each day there is a new display of beauty and delight to greet you if you just look up in the sky.

It seems to me that we spend a lot of time in our lives in our heads, thinking, mulling over something, worrying, planning the day's activities etc. How much time do we spend just "being" or "allowing ourselves to be" in awe of nature?

However we spend our time, and it is often frittered away over the course of the 16 or so hours we are awake, give some thought to taking 5 or 10 minutes, to look at the sky. It's a period of time well worth it.

Cloud watching can be a totally beautiful experience. Indulge yourself. You will join many thousands of people across the world looking up, peacefully exploring the beauty of the world around us.

BAMM: MOVIES

*Knowing that Margaret and Clabon Allen (Ashfield NSW, Day 17) enjoy films, I asked them if they had seen *The curious case of Benjamin Button*, a film that depicts a man who is born old and gradually grows younger, the reverse of the normal process (see <http://bit.ly/1aiEJXh>). It shows the relationships throughout his life, with the inevitable difficulties where the rest of the world is going in the normal direction, from young to old. The film raises many*

*issues about spirituality and aging: the elderly as 'obsolete', death as a tender moment to be treated with respect and dignity, and the impermanence of life. The screenplay is by Eric Roth who wrote *Forrest Gump*. Margaret and Clabon had not seen it but Margaret submitted the following review. Other recent films on aging and spirituality include *The Magic of Belle Isle*, *Amour*, *I Wish*, and *All Together*.*



Margaret and Clabon Allen

FILMS ON AGING

What criteria does one use to review films in terms of the topic rather than how good the film is? Should we look at whether it makes us laugh, or whether it helps us to face up to the inevitable process, or simply is it a good film or a bad film, and does it meet its apparent purpose? Does it help us in our spiritual quest? [*Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat provide an answer on finding spirituality in today's films at <http://bit.ly/1bmgNDfj>*]

The film 'Away from her' – which we saw some time ago – deals with the situation where one partner develops serious dementia and goes into care, where she develops a relationship with one of the other residents – to the great distress of the husband. He still cherished memories of all they had meant to each other and it was very hard to accept that someone else was filling his role. This was a very moving film which faced up to a serious issue and one which none of us would like to face. For the husband, this was almost worse than the death of his wife. It was a spiritual process which we saw as we felt for him in his dilemma. How would we feel in such a situation, and what spiritual resources might help us to cope with it?

Two films were our favourites. They were 'The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel' and 'Quartet'.

I think we liked them because both painted an admittedly idealised picture but one which portrayed an attractive way of growing old. 'Marigold Hotel' shows a group of British retirees who go to live in India – some for financial reasons, others because they are reliving earlier experiences. This is a study of the relationships within the group, with the local people with whom they come in contact, and indirectly with people they have left behind. For instance, Judy Dench is her usual insightful self and portrays someone who realises she never really loved her recently deceased husband. One of the group dies of a heart attack after having been reunited with a homosexual partner in his youth, and he finds the man has been living contentedly in an arranged marriage, while never denying his basic identity. He dies having achieved his quest and a certain contentment. It had been his fear that he had ruined the life of his friend, in a society where

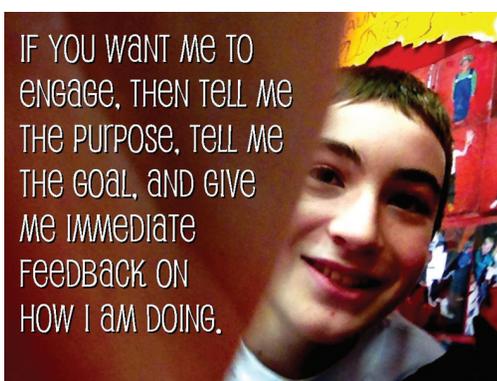
homosexuality is still outlawed. In fact, an arranged marriage had brought real friendship while not denying his true nature. Another couple break up and the wife, who could never accept the life in India, returns to England when their financial problems are solved. There is a good portrayal of Indian society where the spiritual is very much part of everyday life. We have a picture of people growing old but doing new things and living in a positive way.

'Quartet' deals with a group of retired professional musicians in a very luxurious retirement home, who set out to re-live a past experience of playing a quartet together. It takes seriously the decline in abilities, the desire to live life as they used to live, and deals with one member who is trying to escape her past and does not at first want to participate. Again, a funny film that nonetheless looks at serious issues. The picture is of a group of elderly residents who do not give in to their decline in abilities but still seek to live life to the full and be creative. There is a spirituality in their

positive attitude and the desire to go on being creative.

Considering all these made me realise that it is easier to think about the attractive side of aging, the groups of people who are still functioning well and enjoying life. Films that deal with the difficulties, the declining powers, the unpleasant aspects, the acceptance of the approach of death, are not so popular. Which makes me ask - is it better to laugh at old age and not to take it too seriously? And what happens when we really have to face the declining years and the end of life? Is it better to laugh or to cry? What aids do we have when we are nearer to the end of life than the beginning? Does our spirituality decline or deepen? There are many questions because I think we all have such questions. We are reminded that God is with us in the later years as much as in the earlier years. And going to see a good movie is one of the better ways of giving us a new look at life, and, dare I say, sometimes more thought-provoking and spiritual than a worship service.

ENGAGEMENT



Engagement: Members and Friends will have an opportunity to engage with or respond to ideas that were addressed in the previous issue of *Pipeline*. Engaging with the ideas of others, respondents will affirm and / or commend the ideas and also take the opportunity to recommend other points of view.

The June 2013 Pipeline included articles on Alan McLaren and Carole Burnard that described many years of service for God. Here is Irene Carder's story (Earlwood NSW, Day 11). Thanks to Isobel Bishop (Leichhardt NSW, Day 11) for the interview with Irene.

When God lays His hand on you and says, "Tag! You're it!" He has His own plans for your life, and He expects you to respond to His call with complete and absolute surrender. That is what happened to me. From my childhood,



Irene Carder

I have seen and felt the hand of God on my life. It is inescapable.

I made my first decision for Christ when I was sixteen. When I left school at seventeen, I worked in an office until I was 22. Then I went to Strathfield Bible College I thought of going as a missionary to Japan. When I applied to China Inland Mission they said I needed more training so I did general at Camden Hospital and midwifery training at Crown St and re-applied but they said they couldn't send anyone who had asthma to Japan as people get asthma there that have never had it in their lives. Being very disappointed, I talked the matter over with my minister and he said why not try home missions. I went to see Revd Albert Manefield of Methodist Home Missions and he was pleased to welcome me and suggested I train as a deacon. So I did two years in the deaconess college at Leichhardt.

Brewarrina on the Barwon River was my first appointment. I worked with June Smith, Maureen Johnstone, and Noreen Schubert fellow deaconesses. We ran the Church Services and Sunday School and infant welfare clinic and the local ambulance. We also visited some small outlying towns and villages giving Scripture in schools and pastoral visits to some

lonely outback people. Some of these places had little churches and we were able to conduct services for them. We were licensed to do weddings baptisms funerals and conduct communion.

The roads we went on were not always tarred and it was easy to get bogged and occasionally we were stranded overnight. Often the police or the shire council would come and rescue us. A highlight was visiting the aboriginal settlement about ten miles out of town for an evening service with lots of singing. This was once a week at Brewarrina. Fortunately, my colleagues always played the piano.

Mostly there were always two of us but once I was by myself and could hear breathing which was quite scary. I asked another friend to come and stay and she said it was only a dog sleeping under the house. We had tank water but still managed to keep nice lawns and a small garden.

Sometimes I went to relieve at Menindee near Broken Hill and found it quite a change. There we worked in with the Flying Doctor and had to meet him at the airstrip each week. Other times we did stitching of wounds, dressings or pulled teeth.

Later an ambulance service was started at Brewarrina and a Presbyterian Minister was appointed to the town so we felt we should move on. I then did my Infant welfare course. Ethel Hillier and I were posted to Hungerford a little village on the Queensland border again connected with a monthly Flying Doctor Patrol. We were sometimes visited by the Flying padre from NSW and sometimes by Queensland patrol ministers. We did a lot of patrol work around the properties and joined in the social life of the little township. Sunday School and Scripture classes were started and we helped some children with their correspondence lessons. We had to travel long distances to quarterly



Isobel Bishop

meetings with other ministers in our area.

I did one year in Cobar which was a very ecumenical town and working in with other ministers was very pleasant. I lived in the old Manse with one lady school teacher and worked with the Flying Padre. My last year was at Dubbo and Narromine working with Revd Stan Redden. This was a very different life from the outback. I left because my mother needed me at home and I did a course in Gynaecology nursing to refresh my nursing skills. I have always valued the fellowship and support of my ministers and church friends. Yes, there were some difficult times but God looked after us as I am sure God does for all his children.

Diary Claimer

2014

**Annual General Meeting
Saturday, 10th May**

In addition to the AGM, look out for another special day in 2014 when Members in each state meet for prayer and discussion of important Wellspring developments. We hope to link the groups at various times during the day to create a greater sense of community.

PRAYING THROUGH ICONS

In the BAMM Art section of the September Pipeline, one of Robin Pryor's poems reminded us of the power of some mantras to "whisper their way between heart and head today, inviting all the senses to recall, note, inwardly digest and give thanks for their profound simplicity yet their life-giving impetus." In the following article, Pam Kerr (Forest Lake Qld, Day 26) discusses a similar power of icons. (See also Rowan Williams' little book *The Dwelling of the Light* (John Garrett, 2003))



Pam Kerr

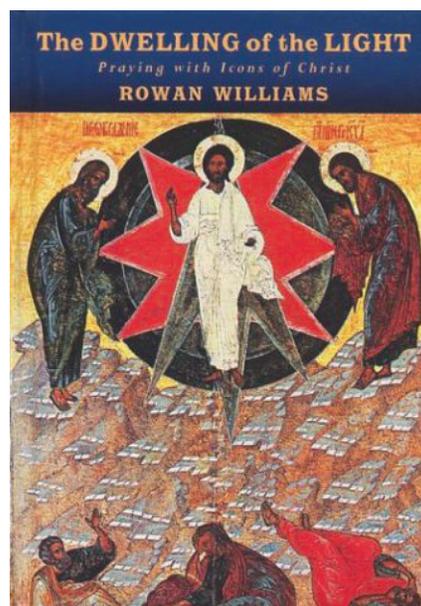
The title caught my attention. I knew absolutely nothing about icons. It resulted in opening a completely new way of praying. The first time I came to see icons was when we were tourists visiting southern Greece. The most northerly place we visited was Meteora that has been a stronghold of the Orthodox East since the 11th century. It is a rock forest that rises from the Thessalian plain near Kalambaka between two mountain ranges.

Twenty-one monasteries originally stood on the top of these sheer rock formations. Of that number, six still function today. The walls and ceilings are covered with icons of the Trinity, Mary, Jesus and his disciples and stories from scripture. So from what appeared to me to be artistic decoration that adorned the monasteries has become a means of entering into the deeper presence of God.

The two-day workshop was led by Dianne Minnaar, a professional artist and calligrapher for more than 30 years, and who for the past 6 years has been specialising in sacred images and icons. "Icons are windows we see through" or in the words of another "Theology in Colour."

Icons reflect the spiritual, so no emotion is shown in the icon, this comes from the viewer. They are very symbolic. For example, Christ is often painted with a red under garment reflecting his humanity with a rich blue cloak over his shoulder showing his divinity. A gold or yellow vertical stripe on his red garment points to his kingship. Christ's right hand is held in blessing. The two upright fingers show his humanity and divinity. When these fingers are slightly crossed it reminds us of the cross on which Christ die. The thumb and other two fingers remind us of the Trinity. Christ often holds an open bible in his left hand. The old Greek script on the one I purchased originally as a memento of our visit to Meteora reads, "Come to me all the weary ones and carrying burdens and I will give rest to you. Matt.11:28." This icon is now a window for me to pray through.

Icons are painted on specially prepared wood or canvas. There is a detailed process required in the preparation of the wood that is covered with cotton or linen cloth. This is in turn is sealed ready for the first sketch of the subject. However, before this



*Hospitality of Abraham
(from bit.ly/18lmxit)*

happens there is much prayer for the iconographer to be open to God's Spirit speaking through her icon. Sometimes embedded scripture in under the painting, this may or may not be seen.

The paints are made from ground minerals to which egg yolk is mixed to form the right consistency. Several layers of transparency and paint are added until the painting is as the artist desires. A gold leaf is added to the halo of the person, or the background may be painted on gold. The colour green symbolises growth; purple - priestly, royalty; gold - divinity, holiness.

The eyes dominate and reflect the serene self. The mouth is small to denote humility and to bring one into silence. Ribbon behind the ears remind of listening to God. The perspective as in the "Hospitality of Abraham" is reverse to the norm, as it shows God coming to us.

The symbols of the icon may lead to prayer. They may also lead us to a question that we can pray though. If you have an icon, why not sit in silence and rest in God's presence? If not, then you can access Dianne Minnaar's sacred images and icons on her gallery on www.sanctussacredimages.com

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NEXT ISSUE: March 2014 has no particular theme. Contributions on any topic are welcome.

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