

Vesak Day Celebration, UNESCO, Paris, May 2015

At the end of May, Jonathan Inkipin (Toowoomba Qld, PDD 26) was invited to represent Toowoomba at a celebration of the Day of Vesak at UNESCO in Paris. "Vesak", the Day of the Full Moon in the month of May, is the most sacred day to millions of Buddhists around the world. It was on the Day of Vesak two and a half millennia ago, in the year 623 B.C., that the Buddha was born. It was also on the Day of Vesak that the Buddha attained enlightenment, and it was on the Day of Vesak that the Buddha in his eightieth year passed away.



Jonathan Inkipin

The UN General Assembly, by its resolution 54/115 of 1999, recognized internationally the Day of Vesak to acknowledge the contribution that Buddhism, one of the oldest religions in the world, has made for over two and a half millennia and continues to make to the spirituality of humanity.

The theme of the celebration was "Fostering World Peace Through Cultural

Education." Jonathan had the opportunity to address the conference twice.

Reconnecting Our Hearts

Amituofu ~ salaam aleikum
shalom ~ g'day

I would like to share a special prayer: a prayer which has been of great value to churches across the world, who together, through bodies such as the World Council of Churches, have sought intentionally, throughout this 21st century, to address violence and its causes.

There are four elements to this prayer. These, I believe, help to sum up and focus Christian understandings of peacemaking: four elements to which, of course, we need to add another, namely, repentance (understood as saying sorry for our own parts in the violence of the world ~ and what others have done in our name: the name of our religion, or our country, or our ethnic or other group). This is presupposed, for without repentance - without a profound change of heart - we cannot be free.

The four elements of my prayer help us seek this repentance or change of heart, as they are elements that are similarly deeply grounded in the Christian tradition but which are also accessible to all, to people of other faiths and none.

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The four key elements of this change of heart are:

First, **Truth**

~ because without truth we can never deal with things properly. Now of course Truth can be uncomfortable to face up to: like the truth about the violence inflicted in Australia in the past on our Indigenous peoples, or the truth of facing up to the violence of what has caused war and violence elsewhere, and continues to do so. Yet without truth, there can be no reconciliation and no real healing ~ we are always likely to be violent again. As Jesus said ~ 'the truth will set you free.'

Second, **Justice**

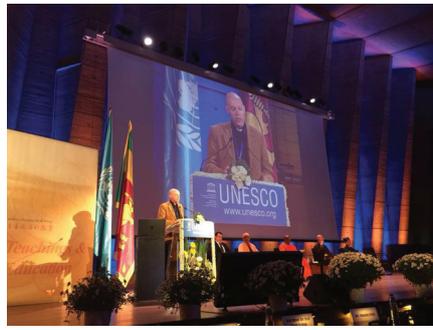
~ for without Justice there can be no real peace - as the biblical tradition has it, peace and justice belong intimately together: as the Psalmist puts it (Psalm 85.10) justice and peace must kiss one another for live to triumph. Or, as Pope Francis has reminded us, 'without a solution to the problems of (today's refugees and) the (global) poor, we cannot resolve the problems of the world.'

Third, **Compassion**

~ for Compassion is, for Christians, the heart of God, and embodied in Jesus Christ. Until we have a heart for one another ~ until we start to share one heart, as some Indigenous peoples say, then we will always be broken people and a broken world. Until then there is a part of our own heart missing. We have to seek grace to cultivate kindness and mercy and their power to transform us and our world.

Fourth, **Courage**

~ for Courage is required to take risks for peace, justice and compassion: this is the courage of Jesus even to risk death in the hope of a better world and in the assurance that nothing can ever destroy the ultimate reality of life ~ the love of God ~ which can transform all that evil throws against



Jonathan Inkipin on stage at UNESCO

it. For making peace comes at a cost but it is the path to renewal, or, as Christians put it, redemption.

All of these things ~ truth, justice, compassion and courage ~ are crucial as part of our education for peace and a repentant, or transformed, heart and world.

So let me therefore share this prayer of blessing:

May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, superficial relationships, so that we will live deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people, so that we will work for justice, equity and peace.

May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that we will reach out our hands to comfort them and change their pain to joy.

And may God bless us with the foolishness to think that we can make a difference in the world, so that we will do the things which others tell us cannot be done.

In Jesus Name Amen.

Walking As One: Being Islands No More

Let me begin with some words from a great poet and priest in my Anglican tradition:

No one is an island entire of itself; every one is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; ... any one's death diminishes me, because I am involved in humankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

This wisdom is still powerful today, even though John Donne himself lived through the violent crises of his own age 400 years ago. For they are words for us all. Whilst they embody Christian understanding about human-divine solidarity, they are also reflected in other wisdom traditions, not least Buddhism. For no one can be an island today: no person, no religion, no country. What happens, for example, here in Paris, affects the rest of the world. In response to their own trials, many French people have said *Je suis Charlie Hebdo*. At its best, that is another way of saying what John Donne said long ago. For whatever bell tolls ~ in Sri Lanka, USA, Israel-Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, the Congo, Toowoomba, or wherever – it tolls for us all.

This last year has certainly been a telling one for Toowoomba, as we have been painfully reminded of how much we are all bound together. For, like the English among whom I was born and grew up, we Australians live on an island, and, like the English, we can sometimes forget we are bound to the rest of the world. In our case, we live on a very, very, big island and it is a long way from others. Yet we are made up of peoples from every part of the Earth. So each day reminds us that every bell that tolls, tolls for us too. Let me give three brief instances of what I mean.

First, Toowoomba shared directly in the grief of the destruction of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 last September. Two leading and deeply loved Toowoomba doctors were on that plane and several others who died from other nationalities were also mourned by relatives and friends in Toowoomba. For, nationality, like religious persuasion, is no protection from our international waves of evil. We are not islands. Together we must form a new continent of compassion, a new world and web of wisdom. In Toowoomba last year we therefore came together in prayer and

mourning, in thanksgiving for all that had been given and taken away, and in commitment to strengthening the bonds of international compassion. In a similar way, we are seeking to respond to other international crises, most recently in fundraising to assist those devastated by the Nepal earthquake. We have renewed our pledge to play our part and to ask others to join us.

Second, Toowoomba faced the shock of international terror at home. Last December's murderous siege in the major Australian city of Sydney was, statistically, a small event among the catalogue of our worldwide horrors. Yet, as Donne said, every death diminishes us: every wounding word of inhuman ideology, every killing bullet, every brutality. The Sydney perpetrator was sadly a man with long-running mental health problems as well as a criminal bent. He was not representative of Australian Muslims. Yet his abuse of Islam also connected with the abuses of religion by others in our world. So, for Australia as a whole, the Sydney siege was a wake-up call. We cannot be an island. As a worldwide community, we sink, or thrive, as one. In Toowoomba this has certainly been true as we have rallied together after the Sydney siege. Three major community events were held: in our main Anglican Church; in the mosque; and in the Pure Land Buddhist monastery. Others have followed. We have used tragedy to strengthen our common bonds, and, in doing so, have given a powerful witness to others to do likewise. Indeed, a delightful, and delicious, sign of Muslim integration in Toowoomba is in our main street. Whereas the horror of the Sydney siege was inflicted by a deranged Muslim in a chocolate café, in Toowoomba our main chocolate café is *run* by Muslims, offering sweet and beautiful hospitality to all. So, let us feed one another.

Third, and even more challengingly, in Toowoomba, as in other places, we are

exploring ways to help those who are easily infected by the kinds of fear and suspicion which flow so freely across our world today. For when Islamic State or other extremists use social media to convey hateful messages so slickly and instantly, we are in a new era. We need to respond more attentively and courageously to the deeper realities of love and solidarity among us. In Toowoomba we are still fortunate that the incessant call to divide and destroy our common humanity is little heeded. Yet in this last year, our new mosque has suffered two attempted arson attacks from one or more crazed individuals. As anywhere in our world, some people are still vulnerable to the waves of fear which rise and fall across the world. Such waves can seem powerful, yet we know they are do not have to be. For if each wave is met imaginatively and purposefully, in love, then the sea of our troubles can be transformed. What does not kill you, they say, makes you stronger. That definitely happened this year for us. We have certainly learned, in the words of one of our major community events this year, that we must 'Walk As One': bringing together people of all kinds into every public space, looking to a more positive future, grounded in ancient wisdom and contemporary imagination. A powerful symbol of this is the Toowoomba City Labyrinth which we have been creating in the centre of our city. Like other creative soul works we are developing in Toowoomba, and of which Kim has spoken, the labyrinth represents a tangible reminder of our common humanity. A symbol found in many cultures, it invites us to walk together. For we may come from different places but we are all one in this shared journey.

An increasingly important task is broadening our network's base to meet new challenges and to engage more people. This involves developing our Goodwill Committee into a body

which more fully brings together the key sectors of our city. We have been given wonderful foundations in our faith representatives. Without our faith communities we would have neither the underlying vision nor the strength to be sustainable. Yet, especially in what is a politically secular city, we are now beginning to work on closer partnerships with other key elements of our community. This will also help to release some of our faith representatives to develop the inner depth and spiritual foundations of our work. The extension of inter-religious relationships in Toowoomba has been heart warming this year, both through the development of new media initiatives and in addressing the worldwide challenges we face together. We now seek to develop fresh inter-religious partnerships with existing and new friends internationally.

The journey to peace and harmony is a bumpy one, whoever and wherever we are. The temptation is always to cut corners and to seek peace and harmony by false ideas of unity which do not fully include. It is so much easier to stay with those who are like us, whether these are people of our particular race, religion, class, economic status, gender, or sexuality. Yet unless we realise that we are all connected, and that no one is an island, we cannot find lasting peace and harmony. As we affirmed together in our celebration of International Peace Day last September 'Everyone has a right to peace'. Unless we ensure this wherever we are, and across the world together, we will not flourish. To be here at UNESCO this year is therefore particularly helpful as we seek to strengthen all our bonds of compassion and cooperation. Indeed, we hope this may lead to new international partnerships, not least through the UNESCO Creative Cities initiative. May what we have to share therefore empower us all and ring out the bells of hope and joy. Let us therefore walk on more closely together.

Interfaith Prayer for Peace

In June, Helen Weavers (Belmont North NSW, PDD 9) attended an interfaith forum in Newcastle. Here is a prayer for peace that was used in this forum



Helen Weavers

O God, you are the source of life and peace.

Praised be your name forever.

We know it is you who turns our minds to thoughts of peace

Hear our prayer in this time of crisis.

Your power changes hearts.

Muslims, Christians and Jews remember, and profoundly affirm, that they are followers of the one God, children of Abraham, brothers and sisters;

enemies begin to speak to one another; those who were estranged join hands in friendship:

nations seek the way of peace together.

Strengthen our resolve to give witness to these truths

by the way we live.

Give to us:

Understanding that puts an end to strife;

Mercy that quenches hatred, and

Forgiveness that overcomes vengeance.

Empower all people to live in your law of love.

Amen.

(Anonymous)

Spirituality of Creation

David Sloane (Corowa NSW, PDD 15) writes on his experiences of the sacred. David refers to Rachel Carson. To see a short video in which she speaks about the environment go to <http://bit.ly/CarsonR>. The image of the kestrel is from Wikipedia.



David Sloane

Neil Holm's article "Spirituality of Place" in the last Pipeline and his experience of the water ripples and the swallows struck a chord with me. It spoke to me because this has been my common experience ever since I was a small child gazing up at the clouds in the sky or wandering among the

Cypress Pine / Yellow Box woodland on our family Riverina property. Unknowingly, I was experiencing the 'sacrament of God's presence' in nature. perhaps it was a gift I inherited from my Scottish Celtic ancestry.

I knew then, and I know now, the truth of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem:

*Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
the rest sit round it, and pluck
blackberries.*

Certainly, for me, God speaks through these manifestations of 'mystery'. Recently I was riding my quad bike checking paddock water and I disturbed a flock of two dozen pelicans circling above the dam. I stopped the bike and gazed up in wonder. Later that night I wrote one of my haiku poems:

*Pelicans circling overhead
silently, softly,
"bush child, turn off the bike,
gaze up in wonder and awe."*

It was certainly a 'thin place' as the Celtic mystics testify. Any location

where God speaks to me is a sacred space.

I absorbed my love of nature and my enthusiasm for conservation from my father, Ian F Sloane, who was a noted bush naturalist, 50 years ahead of his time. After I left the Savernake property and engaged in tertiary education, doing church ministry and raising a family, such experiences fell into the background of a busy life.

In the 1990s I had a 'Rachel Carson moment.' Rachel Carson, an American scientist, wrote "Silent Spring" in the late 1950s and blew the whistle on harmful sprays and pesticides. The book was a game changer and realised that the majority of our farm trees are old, rapidly ageing and not being replaced. I did an Ecotheology Course at St Marks in Canberra and discovered theologians like Jurgen Moltmann, Thomas Berry, Paul Collins and others. I had discovered Creation Theology! During the same period I went an ecotourism trip to the Pitjantjatjara Lands of north-west S.A. and that opened my mind to Aboriginal Spirituality and their awareness to the sacred dimension of nature.

In more recent years, my poetry side has bubbled to the surface and I have become more aware than ever of the mystical side of life.

Retirement has allowed more time to work on landcare projects on my block at Savernake especially planting, and erecting wire guards around, young trees. This coupled with doing an external diploma course in 'Landcare and Natural Resources' through Tocal Agricultural College has upgraded my practical skills. I have seen in my lifetime the climate change over the Riverina Plains from drier winter / springs to wetter and more humid summers.

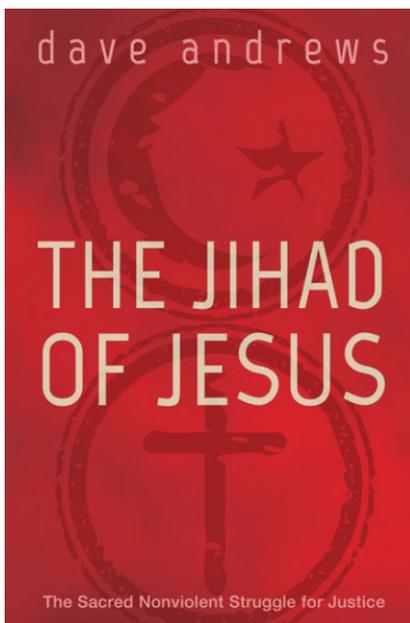
Hence I am now an active advocate for action on climate change. I have long been aware of the decline in birdlife in our rural farming areas, so I have written a poem comparing the hovering kestrel to the Holy Spirit hovering over our lives, making us aware of the damage modern farming and runaway capitalism is doing to our planet.



Wings

A hovering kestrel
Wings perfectly in harmony,
Poetry in motion,
Observing all that is happening
in our dry lives.
Ready to swoop down as soon as we call
Ever mindful and ever caring,
Always there, hovering above us,
Beside us,
and in us,
Wings above us, beating for us
and our land, in love.

BOOK NOTICE



Dave Andrews, *The Jihad of Jesus*, Wipf & Stock, 2015.

Dave Andrews' book has just been released. The description below is

from the back cover of the book. I have a review copy available. Please let me know if you would like to review it.

We are caught up in the cycle of so-called "holy wars." In *The Jihad of Jesus*, Dave Andrews argues that while this inter-communal conflict is endemic, it is not inevitable. Depending on our understanding, our religions can be either a source of escalating conflict or a resource for overcoming inter-communal conflict; and for our religions to be a resource for overcoming conflict, we need to understand the heart of all true religion as open-hearted compassionate spirituality. In the light of an open-hearted compassionate spirituality, we can reclaim the word "jihad" from extremists who have (mis)appropriated it as a call to "holy war," and reframe it, in

truly Qur'anic terms, as a "sacred nonviolent struggle for justice"; and we can reconsider Jesus, as he is in the Gospels, not as a poster boy for Christians fighting crusades against Muslims, but as "a strong-but-gentle Messianic figure" who can bring Christians and Muslims together. As this book shows, many Christians and Muslims have found Isa (Jesus) and the Bismillah (celebrating the mercy, grace, and compassion of God) as common ground upon which they can stand and work for the common good. *The Jihad of Jesus* is a handbook for reconciliation and action: a do-it-yourself guide for all Christians and Muslims who want to move beyond the "clash of civilizations," join the jihad of Jesus, and struggle for justice and peace nonviolently side by side.

Leader's Letter - Spirit of Simplicity



Neil Holm

Our National Gathering is drawing near. I am looking forward to meeting old friends (and a few new ones! We have been fortunate to gain the assistance of Jan Crombie, an experienced mentor for the use of Open Space. Jan will be with us for several days. I look forward to seeing the range of discussions.

One of my great hopes for the Gathering is that a spirit of simplicity will undergird all that we do. It seems to me that any awareness of the spirit of place requires us to begin with a spirit of simplicity. In the 17th century, Francois Fenelon wrote a little book called *Christian Perfection*. Fenelon suggests three stages in the development of a spirit of simplicity. In the first stage, we seek to free ourselves from the attraction of material things and then move toward becoming sensitive to the things of the spirit. We allow the Spirit of God to work through us. We no longer seek to accomplish things in our own strength. We work with God, trusting God to guide us and allowing God to bring things to fruition at the right time. We no longer desire what is bigger, better, newer, and flashier. We accept the maxim that small is beautiful. We no longer seek amazing programs to entertain us, train us, and motivate

us. We begin to open ourselves to allow God to change us and to work on our souls.



François Fénelon 1651-1715
Image from http://bit.ly/F_Fenelon

These sentiments are reflected in the use of Open Space Technology for our Gathering. Open Space has four rules:

1. Whoever come are the right people.
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.
3. Whenever it starts is the right time.
4. When it's over, it's over.

The Law of Two Feet states that: "If, during the course of the gathering, any person finds themselves in a situation where they are neither learning nor contributing, they must use their feet and go to some more productive place."

A spirit of simplicity underlies these principles. We have no desire for an amazing program. We enter the space and allow God to work to our souls.

We make progress through the first stage. We free ourselves of outside

things. In the second stage, we begin to look inward. We think about our souls. We are concerned for the progress of our souls. We worry whether we still long for material things and whether we are still focused on self-satisfaction. We try to discipline ourselves. We examine ourselves for sign of sin. We long for humility and try hard to find it within ourselves. We know that we do not yet have peace and liberty. We are honest and sincere. We have made progress but we worry. We have not found true simplicity.



Image from <http://bit.ly/SimpLicity>

"Simplicity is a rightness of the soul which cuts away all useless turning back on ourselves and upon our own behaviour. It is different from sincerity. Sincerity is a virtue below simplicity" (Fenelon, p. 102). The sincere genuinely seek to be virtuous but they have a certain self-consciousness about being virtuous. Fenelon says that they constantly fear to seem to be that which they are not. They are afraid of having said or done too much.

The sincere are not yet simple. They are trying too hard. "They are not at ease with others and others are not

at ease with them. We find in them nothing easy; nothing free, nothing ingenuous, nothing natural. We would prefer less regular and more imperfect people, who were more natural.” Fenelon concludes that God has a similar preference.

This is an important stage in the development of each stage of the spiritual development of each individual. We need sufficient space and support as we move through this stage. We must remember that it takes time to nourish the spirit and at the right time we will move into stage three.

In the third stage, we begin to think about God more often than we consider ourselves. We turn the full circle. In stage one, the soul is drawn to the attractions of the material and other “outer objects.” By stage three, the soul is drawn to God; the soul becomes attached to God. The soul allows itself to be drawn more and more to God and as it does it grows in simplicity. The soul remains aware of sin but now sin is seen against the infinite

purity of God. Attention becomes centred on God rather than the material. The increasing attention on God involves a form of losing the self while at the same time finding a new, more fulfilled, more complete, more God-like self. The true self blossoms and flourishes. The outward expression of this self exemplifies a natural charm and exuberance. We enjoy the company of people in this stage. They seem relaxed and unforced. They exhibit simplicity.

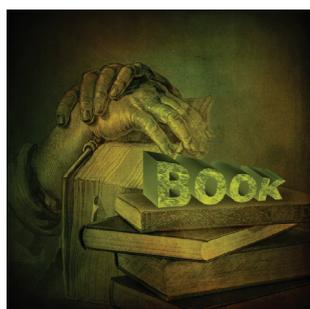
Having appropriated simplicity, the individual is liberated to care for others, to empathise with the needs of others. Furthermore, “With this purity of heart, we are no longer troubled by what others think of us, except that in charity we avoid scandalizing them. We carry on our business of the moment the best that we can, with gentle, free, gay attention, and we give no thought to success. We no longer judge ourselves, and we are not afraid of being judged, as St Paul said of himself.”

I hope the Gathering will be characterised by a spirit of simplicity. I hope that all who attend will blossom and flourish, that they will be filled with natural charm and exuberance, and be relaxed and unforced. I hope we will all engage with each other and the ideas that we discuss with gentle, free, and gay attention. I hope that as we present and respond that we will be relaxed, unafraid of failure, and free from judging ourselves and those with whom we engage.

I hope that those who are unable to come to the Gathering will take the opportunity to think through these ideas, consider where they fit in the above structure, and then contact another Wellspring person to share thoughts.

(Francois Fenelon, *Christian Perfection*, New York: Harper and Brothers, nd, pp. 102-106. In preparing these thoughts I was guided by Richard Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, London: Triangle/SPCK, 1981, Chapter 6).

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: MUSIC

Geoff Stevenson reviews a Chris Botti Concert. To listen to Ave Maria and Caruso go to <http://bit.ly/BottiBoston>

My wife bought tickets to a concert by Chris Botti (pronounced Boat-tie), a jazz trumpeter who brought his combo to the Sydney Opera House and performed with the SSO. We have seen him perform there previously and thoroughly enjoyed his complex

mixture of classical, pop and jazz, imbued with his understated, mellow jazz trumpet. Chris Botti performed with Sting for a few years, after studying jazz trumpet and performing with Frank Sinatra’s band. Touring with Sting raised his profile and gave

him the impetus to begin touring as a solo performer with his own combo. Simply described, Botti’s music is beautiful! It is at times haunting and reflective and at times energetic and filled with life and vitality. His relaxed sense of humour pervades his

music and the richness of his fellow musicians is stimulating and riveting. Piano solos that left one speechless in their complex wonder juxtaposed a unique and powerful bass line and energetic soloing. The Australian guitarist performed brilliantly on classical or electric guitar, with his proud mother in the audience. A drum solo, the like of which I have never seen for its sheer audacity and seeming impossibility, left the audience mesmerised. Botti brought guests; a violinist who was a gentle but lively young woman who attacked her violin with an energy and vigour that was beautiful, staggeringly complex and exciting. Two singers, one a black woman with jazz credibility who stunned in her range and authority, and a young man who had a deep and sonorous voice more attuned to the semi-operatic classics he sang.

The SSO was a beautiful and complex background to Botti's front line combo and guests. The beauty and diversity of the orchestra adds a deep and rich dimension to the performance. Sometimes the orchestra lifted everything to great heights with soaring strings and bold brass and other places it was quiet and sensuous. There was a wonderful relationship between band leader Chris Botti and conductor, Nicholas



Buc as they communicated around jazz solos and orchestral accompaniment.

Botti's music is quite sublime as it transcends classical, pop and jazz and infuses everything with a rich trumpet sound that is full and deep. He is an exceptional performer but one has to listen carefully as it comes over so effortlessly and in such an understated manner it is easy to take for granted his skill and the complexity of the arrangements.

I have a couple of Botti's CD's and find them a rich source of reflection and contemplation. There is beauty and vitality in the music, along with gentle wonder and energetic excitement.

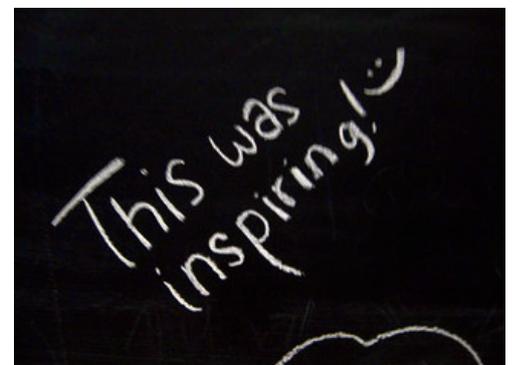
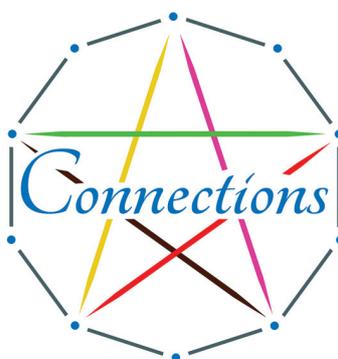
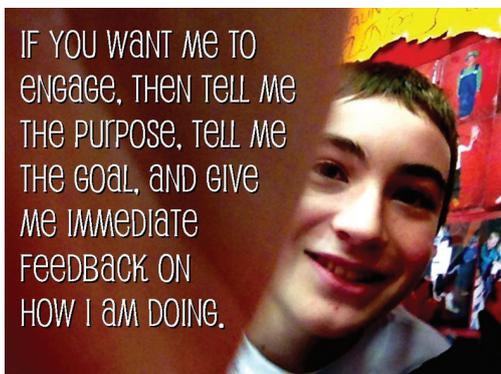
From *Ave Maria* to *I've Got You Under My Skin* to *My Funny Valentine*, Botti entertains and inspires. He takes us into another place through his music and the

sheer creativity and passion points me to the one who is the Creative Source of all.

I have used his version of Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah* across Easter with the theme of 'broken Hallelujahs'. This version is haunting and deep and holds together joy, wonder and struggle. Its richness invites deep reflection and helps me enter into a deeper awareness of life and living. His *Emmanuel* and *Cinema Paradiso* are both amongst my favourites and turned up high on my car stereo lull me into another place as I drive through Hawkesbury valleys and mountains. The violin and trumpet finely balance and contrast one another, first alternating and then countering one another as the pieces rise and fall.

Music has the capacity to take us deeper into reflection on life and being or to celebrate and commemorate the range of life experiences. It offers a soundtrack that enriches our experience of life. Music, of all varieties, can be a thin place where we are drawn closer to the reality of God and encounter the presence of Holy Mystery in profound wonder and awe. This was certainly the case in the concert we experienced of Chris Botti, his combo and the SSO. I experience this rich beauty that nurtures mind, body and spirit in his music on CD and DVD as well.

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.

From Memories to Memoirs: an invitation to compose

Alex Nelson (Lalor Park NSW, PDD 20) is the Wellspring Spirituality & Worship Resource Person. In this article he outlines the central features of a memoir, invites us to contribute some memoirs, and offers us his own memoir.

Lapses of memory are a common experience for me these days, a condition that many of my peers share with some humour and without shame. Our lapses, more frequent on some days, often show up in forgetting to attend to daily tasks, perhaps due to preoccupation with other matters, fatigue or other conditions whose name I cannot remember just now.

Reminiscence, reverie and pondering are an expectable part of the territory for people like me in the final quarter of life. These activities can provide raw material for our memoirs. Some Wellspring Members and Friends may have found find themselves already in a habit of composing memoirs.

A memoir presents a trustworthy account of one or more significant time or event in its author's life. It is not a scientific report or analysis of one's life. And though it is not entirely preoccupied with detailed accuracy, a memoir is characterised by the author's intention to be truthful. For the purpose of composing our life, there is great value to be had in generating memoirs. In time, some authors draw a lifetime of memoirs into an autobiography.

Sometimes a memoir emerges from the experience of a significant time or event that stands out as so formative or transformative in our life us that we consider it to be worth telling. Our account usually recalls contexts and events that accompanied the transformation, identifies a turning point, and relates what happened next.

The significance of particular circumstances and events in our lifetime of experience is often not clear to us at the time when they occur. We may even choose to forget



Alex Nelson and Kate Scholl

about them. Yet memory of these events may return to our awareness, seeking our attention, offering to help us reach some self-understanding through personal reflection and trusting conversation. As well as helping to bring our personal lives into coherence, memoirs also serve a function in building up the life of a community. I recall the memoirs and thoughtful reflections that Anne McPherson and Peter Millar offered to Wellspring, as well as Peter's ongoing Reflections. Perhaps Wellspring members and Friends are aware of how their own memoirs continue this mutual edification.

Memoirs include themes of our encountering amazing grace, of waking up to a call to take action and bear the consequences, of leaving our first home of faith to become a lifelong pilgrim. Reconciliation and healing, being surprised by joy, God's beauty and our own, also appear alongside memoirs of gaining wisdom, expressing gratitude, celebration, and wonder. Regrets and retrieval, second chances, the "Stations of the Cross" and resurrection are also familiar themes of memoir.

For people of faith, in whatever shape it is currently, a memoir can be expected to touch down in some theological reflection that connects

our life with the One who always embraces us.

Our memoirs may be carried within a poem, song, prayer or reflective writing. Or, perhaps we may give it form through some artwork or craft. One person's memoir may remind us of an exquisite embroidered silk purse; another's may have the feel of a carefully secured safety deposit box, or another's may be like a fishing net that already holds a catch but has room for more. Each author or artist will give a name to their memoir that best suits this composition of their life.

I hope that Members and Friends of Wellspring will find this invitation to compose a memoir something that is welcome and enjoyable. Pipeline is a friendly place where memoirs may become available to others. I realise that sometimes it is difficult to get started with composing a memoir, and to stop thereafter. However, a small trustworthy group, listening to each other's memoirs responsively and without judgement, may facilitate a transition from memories to memoirs.

The memoir that follows is about a particular turning point for me while a Catholic priest during the years following Vatican Council II. It tells a story of some meetings and reflects on their significance for my life. A few years ago, a version of this memoir appeared in *The Swag, Newsletter of the National Council of Priests*.

The woman in the market

In August 1975, I was thirty four years old and had been ordained for eleven years. After ordination I had worked in three Sydney parishes, and having completed a part-time BA Honours in Psychology at Macquarie University I was appointed chaplain to its students and staff. In that year, the Pax

Romana International Movement of Catholic Students held a conference in Chosica, Peru, in the Andean hills about 50 kilometres from Lima. Along with some student delegates from Australia, I participated as Chaplain to the Tertiary Catholic Federation of Australia in an intensive month long meeting with students, chaplains and intellectuals from Europe, Africa, North and South America and Asia.

The meeting proved to be a challenging exposure for me. Experts and articulate student delegates delivered, in Spanish, French and English, economic, cultural and political analyses of their national and global situations. I was drawn into levels of social analysis and theological reflection different and deeper than what I usually brought to my reflection on life in the light of the Gospel. Gustavo Gutierrez called us to see social reality through the eyes of the Latin American poor and to live a theology of Liberation. I heard Sri Lankan Oblate priest, Tissa Balassuriya, assert that Asia is the Fourth World, structurally poorer than even the Third World of Latin America. South African Dominican priest Albert Nolan and his student colleagues spoke of their struggles for social justice in the context of Apartheid. Participating through translation in the formal presentations and group processes, I found that, day after day, both my global awareness and my faith was being interrupted and questioned. On all sides, in informal conversations with the many students and chaplains, I heard of their courage and persistence in resisting injustice. My awareness and experiences of struggles for justice in Australia seemed insignificant in comparison with theirs.

By the end of August, I had become physically exhausted and emotionally drained. I felt angry and frustrated at hearing how various forms of systematic violence directed worldwide towards the poor and those

who worked with them for justice despite danger. Filled with admiration for the faith, passion and bravery of both young and older delegates, I was sad to end some friendships then and there because to keep in further contact with them on their return home would carry for them an element of risk. I felt enriched to have met so many beautiful, courageous and hopeful companions on this journey and was proud to be part of this Catholic church that sided with people pushed to the edges. At the end of the meeting, I decided to take a short holiday break in Peru before returning to work at Macquarie University. So, along with some other delegates I travelled by train to Cuzco en route to Machu Picchu.

On the day after our arrival in Cuzco, having adjusted somewhat to the effects of its altitude, in the late afternoon I went wandering through the markets. The buzz, the colour, and the atmosphere captured my attention; dozens of women and children dressed in traditional clothes were buying and selling food, clothing, and artefacts. It seemed like a perfect opportunity for me to buy some small gifts for family and friends in Australia. As usual, I found myself spending time mostly looking without buying. But, as evening approached and it became clear that the market would soon close, I began to buy some gifts. My last stop was at a space on the cobbled stones where a solitary woman had for sale some cloths woven from alpaca wool. She was packing up her unsold wares when I arrived. One particular piece of her cloth caught my eye. It was about three metres long and twelve centimetres wide. Woven from Alpaca wool, with black, creamy white and brown threads weaving in and through the fabric's patterns, it looked to me like a perfect stole. I could just see myself wearing it at the Eucharist. Using gestures and a few words of Spanish, I asked to see it and placed it on my shoulders,

noticing that for a stole it was a little bit longer than I would usually wear. Nevertheless, I was delighted by the strong hairy, woolly feel of the cloth and decided that I would buy it. I imagined that whenever I would wear it, I would carry my memories of the people of Latin America and express some solidarity with their struggles.

At that moment, the thought occurred to me that markets are places where tourists and traders usually haggle to reach a suitable price. Everyone knows it's like a game that buyers and sellers alike enjoy, I told myself. So, with a friendly intention and turning to my dictionary to supplement my Spanish vocabulary, I asked the woman how much the cloth would cost me. I supposed that she would expect me to challenge the price that she asked, so I did. A few exchanges occurred between us, with me turning aside to search for words and numbers, feeling quite excited by this cultural experience of engaging with a Peruvian woman to buy her beautiful weaving. When I was satisfied that I had probably gained a bargain, I fished in my pocket for the required amount of money. She placed the cloth in my hand and I placed the money in hers. The smile of delight on my face froze when I looked at her face. There was no look of joy or satisfaction there. Only a look of immense weariness and resignation in her eyes. I was thoroughly shaken and asked myself, "What is going on here?"

Then I realized that, because I was more intent on playing this game, making sure from my dictionary that I was using the right word, during the whole exchange I had not looked into her eyes to see what was happening for her. As I placed the money in her hand, I had at last looked into her eyes to discover from them that I had paid her a price that was too low. I had cheated the woman in the market. She had not been in a position to insist on more and so had settled for what I thought was a good price for both

of us. My heart sank. For four weeks I had been hearing about worldwide systemic processes that take advantage of the poor. I had felt furious that transnational companies set their prices with poor producers to suit themselves. In this moment, I realized that my inattention to the woman's face had made the bargaining for her one more experience of being exploited. My shame left me stunned, wordless, tears in my eyes, unable to say or do anything.

I wanted to return the cloth, leave all my money with her and run away as fast as I could. She continued to pack up her goods quietly, and after a moment I wandered away in a state of bewilderment. The cloth weighed heavy in my hands and on my soul.

I said to myself that I would never wear the stole at Mass; that I would not benefit from my haggling, that I would give it away to someone of purer heart. The stole that promised

delight had become a garment of shame that I could not bear to wear.

In later years, on several occasions I tried to give it away to someone newly ordained. But I found that I could not lay this burden on another's shoulders, and I realized that somehow it was important for me to wear it sometimes, to remind me of this experience of having my unseeing eyes opened. In the years that followed, I began to see in this encounter with the woman in the Cuzco market an interruption to my life, a waking up that had opened my eyes and left me sensitised and vulnerable. The cloth, which still has a place in my wardrobe, has become a reminder for me to look with care into the eyes and the life of those whom I encounter.

As I reflect on this memoir, I realize that my meetings with the delegates in Chosica and my encounter with the woman in the market in Cuzco both challenged me in subsequent

post-Vatican II years to look beyond my acquired cognitive constructions and assumptions about experience. As a priest I had been educated to consult the "dictionaries", codes and manuals of practice so that I would know what is expected of me and of others, what is allowed or not, and what is erroneous.

As new circumstances continued to interrupt my life and called me into question, I came to rely less on the "dictionaries" that claimed to express the meaning and value of what people experience. As best I could, I tried more and more to learn to encounter with my eyes open those whom I met, vulnerable to their pain and mine and energised by the beauty and vitality in each person, relying on them to reveal to me the true meaning of their lives.

And in time, I began to see my own face and to know what message of vulnerability and dignity that it held for me. That led to some other experiences and the memoirs that followed.

Eighteen Years: a Memoir

Geoff Stevenson (Old Toongabbie NSW, PDD 20), Alex Nelson, and Jim Tulip (Woodford NSW, PDD 3) has lunch recently. Among many other issues, they discussed memoirs and Geoff decided to be the first to respond to Alex's challenge.



Geoff Stevenson

I've recently completed 18 years as the minister of a Uniting Church congregation in Northmead, Sydney. Leaving a church after being the minister for many years is a strange experience. I have been deeply embedded in the community of faith and the community surrounding the church; walking away is hard and

strange. For a time after I left, I had no home, no place to belong in God's Church. When others change their work arrangements they keep their church and social networks, unless there is a significant geographical shift. I had no congregation lined up to follow on from Northmead and had no place to call home. The people I grew close to and shared intimate life with through the crises and significant events were still there but I couldn't belong there anymore. On one Sunday after a short break away, my wife went back to church but I was not able to and felt lost.

It is strange to be a minister in the church. Sometimes you are put on a pedestal and treated like the hero who will save the flagging fortunes of this people who have fallen on hard times.

Sometimes you are misunderstood and met with confusion as you are experienced as an ordinary person with family and the related stresses and roles of life. When they look carefully the people recognise the ordinary and normal in you and are surprised that you aren't the superior, spiritual guru who floats through life like a levitating yogi.

So it is with a strange uncertainty that I ponder 18 years of sharing ministry in this one, ordinary little place in western Sydney. How does one sum up time in a church? Could it be like the CEO of an organisation looking over the successes of his/her leadership? Does one point to the numbers and try to find some meaning in statistics? How does one speak of 18 years, a smallish chunk in the life

Northmead Uniting Church



Spirituality ~ Healing ~ Justice

of a church? Perhaps it is more akin to Tim Winton's Cloudstreet where we journey with people through a period of their lives as they share together in the rambling old house in Cloud Street, Perth. It lives and breathes with them, holding their secrets, their joys and pains within its walls. Maybe that is the story we tell and others will make of it what they will as story engages other stories of our lives interpreting and illuminating one another.

Certainly there was a place, a space, a building. Some of the building was old, almost as old as the congregation's 93 years. A group of Methodists met in Northmead in 1922 and began a church. This property was purchased and a church built in 1929. Two larger churches eventually replaced each preceding one but the earliest two remain as part of the whole complex. One couple celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary with a service in the newer church and an afternoon tea in the hall. They pointed out that they met in the oldest part of the hall, were married in the newer part (which was the second church) and celebrated 60 years in the third church. Others who have lived through the life and history of this congregation brought the stories of Northmead: orange orchards on Hammer's Farm and surrounds, picnics and play by Toongabbie Creek. The church as the centre of the community, with socials, worship, Sunday School and a range of activities that gave people a sense of belonging and a place to be together, entertained and to receive spiritual nurture.

This building holds the memory of people as they remember and recount the significant events of their lives. 'My father built this church, with the help of some other men.' 'We were married here and my children were baptised here.' 'My wife was buried from here and I remarried here.' There are the times of crisis when people embraced news of ill health or impending death, when worship was hard and being part of this group tough. We cried together and laughed together. We had fights and arguments as all good families do – and we held our secrets. We gossiped and frustrated one another with our mis-understandings and lack of sensitivity or willingness to listen. We also welcomed people on the verge of cracking up; people who were lost and didn't know where to go, what to do. We watched several women go through the trauma of breast cancer and receive the extreme treatments with patience and grace. Some survived and a couple eventually succumbed. We puzzled over why prayer didn't seem to work in the way would like or seemed to remember being taught. Sometimes there was inexplicable grace that seemed to transcend everything and we knew God in the profound moment that overwhelmed us.

We celebrated life and death, the passing of milestones, the rise and decline of people as they journeyed through their lives. Some shared for a short time or dropped in irregularly. Others rode the whole journey through – well this segment of it, my journey with this people. We

journeyed towards the mysterious 'Promised Land,' an ongoing journey in the Spirit's grace. We distracted ourselves as one does on trips, visiting side roads in the hope of something new or different or better than we knew. But always we came back to the track, the narrow way that is hard to see through the chaos that surrounds it or the glare of the road most travelled.

We learned to pray on this road and in praying learned that God is God in the midst of everything. There is the sacred and holy everywhere we look – if we have eyes to see or ears to hear. I discovered that the minister is one who disciplines themselves to look and see and point out the sacred in the midst of life. We help people hold the moments of sacred wonder in joy and pain and name the Holy Presence in and beyond and around us. This is a wondrous and special gift I received. I sat in homes, in hospitals, in church pews, under trees, in a men's shed, in the local high school principal's office, in music groups... and I heard people talk of life, their life. Simple ordinary lives imbued with God's touch and made beautiful in their rough or gentle or humble or profound reality – wonderful stories filled my ears.

Stories and music, along with poetry, art, craft and the creativity of human life was the true currency of truth. These things carried a deeper, richer vein of God's word than the rhetoric of creedal or doctrinal belief that so characterises so much of the church's being. We had those who adhered to creedal truth and who felt themselves literal believers, beautiful people who took their faith very seriously. There were others who prided themselves on a liberal bent that questioned everything and scoffed at 'simplistic nonsense,' as they saw it. All of us were guilty of being judgemental at times, not truly hearing or respecting the other. There were disagreements and posturing but there were also

cracks that emerged when things happened. The cracks appeared in the theological rigidity and certainty with which people expressed belief. There was one young man, the son of a dear family who have shared the Northmead journey a long time and all of their son's life. He was returning home from a trip with a mate and his plane was brought down by a missile from Russian Separatists over the Ukraine last July. This sent shockwaves through the church and wider community. Terrorism bit hard in our little community and touched us personally.

Such events break open the faith questions. The certainty of life and belief cracks open at the wailing and tears, at the immensity of grief and pain and of a family brought to their knees in bewildering pain and grief. How could we ever be the same? How could we engage God in the same way? But how would we negotiate our way through this chaos? I discovered my role amidst the people and with the people, not alone but as a leader sharing leadership. There were public conversations and services and private conversations. There were prayers but how does one pray when all is dark and simplistic answers and prayers won't do? Prayer descended into silence as we held each other, especially this dear family, in love, simple love. It had no words but sometimes flowed through tears and sometimes smiles or hugs or music or poetic words. Sometimes we shared the anger and rage at whoever, whatever, and sometimes God.

“Prayer descended into silence as we held each other”

Faith changed, deepened and morphed into something less intellectual and more trusting in the mystery that we call God. We wrestled with truth but unless it flowed into life's reality and was enacted, it felt something

less than we needed. Something was missing when faith was belief rather than trust.

As we engaged more deeply with the Bible we were confronted by the strong sense of justice that flows through its pages. 'Justice,' it is said, 'is what love looks like in public.' As we engaged more with people beyond the church, especially in situations that were hard and unfair, our hearts were moved.

Asylum seekers came into our lives and touched us. Their stories brought tears and disbelief – and anger! We felt small and insignificant but joined in activities that raised awareness and lobbied politicians. We held picnics and activities involving asylum seekers and embraced a congregation with a specific mission to support Tamil asylum seekers. Justice came home and our worship changed gently over time, as did our prayers, our attitudes and our responses to the daily news. The stories moved us and the Spirit entered our experience to open our eyes and hearts and minds and align us with the long arc of the moral universe bending toward justice. We learned that God is love and those who live in love, live in God and love looks like justice towards the most vulnerable people.

Our local Hills Special School taught us a deeper way of being human as we laughed and lived alongside children and young people who live with a variety of intellectual and physical disabilities. They touched our hearts and moved us, befriended us and taught us a deeper human story, one born in love and community.

I discovered along the way that conversation was a critical part of life and ministry and a good conversation was the essence of pastoral engagement and offered the space for personal reflection and spiritual awareness and growth. The creating of space for all the experiences of life to be shared

and reflected on is a gift and the place where the Spirit engages us deeply. I reflect on the beauty and wonder of these experiences where so many beautiful moments were shared. I also realise that the way different cultures (ethnic and otherwise) and different age groups gather around their shared experiences and life stories is different.

Time, place, food, structure and form of engagement are elements that vary as different types of people enter into these intensely life-giving moments through the ritual of worship and conversation. In common with many other churches I recognise that I/we didn't always create the right space for the variety of groups to enter into conversation space and engage in spiritually deep experiences that are meaningful and significant for their culture and personal need.

Music, atmosphere, food and form of engagement are deeply, profoundly different across the spectrum of people and I learned that we need to listen to people's needs and passions and allow them to help us find the way, their way. It is humbling and life-giving to stop being in control and to learn to trust people – and God – to create the future and share the journey.

The 18 years of deep engagement into this community was very special. Schools, sporting clubs, musical activities, social groups, other organisations seeking a common good were all places where I found life and community, where I grew and changed through shared life and story.

Over meals or coffee, one to one or in groups, we shared and told stories, we grew and changed and God was in our midst. The buildings, the church, Cottage, hall and men's shed, all hold these stories and the community in their walls. The large crowd of witnesses forms the silent audience that reminds us of being part of the continual pilgrim people of faith in this sacred place and sojourning community.

A Tale From The West.

In recent issues we have been engaging with various friends of Wellspring. Here Phillis Dolling (Erskine WA, Day 6) shares some the interesting times she has shared with John.



Phillis Dolling

In our 80th year, we live in a rental Seniors' Village in Mandurah, a seaside city 70km south of Perth. The Peel region includes Pinjarra, a thriving inland town, the scene of a tragic massacre' of indigenous people. The Noongar people play an important role in the cultural life and festivals of Mandurah.

We had met at the Congregational Youth Fellowship socials. We partnered each other to Modern School and Wesley College school dances and balls. When Bob Hawke went to Oxford, John became the President of the WA Congregational Youth Fellowship. We were both involved in camps, conferences, and many meetings.

In 1958, we travelled north to John's new banking job in Derby. We sailed in the coastal State ship, Koolinda, on her farewell voyage, a party in every port! She had been a cattle/sheep ship, a hospital ship during WWII, a real, working asset for the State & now to be scrapped!! We returned south on the new ship, Koolama, in 1960 by which time we had become a family of four. It was a memorable trip because ploughed into a storm from Geraldton to Fremantle in 1960.

On our return to Perth, we lived first in Leederville and then in Floreat Park. At this time we added two more children to the family. John gained

promotion in the bank and over time managed many suburban branches. I attended to the home, made the children's clothing, assisted with the P&C at the primary school, ran a children's sport taxi service. In time I returned to teaching

We worshipped at the Forum Methodist church until Union came in 1977.

We stayed in Floreat for 21 years before John was transferred to the country - to Albany - on the south coast!! We were sorry to leave caring neighbours who were our good friends and remain so to this day. As a farmer's daughter, I was happy to be in a rural setting - a country city! We were fortunate to have had the family farm at Wubin for holidays during the school years. All our children, at some time in their married lives; have lived in the country! Our grandchildren have known the freedom of space, of unscheduled time (except for the call of mealtimes and outings!)

In 1988, John resigned from banking after 34 years. He answered the call of God to serve the Uniting Church. He was invited to Perth Wesley and



Phillis and John at last service in Broome.

trained as a Lay Pastor, having been a Lay Preacher since 16 years of age. After three years in the city, he answered the call to ministry in Port Hedland and so we were back in the North. It had taken 37 years.

The parish work was demanding as involvement in the community grew. When the Processing and Detention Centre opened John began visiting as a JP, witnessing documents, and as a



John at wedding at Fortescue Falls, near Tom Price WA

pastor. A Sunday gathering for new Christians was started which led to over 40 baptisms and 30 weddings. Baptisms took place in the church, at Pretty Pool a tidal ocean pool close to the Centre, and in the Centre dining room. At the manse, we hosted the 'other party' being married. I was witness to many of the weddings. These were held in the dining room; always decorated with flowers grown

in the Centre! The reception tables looked wonderful! As did all the brides and guests!

In 1995, with the help of George, the builder, I planned a new manse that was completed early in 1996. We lived there for a few months before packing up to move to Wagin, sheep country in the South West! .

John retired from Wagin at the end

of 2000. We loved our home in Mandurah, but he had 8 more years 'On Supply' to Broome/Derby, Port Hedland, Katanning and district, Esperance, Cannington, Armadale/Byford, and Mandurah churches. As Friends of Frontier Services, we conducted 25 special Annual Services at suburban Uniting churches during 2010/11.

Special Places

In the foreword to this year's Prayer Diary, I encouraged readers to send me a photo of places that are 'spiritually charged in some way – your own 'thin place.' Jeannie Walker (North Sydney NSW, PDD 23) offers these comments.



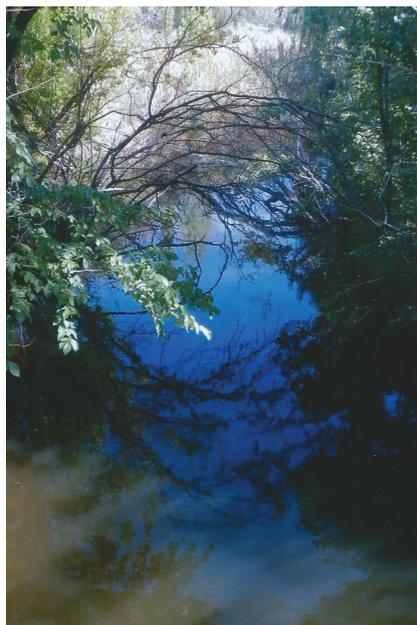
Jeannie Walker

Our jacarandas are in full bloom each January. They arrive, regularly, at the beginning of November which is also the time of my birthday. As I walk along the road it is like walking through a purple-domed cathedral. People come from all over to experience this phenomenon. In July, the trees turn a thick green and by September they are golden before changing to purple in November – all very liturgical.

St Clement's Retreat & Conference Centre at Galong, just off Burley Griffin Way between Yass and Harden NSW, is another special place. This tranquil, picturesque setting is so conducive to reflection, prayer and study. I love going there. It is a 'spiritual home' for marden. The tiny cherub is tucked in a tiny garden. The other photo is at the creek at the bridge in St Clements. In my imagination, I see a crown of thorns made by the branches.



Right: Jacarandas in full bloom.



Above left: A tranquil creek flows under the bridge at St Clements.



Above right: A cherub is tucked away in a tiny garden.

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NEXT ISSUE: December 2015.

Editor: Neil Holm neil.holm.wellspring@gmail.com, phone 07 3372 2562.

Deadline for material is Monday 2 November, 2015. Contributions on any topic are welcome.