

LEADER'S LETTER

Alex Scutt (Day 22)

As we come to the end of another year, I hope that you are all well amidst the pressing challenges that our world and nation faces, and that you have managed to stay healthy and hopeful over whatever period of isolation and lockdown you have been facing. I hope too that despite the disappointing result of COP26, your passion for climate justice remains strong. Over the two weeks of the COP26 meeting in Glasgow I have been following Kathy Galloway's blog "From the dear green place". Kathy is a former leader of the Iona Community, a writer and a practical theologian who has worked in the field of international relations for many years and known to many of you. She is a minister of the Church of Scotland and lives in Glasgow. Each day of the COP26 summit she has written powerfully from first-hand experience.

Last Saturday (13 November 2021) day fourteen of the summit,

The gavel has fallen, and two weeks of mostly polite but sometimes ferocious and often shameful wrangling, of sustained and passionate protest and a sometimes festival-like celebration of life ...are over. The visitors have departed exhausted, the city has had its buildings and streets handed back, and life in Glasgow can go back to normal. Or can it?

The outcome of all of this effort and expectation is what is to be known as The Glasgow Climate Pact. There is

general agreement that this is a weak deal, though how bad it is depends on where you view it from.

She goes on to say that despite a mention of fossil fuels, and especially coal, and even if all the promises and pledges are carried out, it is not enough and the world is still on a pathway to a warming temperature of 2.5C—"quite literally a death sentence" for millions already suffering catastrophic impacts of climate change and which will be catastrophic for endangered species of every kind and render large parts of the globe uninhabitable".

She quotes from Mohammed Adow, of Power Shift Africa and former Head of Global Policy and Advocacy on Climate Change for Christian Aid, who summed up the reaction from the global south by saying that the summit has been "a triumph of diplomacy over real substance and that the outcome here reflects a COP held in the rich world and which contains the priorities of the rich world". Adow says that while the global south is leaving empty handed on loss and damage, "we are morally stronger and hopeful that we can sustain the momentum in the coming year to deliver meaningful support [to those] who are dealing with the irreversible impacts of climate change created by the polluting world who are failing to take responsibility."

From an Australian perspective, Ray Minniecon, a Kabi Kabi and Gureng Gureng Senior Traditional Owner and Anglican priest in Sydney, represented

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the Indigenous Peoples Organisation in Glasgow. He too has shared daily news from COP26. He writes of it as a tragedy:

Can you be shocked and not surprised at the same time? It's one thing to hear the term 'climate colonialism' and it's another to see and feel it up close. It literally oozes here out of every plenary, every action room, nearly every side event and is propagated by governments, [and] corporations.

He sees this COP as not only a continuation of the violence against First Nations Peoples and a continuation of the “almost complete marginalisation of our voices, as bad as that is,” but that the tragedy is also that First Nations People hold the wisdom and solutions if only non-Indigenous voices, government and large corporations would “lower their voices, step back, and allow us to have a seat at the table and lead”. He goes on to speak of the space in a crowded pavilion provided to his First Nations brothers and sisters at the Glasgow summit – “a space so tiny and cramped but so emblematic [of] the marginalisation and disrespect awarded to First Nations voices”. In this tiny room, he writes,

“...harrowing story after story of dispossession, colonisation, desecration of Country is told. The stories are the same all over the world. Climate change and its impacts on our homeland, on our mother earth is genocide for our people.”

He pointed out that the Australia pavilion showcases mining giants Fortescue and Santos and not a single Aboriginal voice is seen or heard. “It’s not an international climate negotiation, it’s a trade show.”

Ray believes that this COP is primarily a failure of Indigenous participation.

Until this is fixed, a safe climate won't be achieved. No new data, better

science, more deft negotiations will achieve...what First Nations people have learnt about the protection of our Country and passed generation after generation[sic] since the beginning of time.

For COP27 Minniecon plans to organise not an Indigenous pavilion in a small corner of a huge venue, but a First Nations Embassy “so that finally, and in the nick of time, First Nations wisdom and solutions cannot be ignored”.



Brooke Prentis, the CEO of Common Grace and a descendant of the Wakka-Wakka peoples writes of Australia’s “abysmal ranking on the latest annual Climate Change Performance Index”. She points out that among more than sixty nations and the European Union, Australia ranks 55th overall... and “dead last” on climate policy according to international rankings. She writes of how the traditional ceremonies of the Anangu people of Central Australia are now often impossible to conduct simply because the land has become too hot, and how the people of the Torres Strait are living with sea-level rise and aggressive storm surges which damage homes and contaminates gardens with salt water. She continues,

When the government says that its approach is the “Australian way,” I think of how, for thousands of years, “the way” in these lands now called Australia was to live in harmony with Country.

She says that it is heartbreaking to hear of a way that refuses to accept limits, prioritises greed and growth, that wilfully ignores the suffering of the

most vulnerable. It is a way, she says, which cares little for the generations yet to come, but yet is being referred to as “the Australian way”.

Our troubled planet’s journey around the Sun has once again brought us to that part of the Christian year where we wait in earnest hope for the coming of the Saviour of the nations. A full four weeks of Advent this year allows us time to prepare, to reflect and to pray. As I write, I am taking full advantage of some enforced downtime from paid employment to fully prepare the music to be sung over Advent and especially Christmas. The ancient hymn from the fourth century teacher and musician Ambrose of Milan, “Come thou Saviour of the Nations” has been set to music over the centuries in ways that allow it to be sung as a reflective quiet hope for the Saviour of the nations to come, or as a strong, heartfelt, earnest prayer and desire – along with the prophets throughout the ages – for the saviour of the world to bring about a realm of justice and peace. Above all, the disappointments of COP26, boil down to a failure of the rich to listen and to act. Yet Mary the mother of the Lord makes the audacious claim that in God’s reign of justice and peace the rich will be sent empty away.

Kathy Galloway’s blog says that after two weeks of intense engagement with COP26 it will take her a while to process what it all means. From among her immediate reactions she recalls COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009 which was generally agreed to have been a political and environmental disaster and that its impact on climate campaigning across the world was one of huge, if temporary, demoralisation. As for COP26 she says, “I do not think that will be the case this time.”

She points out that we are now, much more than we were in 2009, in a time of reckoning for the costs and consequences of empire, and for the west’s role in colonialism and neo-colonialism, including its impacts on the global commons.

In the Black Lives Matter’ and the ‘Me Too’ movements, in many

countries across the world, in the plight of the planet itself, we are being held to account, not for but by our sins! Those of us living in rich western countries are required to recognise and name our privilege, which for many of us is also white privilege and class privilege, which has pushed the world to its planetary limits.

The forces ranged against achieving a just outcome among 197 countries, are immense, and have been in evidence, however subtly or 'green-washed' over the last fortnight. Political power has enormous potential for transformational change, but only by the mobilisation of women and men, and particularly the young, most affected by climate change, poverty, inequality, in protest, resistance and challenge. Is this possible? Perhaps. For sure, in the face of a market economy which bombards us every day with the message that value is always extrinsic, and that nothing has value in and for itself, only for what it can be sold for, it will require of us in wealthy countries much greater attention to alternative spiritualities for resistance, insistence and persistence, spiritualities for justice.

For me, as for Kathy and for all of you, the Christian way—which makes the audacious claim that in Jesus that God has become human, born into a world in turmoil where the forces which ranged against achieving a just outcome for the poor, the occupied and the oppressed were immense—is one—and absolutely must be—one of those alternative ways: a spirituality of justice, of “resistance, insistence, and persistence”. The need for this to be so is as real now as it was for the first followers of the Way, and more so because the survival of our planet is at stake.

I break the flow for just a moment to remark that this edition of Pipeline represents the beginning of Wellspring Community Inc operating under the new rules for membership which I outlined last in the last issue: everyone who renews is being asked to agree that they are in broad agreement with the Rule of the Community and

to choose one of two things, “In 2022 I will seek to live by the Rule,” or “In 2022 I will seek to be guided by the Rule as a highly worthy goal.” To those who have decided not to renew this year, I record my gratitude to you for your contribution to Wellspring and wish you well for all your future endeavours. In due course I will be writing to each of you individually.



To all of you, may the season of Advent and Christmas bring you joy and that in the coming of the Saviour of the nations you will find the will and the courage to be resistant, insistent and persistent in the way you live on this earth. Those three qualities have been the mark of Wellspring’s expression of the Christian way since its inception thirty years ago and more, treading in the footsteps of those resistant, insistent and persistent saints, known and unknown, who have gone before us – Columba, Aidan, St Hilda, Mary McKillop, the countless saints among our First Nations Christians – who have opened for us new ways of walking more gently on this earth. These are qualities which have certainly been in abundant evidence among all of you in this past year and which, I have no doubt, will continue unabated into the future. With every blessing.

Alexander Scutt

Leader

16 November 2021.

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Experiencing Incarnation...

Geoff Stevenson (Day 20)

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:1-5)

These opening words of John’s Gospel are quite profound, echoed elsewhere in the New Testament and linking back to Genesis 1. I have tended, over recent years, to use this passage on Christmas Day. It creates the big picture, a broad sweep of history, well beyond humans and our self-obsessed, anthropocentric sense of history. In the beginning all things were made in and through this Trinity of Love.

My journey into a bigger, broader sense of incarnation began in the experience of disillusionment with the simplistic and reductionist nature of Christmas – both the literalisms of Church and secular economics of the wider society. Where had the wonder and mystery of ‘childhood Christmas’ gone? Was it real or make believe? Was there a message for the world in this simple story?

I suppose that as a child there is a mystery and wonder, superimposed with Santa Claus, gifts, parties, lights, tinsel and trees, Christmas music and holidays. I have, for some time, felt a disconnect between these cultural



realities and the story we celebrate. Moving beyond literal understandings of the story(s) into the experience of Christ in the midst of everything has pushed me into this different place. I often feel a sense of both the fun and frustration of the cultural traditions around Christmas. Beneath all of this I sense there is a deep yearning in the psyche of people for something of substance, something that touches a deeper reality in their lives. As we approach Christmas, I sense there is a real seeking, much of this subconscious. People love Carols by Candlelight and to hear the story through song and, perhaps readings. There is a greater awareness around peace, love, hope, togetherness, giving/charity... In the lights and gatherings, the sharing of food and celebrating, greetings and cards, gifts and more kindness. For a season there is an open awareness of something deeper, something spiritual, something hopeful! By Boxing Day, though, we have moved on to the next thing, a test cricket match or yacht race, New Year's Eve and New Year resolutions. The moment of opening, of hope, of awareness passes and people miss the story, the meaning, the deeper reality of life – Christ in our midst, everywhere and every moment!



I have been journeying with Franciscan Spirituality for a while now – mainly through Richard Rohr. In that tradition, Incarnation is the essence of creation. God is present in the created order, material, physical reality. God, as Trinity, is a relational community of love where the flow of love is a Divine Dance of self-emptying love towards the other. Three Persons are drawn into a unity of being and relationship that overflows in creative love and the creation of the material universe in all its miraculous beauty and wonder.

This is the essence of John 1, where we are overwhelmed by the simple statement that everything came to be through this Word that also ultimately becomes flesh, the deepest revelation of what God is like and inviting the world into deep relational love, inclusive community, peace and justice.



Each day, our dog, Nico, and I wander the tracks and paths along Toongabbie Creek, usually ending up at the Dog Park. Through bush, with bird-song and flowering gums, and other natives, a gentle breeze, black snakes and water dragons in season. Through summer the cicadas sing up a treat and the gums shade us from the sun's heat. There are eels and

fish in the creek, and we climb over rocks as the water flows past. These early morning wanderings are filled with wonder and as God feels close, I breathe more deeply and there is prayer – through images, feelings, 'being' and beyond words. I connect into the raw wonder and beauty of the created world through photography. Looking through the camera, studying the subject and working out how to give it life and reflect its spirit through an image, connects me with it. I begin to encounter the Christ in all things and there is awe and wonder!

In this Pipeline edition, we explore together some of the experiences of God's Presence, Incarnation, in the world. For some this is the experience of nature, wilderness, beauty, poetry... For others it is about active faith through justice and reconciliation, caring for the Earth or working with people of other faiths and backgrounds. As we read and ponder, let us prepare for the celebration of Incarnation at Christmas and be more aware of God's Presence through our lives each moment.

Attraction and love at the heart of the Universe and the Incarnation

Michael Hillier (Day 14)

In this article, I would like to explore incarnation in a slightly different way. It was 13.8 billion years ago, in an age named *Deep Time* that an explosion of unimaginable power, size and force took place that we now know as the 'Big Bang'. Our Universe and more specifically for us, our planet Earth, are at the pointy end of that drama of so long ago.

With unimaginable speed and blinding light that tiniest piece of matter expanded in all directions filling the space, that was created with swirling gases and eventually tiny particles of matter.

And then, if that were not both miraculous and amazing in itself, something even more miraculous

began to happen. Those tiniest of particles, filling that ever-growing space, found themselves attracted to each other. Slowly, bit by bit, down through succeeding billions of years, these forming, growing, lumps of bare rock and gases continued to increase in size, eventually forming suns and planets and galaxies. Billions of them. All based on attraction.

About 4.5 billion years ago our planet Earth began to form, eventually reaching the size it is today through gathering up, drawing to itself, more and more particles of dust and matter. A molten ball, in the freezing conditions of space, its surface began to rapidly cool forming the crust as we know it with its super-heated core that occasionally vents



in volcanic activity even today. It has all been made possible by this *Law of Attraction* (With thanks to Richard Rohr whose book *The Universal Christ* first suggested some of these thoughts to me).

The Evolving Law of Attraction

And now, here we are today, as humans, having evolved at about one minute to midnight, and that *Law of Attraction* has continued to evolve in new ways and grown into something we call 'love' that draws people together into friendship and that oneness and commitment we call Marriage.

Along this path of friendship and going deeper again, love leading to marriage, there have been small, but important steps in that evolving Law of Attraction. The early 20th-century anthropologist, Margaret Mead, was once asked when she thought civilisation had begun. Her response was: when a femur was found that had healed. For that meant that someone, or some small group, had protected and fed this person, whilst their broken femur slowly healed. This



attraction that began with particles was evolving into something new – care and friendship and even love.

Much, much later this would evolve into chivalric love, courtly love, in the 11th and 12th centuries of the present millennia. And love continues to evolve today.

The love you have for your spouse, whether living or departed, for your children and your friends, has come on a long, long, journey from those first two tiny particles of inert matter, 13.8 billion years ago. And yet it is based on the same principle. We can see in this, not just the growth of physical matter, of particles attracted to each other, but the attraction of evolving spiritual and emotional development that complements and deepens it.

Isn't all that truly, truly wondrous and miraculous!

Jesus, love and its opposite

In response to a question, Jesus gave us the *Two Great Commandments* (Mark 12.28-34). Originally based on separate verses and ideas in the Old Testament, it is not certain whether they had been brought together by the time of Jesus. No matter; He does. We are to love God with our whole being, to love our neighbour, and then the important rider – as we love ourselves. That is something that is sometimes forgotten. It is loving ourselves in a healthy, not egocentric way. Narcissistic self-love is not intended.

Contrast that statement with the words that come just before it (Mark 12.13-17). This is about payment to Caesar: 'Whose head on the coin is it? We delight in Jesus quick, sharp response. It could lead to discussions about the secular and religious sides of life, even the profane and sacred if we accepted that division; the place of religion in life, and of politics in religion. I don't wish to go there. I want to stay with my theme of attraction and love that binds the physical universe and humans together.

That vignette of 'payment to Caesar' and the way it is slyly put, with its intention of catching Jesus out, grates doesn't it? It is everything but attraction and love. It speaks of malice and underneath that, fear. Jesus has been turning their world upside down, with power and moral authority moving away from these religious leaders. A new world was coming into being. A world with love at its basis.

Without love, what is life's meaning?

Many today would see that idea of love at the core of the universe as it has evolved and come to be, as silly, even childish: 'You have your little fantasies, while we get on with living in the real world and dealing with the real problems that we face. The world is a hard, scrabble place where the unworldly get run over. Sometimes by a bus.'

So let me ask a question: If so, what then is the meaning of life? Or in particular, what's the meaning of your life? Why are you here on earth? What is the purpose of your life? Is it simply to make money? Is it simply to perpetuate the human race with children? Are we simply here waiting for death to visit us? Get it over with? To move from the personal to the big picture: What is the meaning of the Incarnation?

I would suggest that Jesus' response to the Scribe with the *Two Great Commandments* is an intellectually satisfying answer to the meaning

of life for it goes to the heart of the Universe as it has unfolded. (And who knows what new and deeper forms of attraction and love God has in mind for us as we take the next steps! Beyond our imagination!) And whether it be the Universe as it is unfolding, God reaching out through the women and men of the Hebrew Bible, the coming of Jesus at a particular time and place, or the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst through the generations, in all this we are seeing the Incarnation lived out with our eyes.

Our response

So, on this path, what is the next step that you and I can take that expresses a response to that which seems to lie at the heart of the Universe: this physical, emotional and spiritual that we name as attraction and love?

I think one response is profound *gratitude*. Gratitude to God, the Universe itself, each other, those who have gone before us. Find ways to express that gratitude. Express it in your prayers to God, express it in words to family and friends and even strangers. Express it in grace before meals for the food you are about to eat that comes from the earth. Write it as a letter to your spouse or someone else, living or departed, as gratitude for all they have been in your life. Have a thankful attitude to life, no matter what.

Truly I believe that attraction and love lie at the heart of our Universe as our love for God, our neighbour and ourselves. Truly I believe we see God's love for us expressed in creation itself, and the Father reaching out to us in the life of Jesus and His death for us on that Cross and the resurrection that follows. A love so great that it willingly made the ultimate sacrifice; a love so great that it continues to transform our world through the power of the Holy Spirit given us at Pentecost. Truly God's Incarnation is alive and active in our midst.

The God Tree

Gladys Pagendam (Day 16)

One Good Friday, while out walking I came upon this tree:

I immediately saw God in the white tree standing tall and proud, smooth, pure, and quite glorious. The darker tree, safe within the white tree's arms, is upheld by them. Close up the black tree looks like a leper by comparison, all rough lumpy bark and spiky branches. I felt it represented me, and I felt the embrace of God through it. I was totally upheld and gathered into an embrace by two strong arms, Father and Son. The Holy Spirit, that more ethereal aspect of God, while not visible, was also there, pulsing through the vigorous life-giving force of my God Tree. We are One in HIM, the trees seemed to whisper. As if awed by the wonder of this thought the branches of the black 'me' tree are outstretched in praise, and gratitude and I felt this praise and gratitude pour into me. I could not be sorrowful on this day of remembrance.

As I reflect now on the Crucifixion, there is joy and thankfulness in the crucifixion whereby I am swept up into the loving arms of God. I am



thankful for all God gave us in His first incarnation – namely, his work of creation, through which he had spoken to me. Then I remembered all he gave us in His second incarnation – the birth, life and death of Jesus. The God Tree spoke to me of Reconciliation – a totally joyful aspect of the Crucifixion.

The purpose of Jesus was to lead us to the Father. The trees reminded me I am reconciled to God simply, and in a childlike way – embraced, as his beloved child.

Making the Path Straight.

Neil Holm (Day 26)

*Prepare the way of the Lord
in the wilderness;
make a straight highway for our God
(Is 40:3)*

I have just spent four days walking in Carnarvon Gorge National Park, 720km north-west of Brisbane. I am so pleased that someone (many someones!) made a way through this magnificent wilderness. The main gorge track is hardly straight. There are numerous twists and turns. The track to Big Bend requires 18 creek crossings.

On either side of the main track magnificent sandstone cliffs reach toward heaven. The lush vegetation along the main track and in the side gorges includes cycads growing to four metres, Carnarvon fan palms, flowering shrubs (including native hibiscus that I grow at home but had never seen in its own habitat), mosses, and ferns (including the rare King fern).

For me, walking the track through this wilderness was a deeply spiritual experience. Someone had made a way through this splendid, majestic wilderness that became a highway to encounter "our God".



Those of us who have some knowledge of Isaiah 40 will know that the ordinary understanding of its context concerns the exile to Babylon where they are separated by a wilderness, a desert, from Jerusalem. Thus, the highway is the great highway by which the people will return to Jerusalem. However, a second interpretation of the passage draws on another Isaiah chapter:

water will gush in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
7 the parched ground will become a
pool of water,
and the thirsty land springs of water.
In the haunt of jackals, in their lairs,
there will be grass, reeds, and
papyrus.
8 A road will be there and a way;
it will be called the Holy Way.
(35:6-8 HCSV)



A track, prepared for me, led me through a wilderness whose streams bubbled and chattered, pools of clear water, the haunt of pretty-faced wallabies, echidnas, and even platypus. The track was there and it was a Holy Way that spoke to the desert of my life.

Water lies at the heart of Carnarvon. It shapes the landscape but it does more. A tiny rivulet, perhaps 10 cm wide and 5 or 6 cm deep, bubbled and carved its way through the rock, not in a straight line, turning left then right and at each bend hollowing out a tiny pool with a rusty coloured bed, then cascading over a ledge to become a miniature waterfall, and then repeating the pattern several times before joining a larger stream. These sights and sounds created by the “living water” evoked Biblical memories. “Living water” flows, it is clean and fresh, it is cleansing, it is life-giving. Bathing in “living water” was part of the ritual purification process. The sound and sight of the living water and the artistry of its course shaped and sanctified me.

And then I lifted my eyes to the hills, to the mighty sandstone bluffs, to the massive cliffs rising vertically from the gorge floor. I imagined God tenderly placing me in one of the narrow clefts in the sheer face as God’s glory passed by (Exodus 33:22).

I walked 10 km to Cathedral Cave on Sunday. In the cool morning, surrounded by lush vegetation, I could hear the hymn of thousands of birds. My soul soared. Arriving, without preplanning at 8.30, the time of my normal worship time at St Hugh’s Inala, I connected empathically with those worshipping at home.

The sacred beauty of the cave, appropriately named Cathedral Cave, was powerful. This vast white sandstone cave was palpably sacred.



As with most great cathedrals, in a mystical way the prayers, invocations, hymns, sacramental acts, and the devotion of the people somehow lingers in the space for generations. I was conscious of the Bidjara and Karingbal who occupied this ceremonial space for over 3,500 years. This sense deepened as I looked more closely at the stencil art covering various parts of the cave. Although drawn by the experience, I realised it was not part of my tradition. Although welcome, I was an outsider.

The ancient Biblical reference to Melchizedek, King of Salem, came to mind. As Abram passed through his own valley, he met this mysterious king. This “outsider” blessed Abram who then gave him a tenth of everything. I felt blessed by the Bidjara and Karingbal and I honoured them.

I wonder if, in a manner reminiscent of Abram, God uses Aboriginal people regarded by many as “outsiders”, to bless all Australian people? Is contemporary Aboriginal music, dance, cinema, sport, art, respect of country, the Uluru Statement from the Heart, just to name a few, changing the Australian psyche? Will the Australian Christian church remain an alien body in this strange land until we allow emerging Aboriginal Christian leaders to bless us as together we plant a life-changing church in Australian soil?



Incarnated Truths 1

WHERE ARE MY EYES?

Deborah Ruiz-Wall (Day 27)

Dancing eyes, listening eyes, eyes that travel
 Across time to seize roots, foresee a future,
 Slanty round eyes, hybrid mixed blessing,
 Oriental, occidental, physical, metaphysical
 Belonging to nothing of consequence,
 Inheriting consciousness with no fixed address.

Old script on the wane, climate a-changing,
 Transmigration reigning, border-crossing,
 Asylum seeking, escaping the futility of war
 From leaky boats seeking greener pastures
 Or, simply catching a breath of life.

Where are my eyes?

Transmogrified into ears, my head
 Tuned to the ground to watch out
 For cyber bombs birthing virtual reality.

Where are my eyes?

Swallowed by self-introspection,
 Seeing fallen leaves, feeling alienated,
 Lives lost at random in endemic times.

Where are my eyes?

Absorbed by bee-sipping nectar,
 In the tiniest of fibre, in refracted trees
 Mirrored In my lakeside, in the crystal of bubbles,
 In the clouds sketching uncanny, diverse
 Feathery shapes, nuanced with subtle greys
 Exploding into vivid colours.

*I am not there to hide but to find
 Truths of depths that bring unease,
 I hear drops of torrential rain,
 Dream of dreams
 Of tomorrow awakening.*



Experience and Celebration of Incarnation

John Martin (Day 28)

How do we experience, embrace, and celebrate Incarnation in the everyday experience of life?

How many books and articles have been written, how many sermons have been preached on the birth of Jesus Christ and stories of the visitors, first the shepherds as recorded by Luke and then the Wise Men as recorded by Matthew?

How many have asked about the origins of the gifts brought by the wise ones? Gold, frankincense, and myrrh? Where did they come from and what would have been the working conditions of those responsible?

Gold

Most of us would have at least some gold in the form of rings and other jewellery. Valuable in ancient times it is still valuable today. Gold occurs



more often in the Bible than any other metal. Often it is coupled with silver which is usually named first and was once more valuable than gold.

The mysteriously located Ophir was probably the source of Gold mentioned in the Bible and thus likely to be source of the Magi's gold. With slavery so much a part of the Ancient Near East economy it is highly likely that slave labour was used in gold mining.

Gold is both ubiquitous and valuable. Think of the many Australian locations, now mostly ghost towns, where the discovery of gold created a frenzied rush of fortune seeking prospectors.

After agriculture, gold mining is the next largest employer of people with an estimated 100 million people relying on small scale mining to support their families.



Mining is one of the worst forms of Child Labour in the world.

‘High levels of poverty in small-scale mining communities mean children are often forced to work to help increase their family income. The International Labour Organisation lists mining as one of the worst forms of child labour because it is dangerous and demanding.’ (Fairtrade Foundation)

See this link for more information about Fairtrade gold

<https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/media-centre/blog/top-10-facts-about-fairtrade-gold/>

And this one for where to purchase Fairtrade gold in Australia.

<https://fairtradeanz.org/product/more-products>

Frankincense and Myrrh

Frankincense, also known as olibanum, comes from select trees in the Boswellia genus, and myrrh usually comes from Commiphora trees. The plants belong to the same botanical family and commonly grow on the Arabian Peninsula, in India, and in north-eastern Africa.

The sacred trees that produce Frankincense and Myrrh are almost impossible to grow outside of the Arabian Peninsula, which meant they were constantly in short supply and high demand. According to a famous Roman historian, the sap made the Arabians the richest people on earth by Jesus’s time, more valuable than gold.

It is probable, seeing the high value of frankincense and myrrh that those employed in the delicate task of producing them were better treated, at least than gold miners of the day.

As we reflect on and celebrate the incarnation of our Lord long ago, we also give gifts to the people we love.



What is the story behind the gifts?

What were the working conditions of the people who made these gifts? The experience of incarnation today.

One way to be sure that the gifts we give are ethically sourced is through the range of products in the Fair Trade Association Christmas Shopping Guide. Here is the link for you to peruse the range of gifts available from Fair Trade Association Members.

https://issuu.com/fairtradeassociation/docs/fair_trade_christmas_shopping_guide_2021_final

Acknowledgement: Wikipedia

Where Do I Experience Incarnation?

Lucy Jones (Day 25)

An unexpected phone call, a sense that God is here in our family life with all its joys and hardships brings heaven to us now. Picking up a grandchild, shopping for a friend, getting a meal or celebrating a milestone. Aware that we are all in this together and knowing that God is all and in all.

The Hymn by Christina Rossetti written in 1885, expresses this dimension at Christmas.

Love Came Down at Christmas

1. Love came down at Christmas,
love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas;
star and angels gave the sign.

2. Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, Love divine;
worship we our Jesus,
but wherewith for sacred sign?

3. Love shall be our token;
love be yours and love be mine;
love to God and others,
love for plea and gift and sign.

Celebrating the Incarnation: Christian Unity as a Gift from God Reflecting on Ut Unum Sint: the 25th Anniversary

Presentation to a theological reflection webinar of NSW Ecumenical Council 9 October 2021



By Doug Hewitt (Day 9)

Greetings to ecumenical friends, many of whom have been part of my journey over six decades. I speak to you from Awabakal lands in the Hunter and Lake Macquarie region of NSW, and I want to acknowledge the prior owners who have never ceded the land, and still await a Treaty with those who invaded and who continue to occupy stolen land. We pray for a national response to the cry of First Nations people for **Voice. Treaty. Truth.**

Thank you for the opportunity to share my reflections on the Theological Reflection Commission's volume *A Celebration of the 25th Anniversary of Ut Unum Sint*, published last year. I speak as a non-theologian, whose calling was in education, concluding with 25 years in what is now Australian Catholic University, responsible for leading academic staff development for the final 10 years.

This contribution benefits from a perspective of an ecumenical pilgrimage, on which it has been my privilege to journey for the past

60 years, beginning as a student in Armidale in 1959, through chairing the NSW Christian Youth Council in the mid-'60's, then my participation in the Australian Council of Churches national Commission on Overseas Aid and Refugee work (now called Act for Peace) for over 40 years, including being its chair for 12 years. I have gained immense benefits from great mentors over those 60 years, for which I thank God. Those decades concluded from the year 2000 in my work with the NSWEC, firstly as a staff member, and later Hon General Secretary from 2012 to 2014. To all



The Gift of Each Other
Learning From Other Christians

A Parish Workbook on Receptive Ecumenism
Published by the New South Wales Ecumenical Council
2013

my colleagues I offer appreciation.

In his Introduction to the E-book celebrating the 25th anniversary, Gerard Kelly draws attention to the Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II and reinforces the idea that *Ut Unum Sint* continues the work of the Second Vatican Council. He helpfully reminds us that ecumenical dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas but in the words of the encyclical is always **an exchange of gifts**. This theme of **unity as a gift** is one that I want to focus on in this presentation.

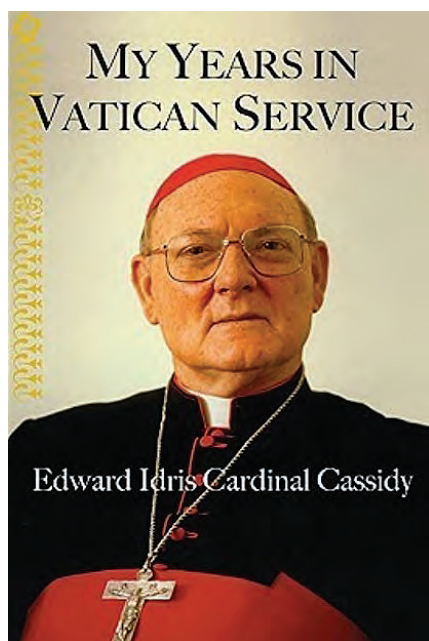
Prior to the release of *Ut Unum Sint*, the 7th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1991 produced the Canberra Statement entitled *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling*. It states "The Holy Spirit as promoter of Koinonia gives to those who are still divided the thirst and hunger for full communion. We remain restless until we grow together, according to the wish and prayer of Christ, that those who believe in Him may be one." WCC Canberra 1991. An earlier foundation had been laid by the 1982 Lima document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*, which had a significant outcome in this country with the introduction of a common certificate of Baptism, since used by many local churches, even though the other elements of that statement, such as a shared celebration of the Eucharist, still remain elusive. The 9th Assembly in Porto Allegre received another gift in the text *Called to Be the One Church*, which inspired progress in several of the Bi-lateral Dialogues then taking place in Australia.

Gerard Kelly also refers to other important contributions to the journey towards Christian unity, including the WCC paper *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, which was endorsed by the WCC 10th Assembly in 2013 in Busan. The Theological Reflection Commission was fortunate to host a seminar in Sydney in July 2013 with Dr Tamara Grdzeldze, from the Faith and Order Secretariat of the WCC, who explained the essence of this document, as "a gift for discerning the next steps towards visible unity." It has been a great joy to be present at three WCC Assemblies when such significant theological documents

have been presented, and opened up for discussion by the delegates. They have all inspired greater efforts from each of us to strive for the gift of unity for which Christ prayed.

-2-

I have always been inspired by biographies and autobiographies of great leaders (recently reading several written about the remarkable Angela Merkel, daughter of an East German pastor). They give great insight into prophetic leadership a quality that is sadly lacking in our contemporary public discourse in this country. How can we be so poorly served by our political leadership!



One ecumenical prophet who had a great vision of unity was an unassuming cardinal from our shores who was never as well-known as his peers. In his autobiography, *My Years in Vatican Service*, published in 2009, Australian-born Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council at the time of the release of *Ut Unum Sint*, reflects on the achievement of the encyclical and the journey which led to its release. The five years from his commencement in January 1990 to the publication of *Ut Unum Sint* in 1995 were extremely busy for Cardinal Cassidy, drafting and re-drafting the encyclical. He reminds us that in the

encyclical, Pope John Paul II writes that “the ecumenical edifice is built on three pillars: prayer, cooperation and dialogue.” He later writes that “Change of heart and holiness of life along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and can be rightly called ‘spiritual ecumenism.’” *Ut Unum Sint* 2

Cassidy further comments in his autobiography “during my years at the Pontifical Council, there was talk from time to time of a ‘winter of ecumenism.’ That was never my experience.” He further states “the eleven years I spent at the Pontifical Council were the best of my life.” This was after a career as a Vatican diplomat for more than 30 years, representing the Holy See in countries as diverse as Southern Africa, Latin America and five different Asian countries. Not bad for a boy from Bankstown, who in his teen years accompanied his friend to the Methodist scripture classes at Parramatta High School, because they were not as boring as the Catholic scripture!

In retirement in Newcastle, until his death last year at 96, he often reminisced about his life’s experiences. He welcomed a ride home after ecumenical gatherings, and frequently spoke about his joy of meeting representatives from many churches when they visited the Vatican, and his delight of staying with generous hosts at places like at Lambeth Palace with Archbishop George Carey and his successors, as well as once attending an ashes cricket test at Nottingham with Geoffrey Wainwright, from the Methodist World Council. He confessed that as expected they cheered for different teams!

In *My Years in Vatican Service*, Cardinal Cassidy writes that although it is true that our divisions are the result of human weakness and sin, and that God will not bring about unity without our efforts, that strong desire

for unity will not be achieved by our own efforts alone, but is a gift from God. He writes of a period early in his time at the Vatican, when there seemed to be a standstill in relations with other churches, and he had the task of preparing a homily on the Gospel account of the disciples fishing all night without success. We recall that Jesus appeared and instructed Peter to “put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” Despite Peter’s protestations that they had fished all night and caught nothing, Jesus was insistent. So, Peter reluctantly followed the command of the master, and we know the result. Cassidy writes: “I suddenly realised that what the Lord was asking me to do was to let down the nets, and leave the rest to the Lord. From then on I was able to carry on the task entrusted to me without being overly concerned about the results. Of course, I was eager to have a great ‘catch,’ but that was the Lord’s to grant in due time.” P. 126. In conclusion, Cassidy paints a positive future for the ecumenical endeavour, which he certainly conveyed to us in Newcastle, when he spoke publicly on occasions such as the service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. He always remained positive about the **gift that unity offers to us all**.

May I take a minute to urge that serious attention be given to “receptive ecumenism,” a term which I am sure is familiar to you all. Following a visit to Australia for two months in 2012 by Professor

Paul Murray of Durham, the NSWEC published in 2013 the excellent study guide “*The Gift of Each Other: Learning from Other Christians*.” This book was launched at Polding Centre by the two Archbishops of Sydney, Cardinal George Pell and Dr Glenn Davies, in a mutually collegial event. At the launch Dr Gideon Goosen, the editor, described how people from across the churches were invited to tell their own stories of what they had

learned from members of churches other than their own. These accounts are used to provoke questions for group discussion on the lessons we can take for our own local ecumenical dialogues.

Finally, as the World Council of Churches prepares for its 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe Germany in 2022, it is important to keep pace with the stimulating theological writing on unity in journals such as *The Ecumenical Review*, from the World Council of Churches. My recent reading has focused on articles such as that by Rev Dr Susan Durber, the current Moderator of the Faith and Order (F & O) Commission of the WCC. The theme of the coming Assembly is “Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity,” the first time Durber points out, that that the theme puts ‘Love’ at the heart of an Assembly. It will take another paper to tease out the implications that this decision has for the emphasis on the life at the coming Assembly, and even more challenging for the Faith and Order Commission to grapple with this theme’s implications for its work. For example, Durber asks whether in contrast with traditional emphasis on the intellectual pursuit of rational thought in the Commission which she chairs, is it possible for ‘love’ to sit easily with the maintenance of ‘order’ within the church?

Can this be a turning point in work of the ecumenical movement? The F & O Commission has been hosting a series of webinars on Koinonia and Visible Unity with speakers giving different perspectives on the responses from WCC member churches to the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. In these webinars Dr Durber has been joined by fellow members of the F & O Commission from Canada and the United States as they react to the subdued reaction, with fewer from the Global North than from emerging vibrant churches in the Global South. Dr John Gibault

declared that the future of gift of unity lies in grappling with the impact of poverty, racism and climate change on the survival of humanity.

Dr Durber’s conclusion in her article challenges us to transform our usual approach to theological study. She asks: “What could it mean to discover anew an ecumenical movement that is founded on love, profoundly moved and inspired by love, and unafraid to talk about love? What could it mean to renew ecumenism so that it finds new shapes, forms and styles in

more holistic ways, embracing all of body mind and heart?” Durber takes heart that at her ordination into the United Reformed Church in the UK she had to promise “to cherish love towards all other churches, and to endeavour always to build up the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.” I am encouraged that such thinking is now at the forefront of the leadership in the WCC’s theological study. If we can capture this thinking in our Australian churches then the hope promised by *Ut Unum Sint* may be realised.



Doug Hewitt, General Secretary of NSW Ecumenical Council, Cardinal George Pell, Anglican Archbishop Glenn Davies and Fr Shenouda Mansour, President NSWEC, at the book launch

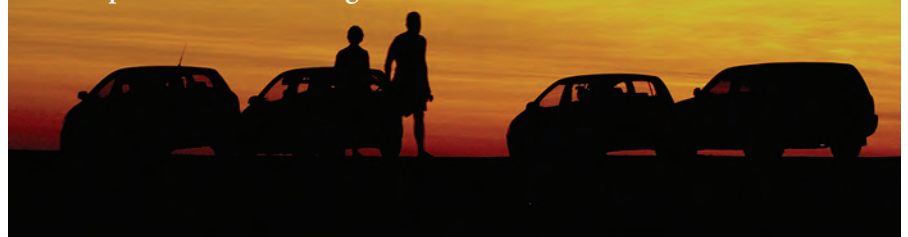
Incarnated Truths 2 - STAR FAR AND NEAR Deborah Ruiz-Wall

Fractured star
Swallowed by the black hole
In a galaxy some light-years away.
Old life dies, new life creeps in.
Mysteries fold and unfold.
The gulf, wide and deep
And YOU, just a breath away.

A moment captures mutual sentiments,
No beginning...no end,
Flora and fauna speak a common tongue
But humans make aliens of themselves
In this planet, our common ground.

People doing time,
Prisoners of their minds,
What new knowledge they explore!

At the edge of non-existence,
The world turns grey in the light,
But a faint flame flicker from afar
Offers a sliver of hope
for all of us, journeying souls!





An Advent Message For Today

Col Jennings (Day 3)

The visit Pat and I made to Trieste in Italy was mainly to investigate their health system and explore their social enterprises. Having some spare time we walked along the promenade by the crystal clear aqua waters and arrived at the Miramare Castle. It was surrounded by beautiful grounds where people picnicked and strolled through the gardens. On return in 2013 I was determined to paint the castle. (Below)



It wasn't until a year or so ago I became aware that one of my favourite mystics or prophets originally came from Munich in Germany. He had spent most of his life in Trieste with his loving Greek wife from 1837 to 1877. Until his final seven years

Gottfried Mayerhofer worked as an artist and musician, but gradually developed a strong interest in the spiritual life and the natural world. In March 1870 he heard the Lord's voice and from November 22nd. 1871 he began recording fifty-three sermons which are now available in print and on-line as *'The Sermons of the Lord'*. Sermon One is for the *First Sunday in Advent* and begins with a reading from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 21, verses 25 and 26.)

In many ways this Sermon and the Gospel reading are particularly relevant to what we see happening in the world at this moment.

'And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men and women's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.'

Jesus, speaking through Mayerhofer, says in Sermon One, what happened in Jerusalem back during His first Pilgrimage, is happening again today.

It has already begun with exactly the same symptoms as at that time. 'War and uprisings, the persecution of My followers, fear of the future and all kinds of diseases. The wind of spiritual freedom is also blowing today, penetrating all human hearts. The human rights that have been disrespected for so long need to be respected and no longer be trampled underfoot by just one class of people – the more powerful.'

We are called to respect human dignity, to build up our spiritual lives, to be moderate in all things and we will find that love and mercy will overcome all even over the 'smoking ruins of worldly splendour and battlefields where matter has been defeated, but the spirit liberated.'

In the last Sermon, number 53 of *'The Sermons of the Lord'*, Jesus reminds us to love one another, for the world was created out of love. Out of love the world is being purified and we are told; as even the spiritual atmosphere is being 'cleansed from all the poisons, everything will be ready for a new, active life, just like the refreshed earth after a thunderstorm. Amen'

Incarnated Truths 3 - Creation

Deborah Ruiz-Wall

*Empty-handed we have arrived,
t'was a blessing, a gift
to come to be.*

*Out of the dark void,
the stark formless nothingness
was born a star,
its inkling, its vibration,
its tingling sensation
within the core of consciousness.*

*Look within and discover
eons and rays and inner glow.
Listen to Mother Nature's melodic
rhythm and rhyme
that will tickle your ears.
Feast on this unfathomable mystery
that only the soul can see.*



A Black Summer Changed Lives and Landscapes

Global warming has had a devastating effect on Australia through drought and fire. The question is what part has human activity played in changes to weather patterns? What impact can people of faith play in influencing better outcomes for the planet?

Australia has been described as a land of extremes. Devastating bushfires raged in South Eastern Australia, preceded by three years of severe drought. A meteorologist explained that as the air around the equator heated up, rain bearing low pressure systems were being pushed further south toward Antarctica. As the oceans warmed, the Australian land mass became increasingly dry - exposed to high temperatures, low humidity and low soil moisture. Rainfall came from occasional cyclones plus seasonal northern monsoons mostly around the coastline.

The black summer of 2019 – 2020 resulted in uncontrollable fire where



46 million acres burned, 3,500 homes were destroyed, 34 people died as a direct consequence, with 445 indirect deaths from smoke inhalation. Accompanied by gale force winds, embers spotted up to five kilometres ahead of the fire front, starting new blazes. Rural communities, farms and livestock were devastated with crops wiped out.

In January 2020, Canberra experienced the worst air quality index globally, severely endangering human health. Smoke from the summer bushfires reached Antarctica, New Zealand, Argentina and Chile.

The horror for me was not only seeing homes and lives destroyed, but observing three huge blazes between Sydney and the Blue Mountains join up to become a firestorm megafire.



Nearly three billion animals were killed or displaced, and birds ‘just dropped from the sky’ - causing a major extinction event. Survival for some animals was due to sharing underground wombat tunnels with other species in an effort to stay alive. The loss of habitat and food meant survivors were more vulnerable to predators like foxes and feral cats.

Has human activity or commercial interests influenced planetary climate change? Newcastle is the world’s largest exporter of thermal coal used for electricity generation, a major source of atmospheric pollution. According to local media, in 2019 a record 164.9 metric tonnes of coal was exported.

At one time, living near the river port of Newcastle at the mouth of the Hunter River, our health was affected by three coal loaders just upstream. Daily sweeping of the front porch resulted in a small mound of coal dust. The Hunter valley supports farming of cattle, dairy, sheep, grapes and horses yet also has 41 coal mines over an area of 450 square Kilometres. Open cut mining in the Upper Hunter valley is leaving a landscape described as a ‘moonscape’.

Increased exposure to fine particulate matter associated with open cut mining has aggravated respiratory disease with increased hospital admissions. Local ecumenical lobbying and protest prevented the installation of a fourth coal loader.

In 2010 as convener of the Hunter Social Justice committee I moved a motion at the Synod meeting of the Uniting Church NSW/ACT. It proposed that unless two banks, used by the Uniting Church, refrained from supporting new mining of fossil fuels

and invested in renewable energy, the church would withdraw funds. The motion was adopted, went on to the Assembly where it was also adopted. The banks complied!

An application to extend an open cut mine close to a regional centre, disturbing valuable soil and alluvial aquifers was opposed by our committee through Synod and government planners. Our activities included convening a climate change seminar involving experts, conducting an energy survey and supporting an ecumenical blockade of the harbor to draw attention to coal exports. The extension did not eventuate.



Currently, politicians are seeking ways to use the skills of miners in renewable energy and assist vulnerable communities to adapt. Development of a Hydrogen Technology cluster has been announced locally. Vast numbers of consumers have installed rooftop solar panels. A major bank stopped lending to the Port of Newcastle after adopting new policies that prohibit it from entering new finance deals for customers with significant exposure to fossil fuel.

Within Australia, five coal fired power stations will become uneconomic by 2025 due to pressure from investment in renewable energy.

The urgent issue of climate challenge can be addressed and people of faith can speak truth to power.

Helen Weavers

(I am an Associate of the Iona Community, been a volunteer in Iona, Council member for the Wellspring Community. Was a secretary, a registered nurse, part of an Intentional Interim Ministry team, an active lay preacher. Married to Keith with three sons and four grandchildren. Now living in Newcastle, Australia.)

Reconciliation and Refugees Update

Joy Connor - Wellspring Community
Contact person: Reconciliation and
Refugees area of concern

Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Prayer Vigil- know their names



Knowing another's name reminds us of our shared humanity. In September Wellspring members listened, learned and prayed with Common Grace and the families of some of those who had lost loved ones in custody. It was a moving and beautiful prayer vigil and we heard the names of those who had died. We learned that 10 Aboriginal people had died since March this year in custody and in police pursuits. Four hundred and seventy have died since 1991. Most could have been prevented if the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody of 30 years ago had been implemented. It breaks your heart to hear of such avoidable tragedy.

We were asked to learn the names and stories of 3 people who had died and to lament, act and pray for all involved in those incidents. Here are 3 to pray for: Anzac Sullivan Aged 37 yrs. died 18/3/2021 Broken Hill; Veronica Walker 37 yrs. died Victoria 2/1/2020; Sherry Fisher-Tilberoo 49 yrs. died Brisbane Watchhouse 10/9/2020. see <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/series/deaths-inside>

A Voice to Parliament-the focus of campaigning for the next election

The campaign to give Aboriginal people a voice that cannot be removed by successive governments, as outlined in the Uluru Statement from



the Heart, is the focus of Aboriginal organisations and their supporters in churches and the community for the next election. A Voice to Parliament is a body enshrined in the Constitution which would enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to provide advice to the Parliament on policies and projects that impact their lives. As mentioned in the last update it is worth writing to the Prime Minister at Parliament House Canberra 2600 and telling him you support this Constitutional Voice for Aboriginal people. Recent research shows one hard copy posted letter is worth 1,000 signatures on a petition in the assessment of public opinion.

Afghanistan

Wellspring added our name to the "Christians for Afghanistan" campaign and our leader Alex Scutt wrote to the government with our concerns as did many members.

This campaign has been an unprecedented demonstration of Christian unity and compassion as Christian Churches and organisations come together to petition our

government to provide refuge to people fleeing the chaos of Afghanistan. Groups as diverse as Catholic and Anglican Bishops, Pentecostal Pastors,

The Christian Lobby, Baptists, Uniting Churches and a plethora of church-based organisations have worked together and co-operated with the "Action for Afghanistan" team to present 200,000 signatures to Parliament. Replies have been received quite swiftly and although no new promises have been made the Prime Minister and Minister for Immigration are now talking of increasing the number of people from Afghanistan, to whom we offer refuge.

The petition is still open <https://www.unitedforafghanistan.com/?partner=Common%20Grace>

As we bring to mind the suffering of so many, a prayer from the Wellspring Prayer Diary of 2003-2004 holds us together:

"Loving God may your healing love flow out in renewing grace and compassion to our fellow wounded companions in the journey of life. "



Vale Margaret Lilian Holm

13th October 1944 - 23rd August 2021



Vale Margaret Lilian Holm (13th October 1944 - 23rd August 2021)

Written by Heather and David Eckersley on behalf of our Qld Wellspring Group. November 2021. (PDD Day 26)

Margaret Holm was the beloved leader of our Queensland Wellspring group. Margaret and Neil led us for many years in face to face gatherings and then pioneered us into the COVID reality of cyber connections. Margaret only relinquished that position in the early months of 2021. It became too difficult to coordinate activities to the exemplary standard she always held. So she wisely asked for help and John Martin has ably stepped up.

Margaret and Neil in Ian and Pam's home July 2019 preparing materials for the Wellspring National Gathering in Brisbane.

All members of our group loved and admired Margaret as a wise, gentle, non-confrontational leader who led by consensus.

John Martin described Margaret as passionate, creative and imaginative in the manner in which she approached issues, especially in contacts with politicians.

She was always welcoming and friendly. John received a great welcome when he moved to Queensland and to the group. I know she kept in contact with people such as John Graham who was unable to attend our meetings. Margaret made sure he always received snail mail of our activities. Recently Neil was able to visit John in person.

Margaret had a great concern for communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ, especially to school children. Margaret was a person of prayer. Not long before she died she shared with our group a 'prayer diary' which she had prepared for the local Anglican Congregation of which she and Neil were very active members. Margaret was also a great supporter in seeking justice for workers worldwide through Fair Trade.

Gladys Pagendam wanted to recognise Margaret's active church life and to say something about her 'outside' the church activities:

Margaret ran a book club at the local library and I joined. She made sure that each year there were books about the justice issues that fired her. So we read books about indigenous



issues, about refugees, environmental concerns, racial discrimination, difference, prison life, life in refugee camps, abuse of all kinds etc. The debate in our meetings was sometimes challenging and intense. I wish a similar sort of debate could happen in churches generally. I honestly feel that if every church had such a

book club, it would revolutionise and refresh churches with what is really important to God. Margaret allowed people to say exactly what they thought and felt, without judgement. When someone made a contentious point they were never bible bashed. She would sit quietly and reflect and then, rather than challenge that person confrontationally, she would quietly and lovingly ask a question. It usually began with "I wonder...." What followed would really turn the conversation upside down - all done without a hint of preachiness or churchiness. She and Neil (for they were a matching pair in this regard) really showed me, in non-church forums, that at the heart of God and the gospel is justice. This is what she took out into the world and it changed people's way of thinking. I can testify to that because it changed mine. Beside this, she was kind and gentle with everyone in book club. If people could not get there, they would be picked up. During Covid lockdowns she made sure everyone was able to Zoom. She made sure everyone was 'included' in the discussions. We loved her in that space and she has been mentioned at every book club meeting since she went to God.

Margaret did God's work at a macro and a micro level. I often wonder how many tough mindsets she cracked - thus forging a way for the light to get in.

Ingerid remembers Margaret with deep thankfulness for her constancy and faithfulness to all she committed herself to. She seemed to be able to throw herself wholly into multiple areas that required love and justice. Margaret was a thoughtful leader in the many communities of which she was an active part. She will remain an icon for me of how to walk The Way.

Ian and Pam Kerr recall Margaret with great fondness. Ian had the privilege of conducting Margaret's funeral. The

comments made in eulogies and more informal moments on that occasion showed how much Margaret's life made an impact upon such a variety of people, from children to politicians. Nor should it be forgotten the inspiration she received from her marriage to Neil and the family, and the love she brought to her family. We always found it a joy and inspiration to be in Margaret's company. She was warm and accepting, but impatient with injustice and complacency.

Margaret was both a dreamer and a realist. She was captivated by the life of Jesus and the dream of God's Kingdom coming on earth. But she also was aware God's Kingdom would not come only by our human efforts. And so prayer for the coming of God's Kingdom was integral in all Margaret's efforts. However, as the apostle Paul reminds us, Margaret's efforts were not in vain. Others have been inspired by her and their ministry too will be blessed.

While we should give thanks for Margaret's life, witness and unique tasks carried out, we should not forget Margaret's basic love and commitment to her Lord. In this year's Prayer Diary, Margaret's last prayer was not for herself or the tasks she had chosen. It was praise to God! To express that praise she chose Psalm 66. "Make a joyful noise to God, all

the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise.---All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name. --- Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me."

Doris Cornford endorsed what people have already written about Margaret. The Wellspring Community is a community "where spirituality and justice meet." Margaret embodied this. She was a passionate advocate for social justice. I was always impressed by the time she devoted to writing to those in authority about issues (local, national and international) where she saw justice being flouted or compromised. Not only would she write raising the issues but she would not be put off with trite responses. She would continue to pursue the matter.

Judy Krohn reflected that from the time she first met Margaret, she admired and marvelled at her dedication, determination about justice issues, ability to speak out fearlessly and lovingly.... and so much more. We were elders together at St. Lucia U.C. As heads of Colleges she shared her own special gifts and was greatly loved and respected. There are so many wonderful memories to treasure. I will always be grateful and thank God for her.

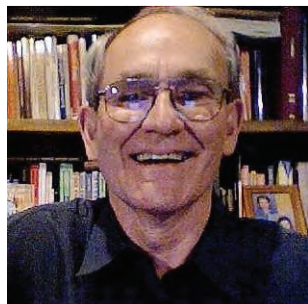
As you will see by all these heartfelt reflections, Margaret was esteemed greatly as an inspirational leader in our midst. She was also a person who was humble and filled with quiet dignity. Her courage to act and speak up for the marginalised and to support those suffering, spoke more loudly than mere words ever could. She was well known and loved and the local school children honoured her passing with many expressions of their appreciation.



Tributes on the Richlands East State School fence on the day of Margaret's funeral.

Her welcome and hospitality are legend. She seemed to us like an angel who could always reach out and make sure everyone was included and shown love. We, like many people she has touched, keenly miss her presence with us but recall with deep gratitude all the ways she shared herself and touched our lives. Her indomitable spirit will live on amongst us.

Threads of Living . . .



Alex Nelson (Day 20)

As I contemplate the new Year of Grace 2022, poised to start with the season of Advent, I am considering the work and play of weaving my life tapestry during 2019 – 2021. My

attention is drawn to some threads that, having appeared in those recent years, wait to have me appreciate their place of significance in my tapestry.

Throughout these years, threads of distress have emerged to claim attention in the life of people worldwide. My own experience of distress sounds to me like a lament. It voices some questions that have tumbled out - *How am I to live wisely and with care during this time? What am I to do in response to threads of suffering within Australia and all round the world that are calling for my attention?*

Neglect and indifference from governments continue towards the need that First Nations people worldwide have for empowerment and opportunity to construct a life where they have access to good health, education, work and a place in government to contribute leadership from their wisdom and spirituality. The familiar voices of appeal for change from Amnesty, Doctors without Borders, UNHCR, Water Aid, and Climate Council among many others have been joined by urgent calls for aid from growing

numbers of refugees. A thread that is seen to connect with diverse sufferings of many people is the worldwide cry for change through effective Climate Action.

The global effects that follow the emergence of the Covid 19 pandemic multiply for many people who while fearing infection and death, are also alarmed by restrictions to their cultural forms of support for dependent family and friends who face loss of income, experience isolation, anxiety and depression. Reports and rumours that vaccinations proposed as remedies also present dangers to health bring bewilderment to many. A vocabulary of harsh words has appeared in our conversations and public announcements – jab, lockdown, quarantine. Blame and shame for spreading the virus are assigned to suspected carriers who live in particular residential areas,

What am I to do? How are we to live with the anguish that our current experiences of suffering continue to evoke among us? This thread of distress reveals our vulnerability, and heightens our concern to preserve mental and physical health for us and those who depend on us. For some citizens, and notably among the elderly and the young, our concern for the common good expands to include ecological responsibility for all beings within our multiple environments. A sense of kinship with all beings in our planet raises challenges to the destructive effects that ensue from mining of fossil fuels. Our own bank accounts may show a regular trickle of our income that goes to support people in projects committed to meet increasing needs of people in many nations to survive starvation, find safe shelter from outbreaks of violence and civil unrest. Threads of care link our personal tapestries with those of our kin throughout the planet who call for help.

In March 2021, at Macquarie Singers we resumed choir rehearsals. Whether by Zoom or face to face, the company of singing together brought to me and others a hope of finding beauty

and relief in our time of isolation and suffering. Recovery after some medical treatment made it difficult for me to participate in person at rehearsals for some concerts even when that was permitted. However, weekly rehearsals by Zoom enabled me and others to join those who could meet in person, to share our hope to create a concert together.

At the first Zoom rehearsal, I was deeply touched to find that the Choir Director, Sarah Penicka Smith, had chosen the *Stabat Mater*, composed by Joseph Rheinberger, as a major piece in our next concert. This lengthy 13thC Latin poem portrays Mary, the sorrowing mother of Jesus, present during his crucifixion. I recalled from my study of Latin that the tense of the verb *Stabat* indicated her standing as a continuing action, waiting at the cross patiently. Though the death of her son would come only after some hours, Mary chose to remain there, standing by him for as long as his suffering would take. At his death, his body, taken from the cross was laid in her arms where she held him in the embrace of love named *Pieta*, the love a parent has for their child and a child for their parent.

Some decades earlier, Mary had held her son in her arms for the first time. That first embrace also came after a time of attentive waiting in hope during her pregnancy that called for a journey to comply with Roman regulations to register for a census. The birth and death of her son were times of transition, just as in every human life, that required her to accompany, protect and nourish him for as long as she was required.

Due to the pandemic, many children and their family members are still not able, for a variety of reasons, to be present with loved ones to express their *pieta* in times of birth, dying, marriage and other significant transitions. Lockdown, invoked as necessary to protect health, brought unexpected suffering to our populations worldwide, calling for all of us to stand by, suffering along with those we love, for as long as it would

take for some to recover, and others to succumb to the deadly virus.

Compassionate presence for ourselves and with others in our shared suffering is a thread of beauty that needs to be woven into our shared life tapestry for as long as it is needed. Our Mother Earth also sings in many voices, and with movements of dance to her Creator and to us her kin. She sings a *Kyrie eleison* – Lord, have mercy, in lament and in hope for relief from ongoing destruction. She shows her tear stained face to us who depend on her for life; she appeals to us to stand up together with her in compassionate presence to undertake action for climate change that changes our approach to our global family of all beings which continues to suffer, until sustaining relief arrives.

A new year of grace arrives in Advent as time for us to live in hope together and take action for change, for as long as it takes.

Appendices

In his Leader's Letter, Alex referred to two articles, one from Paster Ray Minniecon and the other from Brook Prentis. Below are the articles in full – worth reading in full!

10 NOVEMBER 2021
ACF DAILY NEWS FROM COP26

Climate Justice isn't a hashtag — First Nations leadership is the only way to a safe climate.



Pastor Ray Minniecon is a Kabi Kabi and Gureng Gureng Senior Traditional Owner from Australia — at COP26 with the Indigenous Peoples Organisation.

Can you be shocked and not surprised at the same time? It's one thing to hear the term 'climate colonialism' and it's another to see and feel it up close. It literally oozes here out of every plenary, every action room, nearly every side event and is propagated by governments, corporations, and I'm sorry to say — CANI members alike. The tragedy is not just the continued violence against First Nations Peoples at this COP — a continuation of the colonial project reinforced by the almost complete marginalisation of our voices, as bad as that is. It's walking around and seeing so many people working so hard to find a global solution to this existential problem, when First Nations People's hold the wisdom and solutions if only non-Indigenous voices, government, corporate and CANI alike would lower their voices, step back, and allow us to have a seat at the table and lead. My First Nations brothers and sisters occupy a crowded pavilion. A space so tiny and cramped but so emblematic of the marginalisation and disrespect awarded to First Nations Voices. In this tiny room, harrowing story after story of dispossession, colonisation, desecration of Country is told. The stories are the same all over the world. Climate change and its impacts on our homeland, on our mother earth is genocide for our people.

Our ancestors are in the air we breathe, the water we drink, the mountains, the animals, the trees. To destroy them is to destroy the memory of our ancestors. Our creation stories tell us how to look after Country as care takers, and our creator has a way of waking us up when we are doing wrong. This has been the case since Rio. We are still crying out to be heard, and white people wonder why more progress hasn't been made. For my people — the oldest continuous living culture in the world, 100,000 years of caring for Country is being destroyed less than 250 years.

The Australia pavilion showcases mining giants Fortescue and Santos. Not a single Aboriginal voice is seen or heard. Terra Nullius — the lie that Australia was uninhabited when invaded, is alive and well, and undermines our self determination just as it works to undermine the success of this COP. Australia's mantra is that faith in technology will save us. It's not an international climate negotiation, it's a trade show.

This COP is first and foremost a failure of Indigenous participation and until this is fixed, a safe climate won't be achieved. No new data, better science, more deft negotiations will achieve in time what First Nations people have learnt about the protection of our Country and passed generation after generation since the beginning of time.

Our issues, concerns and solutions have been completely sidelined and ignored. We demand a seat at the table. Climate action starts with climate justice — a Peace Treaty between First Nations and the coloniser also ends the war perpetuated against mother earth.

This is not about being anti-development. We don't subscribe to this 'white' binary choice. It's about the application of the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent underpinned by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It's multinational corporations that must shout for and justify a seat at the table. The same international governance and legal system that invaded and colonised First Nations Peoples across the world is playing out right here at this COP. Little has changed. No matter how hard you try, the solutions won't be found if the foundations for these negotiations are based on injustice, dispossession, colonisation and violence. COP is just living out colonisation in another form.

In Indigenous thinking and philosophy we walk backwards into

the future on the footprints of our ancestors, who have shown and taught us so we do the same things they have done for millennia. They show and teach us how to look after Country. We are in harmony with the earth and each other. Western science is flawed because it works to recreate the future based upon profit, greed and competition — the root causes of the trouble we are in now.

I came here so I know what must be done at COP27. I plan to organise not an Indigenous pavilion in a small corner of a huge venue, but a First Nations Embassy so that finally, and in the nick of time, First Nations wisdom and solutions cannot be ignored.

Too hot for ceremony: climate is fast changing for First Peoples and it's not our 'Australian way'

By Brooke Prentis

The Sydney Morning Herald

November 10, 2021

As an Aboriginal Christian leader, I've travelled widely across Australia's diverse and beautiful landscape. When I met the Anangu people in Central Australia, they told me of how traditional ceremonies that had been performed for millennia were now often impossible, simply because the land had become too hot. My brothers and sisters in the Torres Strait Islands tell me how the sea-level rise and more aggressive storm surges are already damaging homes, destroying infrastructure and contaminating gardens with salt water. This is climate change happening right here, right now, in Australia.



Kazuhiro Sagigim. 10, searches for crabs and shrimps on the shores of Thursday Island in the Torres Strait.

And yet now we learn, once again, of Australia's abysmal ranking on the latest annual Climate Change Performance Index. Among more than 60 nations and the European Union, Australia ranks 55th overall – and it comes dead last on climate policy – according to the ranking published by Germanwatch, the NewClimate Institute and the Climate Action Network. And overnight, the news from the Glasgow climate summit was alarming: even if nations meet their latest pledges to cut emissions by 2030, we're still headed for a catastrophic 2.4 degrees of global warming by 2100. Last week we had the more optimistic – though still disastrous – estimate of 1.8 to 1.9 degrees, but that was based on longer-term pledges.

The longer term is the Australian government's comfort zone. While it has committed at long last to net zero by 2050, it promises no extra emission cuts this decade. Australia

can wait, it seems. The Prime Minister says we will rely on technology, much of which is undiscovered, unproven or underdeveloped. The Morrison government defends fossil fuels while expecting business to drive down emissions without the kind of government incentives offered by other nations. Meanwhile, my people and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to go unheard.

Fears that COP's 1.5 degree climate goal may be slipping away

When the government says that its approach is the "Australian way", I think of how, for thousands of years, "the way" in these lands now called Australia was to live in harmony with Country. It is heartbreaking to hear a way that refuses to accept limits, that prioritises greed and growth, that wilfully ignores the suffering of the most vulnerable, and cares little for the generations yet to come is being referred to as "the Australian way".

The United States and New Zealand plan to cut emissions by half by 2030 relative to 2005. The EU pledges 55 per cent and Britain 68 per cent relative to 1990. Only Britain's pledge is sufficiently ambitious to align with the 1.5 degree target. But all vastly outstrip Australia's.

Australia has come to be regarded as a climate laggard. Its "technology first" mantra will do little to shift this reality. We must imagine a different way, one where the voices of the world's oldest living continuing cultures are listened to and acted upon.

Brooke Prentis is a descendant of the Wakka Wakka peoples and an Aboriginal Christian leader. She is the Aboriginal spokesperson for Common Grace and co-ordinator of the Grasstree Gathering.



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NEXT ISSUE: March 2022.

Pipeline Committee: Geoff Stevenson.

Deadline for material Friday March 11. You are invited to reflect on the theme suggested by Mark Hurst (Peace and Social Justice Contact). It comes from a line from Luke 19:42: *"If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!"* You are invited to share how you are working for peace and justice in your local area. An example – Mark and Mary Hurst are currently involved in a local issue involving Energy Australia wanting to construct a huge dam in their area as part of a pumped-hydro scheme. They're supporting their neighbours in questioning what this project entails and how it will affect our community.

You are encouraged to share about local endeavours for peace and justice that they you involved in.

Please email material for that edition to Geoff Stevenson geoffs81@gmail.com