

'Thoughts from the Gathering and more ...

A MORE MULTICULTURAL CHURCH. TOWARDS INCLUSIVENESS – FAR TO GO?

As a philosophy student pondering some great question, Katalina Tahaafe-Williams would often ask herself, 'What would Socrates say?' Later she was to realize an even greater question was, 'What would Jesus do?' The chasm between saying and doing was the sub-text of her keynote address at the National Gathering on the search for multicultural inclusivity in church life – and by implication in the membership and perspectives of the Wellspring Community.

It recalled my comment at the final evaluation session of the previous National Gathering, that in the last few days I had been living an anachronism: in Australia today an almost exclusively monocultural assembly was something of an oddity. For a Community grappling with contemporary issues we needed the presence of Australians of diverse cultural backgrounds and experience. As Katalina bravely asserted this year, it is an issue for our Churches too. The saying/doing gap lives on.

Few would know better than Katalina just how far we have to go to realize

the New Testament vision of church or Christian community. Inheriting her patriarchal Tongan culture but always seeking to bring it under the spotlight of Kingdom values, she had worked for years as executive secretary for racial justice and cross-cultural ministry with the United Reformed Church in the UK and now has a kindred role in the NSW Uniting Church Synod. In England she had compiled a monumental *Multicultural Ministry Toolkit* for the practical guidance of congregations and clergy.

In her Wellspring address Katalina identified nine critical issues to be tackled, and the processes and resources required for this. But space here only permits a thematic, maybe impressionistic account of her passionate addressing of these issues.

Probably the most basic of them is the challenge of hospitality towards people of other cultures: not on the grounds of a cloying paternalism but rather, from a sober acknowledgement of the often unhealthy power-relationships that still reflect our colonial origins. Most Westerners can't contemplate

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Blessings, written by those who attended the Blessings Workshop, are interspersed throughout this issue.

'A more multicultural church' continued

our racial sins and the legacy of white superiority that lives on, whether directed at asylum seekers or Indigenous people. Sadly the victims too often internalize their sense of inferiority, in the process damaging the credibility of the Faith among their own people. Jesus is still imagined as a white Anglo-Saxon clergyman! Yet globalisation has reversed the colonial penetration of the Third World to the point where in our age enclaves of such peoples are strewn throughout the Western world – mostly still to the West's economic benefit. Many are Christians with much to give - and gain - from cross-cultural links with mainline Churches. However, this depends on an openness to mutuality by both sides.

As far back as 1986 the Uniting Church Assembly declared the UCA to be a multicultural Church, a bold step not yet emulated by other denominations. The words were beautiful, but a Church that claims to be multi-cultural must take justice and non-discrimination seriously. Proof of this would be seen in the actual distribution of power and resources within the Church.

In an ageing Church, the transfer of power to newer generations drawn from diverse cultures - and all overlaid with the local youth sub-culture - may well prove to be the acid test. This would imply profound changes across the board: a more open and adventurous leadership style, more sensitive ways of communicating, more generous place for young people, a youth-friendly visual environment, and more inclusive forms of worship. 'We need to find ways to be together more often, so that we can listen to each other and foster a more collaborative spirit across cultures and generations, so that the leaders don't talk all the time. We all need to become more skilled in negotiating the cultural mindsets, styles and attitudes that we all bring unwittingly to the task'. It must start with recognition!



Katalina presenting her paper

Many ethnic people are surprised that here in Australia there seems to be no need for loyalty to values, even among Christians, but everything is eternally in the melting-pot. 'This is not Christian, it's media-driven and we are suckers to fall for it, entrenched as we are in our fashionable mindset, forever evolving'.

But some will say, 'We don't have any ethnic people in our congregation'. Well might we ask, 'Why not? They're all around us in the society'. Others may point out the need to value our own [Western] culture. But may this actually amount to worshipping our own culture while devaluing others? 'Many of our traditions are life-giving

and may result from the work of the Holy Spirit in earlier generations. We need to reclaim what is beautiful and intrinsic to our being. The call of God is to all cultures'.

Indeed, in their life and culture all our churches should be models of God's Kingdom. But while ever one culture predominates it dominates. In Australian multicultural churches power and decision-making remain firmly in Western hands. Yet to deny the equality of cultural backgrounds and gender is to deny the Holy Spirit, who in every society seeks to build the multicultural community of Christ, as a foretaste of the future that God is calling all of us into.

This thread of universality runs through all Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, concentrically expanding from the tabernacle and the synagogue to the ministry of Jesus, the journeyings of Paul, the worldwide household of faith, culminating in the heavenly vision of the vast multicultural throng gathered before the Throne, when God shall be all in all. Universality is in the DNA of the Church!

'See, I am making all things new.' And what about Wellspring?

Jim Houston

[A copy of Katalina's talk will appear on the Wellspring website in mid-June.]



Sunday eucharist – David Sloane, Jenny Johnston, Norma Brown, Jane Pitman, Peter Fensham and Jeannie Walker

Letter from the Leader

- A PLACE WORTH GOING TO?

The recent Gathering was a wonderful time for meeting and sharing once again. Jill and I were delighted to meet up with people we had visited 'in the field.' We meet with people we know by name, pray for each day, and now see face to face. It is a joy and inspiration to share our lives and concerns with others, as those who are fortunate enough to be in a cell group know.



Gathering together again at beautiful Greenhills Conference Centre

Following the Gathering in 2007 a discussion guide was made available for use by groups or individuals offering four different reflections on Building Community - two by Kathy Galloway, one by Jonathon Inkpin and one by Alex Nelson. I received some feedback where part of the materials was used but I am not sure all reflections were used. Many of us feel we have been building community all our lives and have tried all aspects, some with success, some without. We can still reflect on these thoughts. I recall a young woman who had not attended a church for some time presenting herself at a service. After it was over she said, 'But I have heard all that before!' So have we - so why do we continue to go? Why do we read the Scriptures again and again? If we wish to build up our groups with new people we must have a process at our gatherings/cells that brings people in to share the challenges they have in living their 'lives to the full.'

Because some of us know one another through church associations we forget to listen to the quieter ones and

give them time to speak, or even to incorporate some of their suggestions into our activities from time to time. Having guest speakers or activities all the time does not always allow for deepening our sharing, for reviewing our life for the past month or two in order to move forward.

To quote Alex Nelson: 'Animating communities operates from a conviction that people can learn to transform the world in which they live, by discovering what holds them back from living a full life both as individuals and as members of a community. Community animating involves someone encouraging people in a community to continually learn to live together with, for example, more dignity, freedom, compassion, effectiveness, grace, wisdom. The encouragement can simply come through conversation or through the use of art, drama or music.'

'Animation is a way of living or being in the world, rather than a job.... A community can be a place where we

do this listening to each other so that we can discover how to proceed with our life and work as a community.'

A number of people have commented that they believe a cell group is where we share what we are already being or doing and seeking advice about possible activity etc. All matters brought to the group by participants are not for discussion but to allow a person to reflect aloud on where they're at. Advice is only given if requested. Also, future topics for discussion or action can arise from such individual reflections. This means everyone may not be heard at every meeting but with a few pertinent questions priority can be set and a designated time given for each review. Any subject is relevant.

Jonathon Inkpin's reflection offered an alternative to communities of relevance, popularity and power. He offered communities of consecration - celebrating the wholeness of life including failure and loss; communities that resists all that is false, unloving and evil; and communities seeking hope.



Three cheers for the intrepid Western Australian contingent who once again made the long journey across the country! Back row: Alison Atkinson-Phillips, Cherry Miners, Betty Matthews, Janelle Macgregor, John Dolling; Front row: Lee Edwards, Julie Smout, Ailsa Maley, Phillis Dolling and Janet Watts.

'Letter from the Leader' continued . . .

'Perhaps this is part of Wellspring's distinctive contribution to our lives. Many may find faith, and support for faith in other places, and love, more naturally, in the immediate people and places around us. Where, however, do we find hope and fellow-bearers of hope? Where do we find fresh balance, welcome surprise and new visions for ourselves and our land... Where if not in a community which exists for the building and consecration of other communities, a network of connection for fellow spiritual resisters, and a pointer of hope to other sources of hope?'

These discussion papers are still available from the office or myself.

Mary Gilchrist.



The Gathering had so many wonderful aspects. I loved the way Trish Watts led the worship, especially using the outdoor chapel, and Norma Brown the eucharist, and the input of the various visitors, especially the younger variety!

It was particularly special to have the broad focus on Indigenous contributors, all of whom inspired me in different ways.

Jenny Johnston



I will miss you my friend when we depart this place. May the wisdom of God guide you, the love of Christ surround you, may the Spirit inspire and empower you, until we gather again.

Peggy Goldsmith

As you go from this Gathering, may the creative Spirit of God go with you, to inspire you and delight you, and help you find words and actions to bring blessing to others all the days of your life.

Jill Robertson

Out of Space: a reply by Doug Golding to Doug Hewitt's article in our last issue, and a Review of 'The Life of Jesus' by Margaret Holm will appear on our website.

Christ through Culture

How does the Wellspring Community relate to Indigenous people in Australia? This is an issue of some concern as we have minimal numbers of Aboriginal people among members and friends. We can sharpen the question a bit more. How does the Reconciliation Area of Concern develop deeper relations with Indigenous people? We have many members who have long professional experience in relating to them and others are involved in various activist groups. It is good that we [had] an Indigenous person speaking at the Gathering but we cannot say that is a deep ongoing relationship. [Christine King, who delighted us with her story telling and honesty.]

It was because of questions like these that I decided I should attend a conference on Aboriginal Spirituality in Ballina in February, organised by NATSIEC (the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission). This was organised by Graham Mundine as part of an ongoing programme of the National Council of Churches of Australia. It was a major attempt to bring together Catholics, Anglicans and other Protestants to look at the theme of 'Christ through Culture'.

This was a refreshing experience because Aborigines were in the majority; they were the main speakers and they developed the programme.

Thus I felt I could relate to their spirituality in a new way. It was also interesting because of those attending – a majority were Catholics (no bishops and the only priest coming from New Zealand, but plenty of nuns and laypeople), a good number of Anglicans (including 3 bishops) but only 2 Uniting Church people (the Moderator dropped in for a day) and one or two from other denominations. It was quite different from our usual Wellspring events.

To help us look at issues from a wider perspective, the main speakers were a husband and wife team from Nagaland in the Himalayan foothills of North East India. The husband had worked for 6 years with the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia on promoting Indigenous theology among tribal peoples in Asia. Now they both teach in a Baptist seminary in Nagaland. They shared their indigenous understanding of their relationship with the Land and there were remarkable similarities with the Aboriginal understanding. I thought it a creative move to broaden Aboriginal understanding by comparing it with another well thought out Indigenous theology. They were a very lively pair and they shared aspects of their dress and local culture. There was a similar emphasis on Oral Culture and the importance of stories.



Aboriginal youth entertaining the Gathering on Saturday evening

We also did something that might be relevant to Wellspring. We had a session in groups looking at what had gone wrong in the last 100 years of the Church and Mission. Then we had a session projecting forward what we would like the Church to be like in another 100 years. This allowed everyone to release their radical fantasies and deep hopes. There was a lot about a non-hierarchical, inclusive and open Church.

The underlying theme of the conference was Christ through Culture. Indigenous people feel that their whole understanding of the Christian truth is moulded by the stories and rituals of their culture. Our main speaker put it quite provocatively. 'White people see God as coming down and building a relationship with humanity. Indigenous people see God as coming up from the soil and having a deep relationship with the Land. European theology is anthropocentric with the Holy Spirit speaking to human hearts. Indigenous theology is cosmocentric with the Holy Spirit relating to the whole Land and Earth'.

These ideas challenge us to see Aboriginal spirituality through fresh eyes and to seek to gain new insights and deeper experiences.

Clabon Allen



Beautiful Christine King, daughter of Nanna Fejo (the Aboriginal woman who PM Kevin Rudd visited before making his 'Sorry' speech)

Leukemia Foundation - Shave/Colour for a Cure



Merrilyn getting help from Lisa Wriley - grab a texta and colour Merrilyn's hair GREEN

Merrilyn Tandukar dyed (temporarily, fortunately) her hair GREEN during the Gathering. "I want to thank everyone [she says] who supported me in the 'Shave/Colour for a Cure'. With other donations from family, friends and work colleagues I made \$610. I was very thrilled and I'm sure it will add to the final result which will help care for patients and families living with leukemia, lymphoma, myeloma and related blood disorders.

The Leukemia Foundation sets an international benchmark in the care and support of patients and their families. They also fund cutting edge research into better treatments and cures through our National Research Program helping to improve survival rates for adults and children."

'Wellspring Community – An Introduction'

The Gathering saw the launch of the Wellspring history booklet, our publication that not only says 'what we believe' but how we came about. We hope all Members and Friends will not only buy a copy for themselves but also for friends and family. Please keep in mind that it can also be used for 'promotional' purposes.

To launch the book (without fanfare) those gathered formed an inwardly spiraling circle around the authors, beginning with the oldest and ending with the newest members of the Community. A copy of the booklet was passed from person to person and blessed as it was handed on until it reached the centre. Anne now has this especially blessed copy.



Anne McPherson signing copies of our new Wellspring History

The new Friends we welcomed at the Gathering were:

- Pat Castley (NSW)
- John and Phillis Dolling (WA)
- Katalina Tahaafe-Williams (NSW)
- Linda Turton (NSW)

Till we meet again:

May birdsong of the morning mists recall for you our songs of praise.
May waking thoughts bring forth again your Wellspring dreaming.
May the deep rivers of the Spirit of action strengthen your days, till we meet again.

Heather McLaren

A blessing for new friends of Wellspring

Friends,

As you begin your commitment to this Community –

You have blessed us with the skills you brought to this Gathering.

You have blessed us with your love and generosity.

You have blessed us with your gift of laughter.

You have blessed us with your creativity, wisdom and vision.

May you, as you leave this Gathering, continue to stand tall and strong like the windmill, to catch the winds of the Spirit.

May the water of Eternal Life bubble up abundantly from unexpected sources

for you to channel to areas of need and concern.

May God, who is steadfast and strong, strengthen and sustain you.

May Jesus, our radical teacher, stir you up to transform the world around you.

May the Holy Spirit energize you and be your constant companion.

Ingerid Meagher

As you step forth in expectant hope
may your eyes be lit by radiant joy.
May your feet be afloat in the Spirit's
glow and may your loving presence
gladden our world.

Jacinta Shailer

May you know the comforting God
who is always near;
May you sense the company
of the Christ-friend always beside you;
May you experience the guiding
wind of the Spirit always leading you
day by day.

As the willy willy makes its presence
on the fallowed paddock and the
summer storm lights up a dark
western sky, So may God's presence
be as real to you, as you go through
all the bulldust sections of life's road.

David Sloane

Wellspring offers a prophetic voice

... Creating community brings challenges. When any group of people gather together, many things are gained but some individual freedoms are lost in the process. Finding the balance isn't always easy.

As an Australian Community, Wellspring is strongly committed to discovering what it means to be a prophetic voice in this land, and to working for reconciliation in Australia. It's fitting, then, that the name of their recent Gathering should be 'Called to Create', taken from the Australian song which says we are 'Called to Create a New World for the Lord.'

During the four days in Canberra, the Community explored various aspects of such a new world: hospitality, reconciliation, justice and regeneration.

Days started early, with a 7am worship led by a different person each day, each bringing something from their own tradition and style. Not being an early riser myself, my days started with breakfast, followed by 9am worship in an outdoor chapel overlooking a

hillside coming back to life after the Canberra bushfires of 2005.

During one very special morning each member of the community was asked to remove a single shoe and place it around the ashes of a fire, as a symbol that however hard we try, we can never truly know what it is to walk in another person's shoes.

The worship life of the community was enriched through the music of Trish Watts, whose simple use of melody had even the most reluctant singer opening their lungs to the elements and finding their 'prophetic voice'.

'Wild Spirit' they sang, but the surface isn't very wild. The surface is a group of middle class, respectable, (mostly)



A circle of shoes and ashes for thought (Trish Watt's back)



The SIEV X memorial

grey-haired people. Dress code is smart casual and shoes are sensible.

But that surface is deceptive. Being a radical disciple isn't about having dreadlocks, and every mealtime conversation brought another inspiring story of faith lived out.

Afternoon workshops reflected the 'areas of concern' of the Community, and ranged from the hands on - a picnic with God or non-dig gardening - to the informative, including a session where Uniting Church President Rev Gregor Henderson shared his insights from a Heads of Churches visit to Palestine-Israel.

A highlight for me was the Saturday afternoon visit to the SIEV X memorial, to see the 353 painted wooden posts which commemorate the lives of refugee children, women and men who lost their lives trying to reach Australia in 2001. My own congregation in Perth painted one of the posts, and it was a moving moment to see the peaceful, hopeful sight of the memorial.

Wellspringer Gillian Hunt shared the story of one of the survivors who had been part of the first temporary installation of the memorial (it wasn't originally given planning permission) by holding up two of the posts, just as he had held his wife and child for



Aboriginal singer Johnny Huckle

long hours in the water before finally saying goodbye.

Not many people plan a weekend around inviting as many people as possible who will come and challenge the way they think about the world. Guests included Christine King from Reconciliation Australia, Aboriginal singer-song writer Johnny Huckle, Uniting Church justice advocate Mark Zirnzak, Jon Owen and his family from UNOH, an intentional Christian community immersed in Sydney's western suburbs, and Elizabeth, a young woman from South Australia with a degree in circus performance who is in the process of joining the Sisters of Mercy.

A daily reflection by Katalina Tahaafe-Williams provided a common thread running through the weekend. Katalina is a Tongan Australian woman based at Sydney's Charles Stuart University with 10



Elizabeth Young doing her circus act

years' experience of multicultural community development work in the UK. Katalina challenged the Community's ideas of hospitality and inclusivity - and still they asked for more.

After four days Katalina, along with a number of others, celebrated her entry as a Friend into the community, and the Gathering dispersed once more.

Enriched and challenged, the Community members return to their homes, knowing they are held together over the next two years by common prayer and action; and by their calling to create a new world.

Alison Atkinson-Phillips

Manager, Media & Communications, Uniting Church in Western Australia



Our final act – Mary, Lisa Wriley, Michelle Coram and Jill planting a tree: The tree planting is a way of our putting action behind our words when saying the environment is important to us. The tree is a liquidambar. It is a deciduous tree which apparently is more fire resistant. Greenhills made the request for that particular type of tree.



Our valued under-50s!

Michelle Coram, Thelma Johnson, Elizabeth Young, Brent Lyons Lee

Interview with Trish Watts

What's the story of your being at this Gathering?

Mainly through friendships and other circles. I'm involved in spirituality and creative arts, so there are key people in Wellspring whose pathways I cross in other areas, for example Taizé, or Interplay or Celtic spirituality, bushwalking... so I feel like I've been doing a bit of a dance with Wellspring. I've known about the Iona Community for a long time, and have used the music of the Community and know some of their composers. I've always been interested in how people find voice for spirit and for their lives, and how to stay alive creatively. So I find myself being drawn to different communities that are interested in these sorts of things. The thing that's really impressed me about Wellspring is its focus on social justice. Wellspring was looking for someone to help with the worship and I said 'yes'.

You were talking in your workshop about hearing a Taizé song during a NCYC and just rushing off there. Is that where your music ministry started?

I think it was really affirmed during that time. I grew up in a church that was a singing church — Methodist and then Uniting. Churches were pretty significant out in the country because that's where everyone came together to share; lots of churches have a background in singing. I grew up in a singing family, and I knew I would probably be doing music with my life. I was in my early 20s, and I could see how young people and spirit and music could come together in a call to a gospel life that

wasn't daggy. With Taizé, you go over there [to France] and it's all focussed on youth and simplicity.

In the workshop you were saying 'I want you to be a bell', and for us to think that there's music around and we're just a channel.

I really see the body as a vehicle for the voice. When we sing it's not just with our heads, not just with the cognitive; when we sing it's this way of engaging our whole body, with our heart; every cell in our body begins to vibrate when we sing. So it's an internal massage, as well as an external one. And it's a great connector with all of life, the breath of God... so I like the image of a bell because it just reminds me that it's like the breath is striking us to give sound. On the breath we give it voice. This enables me to think of the body as a resonating chamber.

I think it's a real gift to people who don't think of themselves as singers

I really think it's a birthright to sing, to dance; if you have a voice you can sing, if you can walk you can dance — that sort of idea. And the accessibility of voice, you don't have to be carrying an instrument — it's right here, something you can carry from within. It just brings so much joy to people - and healing - to be able to access their voice, and to be able to really express what they feel. In our world there's so much emotion; lament, anger and rage. To be able to bring all of our whole selves, to be fully alive and present, requires some access to our inner selves. And voice is a great way of connecting our inner selves with the outside world, so they become one.

During the afternoon conversation yesterday we got into quite a heated conversation about music in worship; it can be quite a divisive issue.

I keep trying to find the core, what is essential that will connect people. Taking away all the instruments and just enabling people to hear themselves singing is a very freeing thing when you can get to that.

You seem to draw a lot from songs of other countries?

I've travelled quite a bit. I just find getting it body to body is the best way to learn the songs, passed on from another person who knows it and who can sing it to me. You also get the intention of the music that way. I like to do music that's been passed to me if possible. I'm interested in different cultures - the colour, the rhythms, the melodies, the different ways they use words.

What do you do?

I've been freelancing for 25 years, so basically I go to where I feel drawn. I'm the creative director for Interplay Australia, which is a creative approach to unlocking the wisdom of the body for people. We use the tools of story, singing, music and stillness. That's very much involved in building community, and I work mostly with adults in that.

I'm a trained voice movement therapy practitioner, BMT, which works with individuals and groups to find their voice.

I'm a song writer, I do some performing and choir work, so people bring me in and I do singing workshops. A bundle of all these different things really.

Alison Atkinson-Phillips

Workshop on the Palestine visit

by Australian Church Leaders

- Gregor Henderson's report to the Wellspring Community

Australians have a special responsibility to pray urgently and constantly for Christians in the Holy Land and for a future marked by justice, security and peace for Palestinians and Israelis. A solution to their ongoing turmoil is desperate and necessary for the peace of the whole world. The Rev Gregor Henderson, Moderator of the Uniting Church in Australia's National Assembly, emphasized these points as he shared the experiences of Australian church leaders when they visited Israel Palestine in late 2007. Gregor gave a most moving report, through wonderful photos and anecdotes of meetings with Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders as well as representatives of the Israeli Government and Palestinian Authority and people in refugee camps – whose families have resided there for over sixty years.

The Statement by nine Australian Church Leaders made in Bethlehem in December 2007 acknowledged that:

'We recognize the complex nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We strongly affirm the right of both Israel and Palestine to political autonomy, security and self-determination. ... We understand the reluctance to make concessions or to trust those who are the source of fear and oppression, but the time for courageous and inspiring leadership has come. ... We support actions to enable Israel and Palestine to negotiate just outcomes on borders, settlements, water, refugees, prisoners, Jerusalem and security.'

We ask Australian Churches to:

- pray for a just and lasting peace for Jerusalem and the Holy Land;
- encourage the Australian Government to take more action to support a just and lasting peace for Israel and Palestine;
- hear the stories of the suffering and oppression, perseverance and hope of the people of the Holy Land;

- sponsor aid and development projects in the West Bank and Gaza;

- support the status of Jerusalem as an open city for all faiths and people;

- encourage Australian Christians to visit the Holy Land and foster relationships with Palestinian Christians;

- build stronger relationships with Jewish and Muslim communities in Australia.

Subsequently, a resolution of the Executive of the National Council of Churches in Australia in April 2008 and then, on 4 June 2008, a Heads of Australian Churches Statement on Palestine and Israel (signed by 12 national leaders and 45 other leaders) reflected the findings of those who had joined Gregor on the 2007 visit. In March 2009 immediately following the Wellspring Gathering, Gregor was to be part of an interfaith (Christian, Muslim and Jewish) delegation to the Australian Government urging

Australia's pressure internationally for action to end the gross violations of human rights of civilians and the ending of Israel's economic blockade and illegal occupation of Palestinian Territories. Gregor asked for our prayers for a possible future visit of Australian Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders to the Holy Land – with the unique opportunities which Australia provides, with these communities living side by side peacefully. Finally, we are called to participate in a World Week of Prayer for Peace in Palestine-Israel, 4 - 10 June 2009. Resources [Ecumenical Service, poem It's Time for Palestine, Jerusalem Prayer] are available from www.vcc.org.au/icappi.

Let us continue to pray for Gregor that he will continue with courage and wisdom in this work of peace-making.

Jenny Johnston

New Administrator - Jan McEvoy



I started with Wellspring as Administrator on Monday 4 May, after spending the last 10 years as Administrator and Office Manager for Macquarie Christian Studies Institute located at Macquarie University. Prior to February 1999 I spent 23 years with IBM holding various positions. I have attended an Anglican church somewhere in Sydney since I was about 4 years old,

the latest of which was St Albans, Lindfield. I have recently moved house and gone back to my roots in Kogarah where I will be looking for a new church community. I enjoy spending time with my family, listening to music, particularly classic music and I love to travel. I also have a bit of a passion for the movies, but I have a rather limited scope of films I like. My passion for reading comes and goes! I will get a book and can't put it down, then another and then another, but all of a sudden I stop reading for quite some time – not sure why! If you are ever coming to Sydney, particularly the city on a Monday, please let me know as I would love to meet as many of the Community as possible.

Notes and Council News from Mary Gilchrist

- We say 'Thank you' to Sally Horne for the generous ten months she gave us as a part-time Administrative Officer for Wellspring and we say 'Welcome' to Jan McEvoy who started on 4th May, working on Monday of each week (9 to 5) at our desk in 379 Kent Street, Sydney. You can ring her, leave messages or write. Jan had already booked a holiday for July/August so will not be present at that time but someone will be calling at the office each Monday whilst she is away.

- We had a wonderful display at the Gathering of posters and photos depicting the social interests/concerns of our dispersed Members and Friends, along with symbols of their local areas and communities. Thank you to those who took so much effort with their displays.

- All elective Workshops were excellent and particularly, for me, the one led by Col Jennings on 'Living Creatively with the Outsiders' - mental illness, the poor, the Indigenous, the homeless, the peacemakers. Col prepared an excellent booklet with stories of creative people and their work plus relevant information. I share with you a couple of humorous lines of *My Living Will*: 'Last night my daughter and I were sitting in the lounge room and I said to her: "I never want to live in a vegetative state, dependent on some machine and fluids from a bottle to keep me alive. That would be no quality of life at all. If that ever happens, just pull the plug." So she got up, unplugged the computer, and threw out my wine.' This booklet is available from Col Jennings, Blue Mountains NSW cell group.

- Our Annual General Meeting was held on 18th April. The Annual Report for 2008 was presented and copies are available from the office. The same team nominated for office-bearer positions and

as Councillors with the addition of David Sloane (NSW) and Janet Watts (WA)

New State contacts are: Di Shearer (SA) and Betty Matthews (WA). Mark Hurst (NSW) has again taken up the position of Convenor for 'Peace and Justice' and Lisa Wriley is joined by David Sloane for the 'Environment' area of concern.

- A wonderful contact has been made with Cuba where a group of people are setting up a Community also inspired by Iona. They sent us greetings for our Gathering and through our contact Keith Weavers we hope to hear more about their growth. Peter Millar advised that there are also contacts in USA looking at Wellspring for ideas in developing their own Iona inspired Community.

- You may be pleased to know that Council is exploring the possibility of a venue for our bi-annual Gathering outside NSW. Each State is looking at the matter keeping in mind the organisation and transport links required for such a venture. Get on to your State rep if you have any suggestions.

- Please note that Newcastle Wellspring is hosting the visit of John Bell in October this year.

- South Australia Wellspring is partner in the visit of John Dear SJ to Adelaide in November. He has been

imprisoned in US because of his focus on non-violent activities.

- The theme *That they may be one in your hand* (Ezekiel 37:17) is the theme of this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. We hope that you may have an opportunity to encourage others to participate in local ecumenical services or study groups. Resources are available from National Council of Churches in Australia. www.ncca.org.au/departments/faith_and_unity.

- Invitation from Ian Robinson (Friend WA) to National Gathering of *the Australian Research Institute for Desert Spirituality (AIRDS)* 1-5 July at 'White Gums' out of Alice Springs. Two days of silence and two days of discussion. Further details and bookings Ian +61 417 687 746

- Wanted: ordinary people who think big. What is the next big question? Research and development group *Australia 21* has launched a 2-year project which aims to spark people's thinking on what they want for the nation's future.

Chairman Bob Douglas (Friend ACT) said the project was about engaging the public and specialists in a conversation about the issues that face Australia. The Emeritus Professor is a former director of the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health. Ideas on what the next big question

is can be submitted on the *Australia 21* website, where online discussions will take place, as well as providing analysis of trends. Website is: www.australia21.org.au

- Discussion took place at our Members' meeting in ACT on the growth of more cell groups around the country and a process of outreach for new members and friends. Each State is to follow up on this report.

Mary Gilchrist



Mary directing proceedings at the Members' meeting; the candle Jill holds was made from scraps of coloured candle brought by participants. Gillian was the candle maker.

Fencing Work Party

During the first week of April I went on a Uniting Church organised fencing party in the Beechworth fire area. In this fire two people lost their lives, 14 homes were destroyed, over 1500 head of stock killed and 1323 kilometres of fencing lost. The Beechworth fire burned 75,000 acres.

So far there have been ten volunteer work parties, involving 2000 'man' hours. In our group there were an elderly married couple from Toowoomba, Qld, two from Cootamundra, two from Wagga Wagga, one person tripping around Australia and one German on a work visa, plus myself. All were retired farmers except the German and me.

We split up into two work gangs. One worked on a very steep area doing a boundary fence and our party worked along the more undulating Mytleford-Mt. Beauty Road. We picked a hot week and shade was a scarcity. I became an expert on clipping poly droppers into the wires. Others were laying and straining the wires. The previous work party demolished

the remains of the burnt out fence. We had a full time supervisor from Wagga Wagga, Murray Nash, who coordinated everything and negotiated with the land owners.

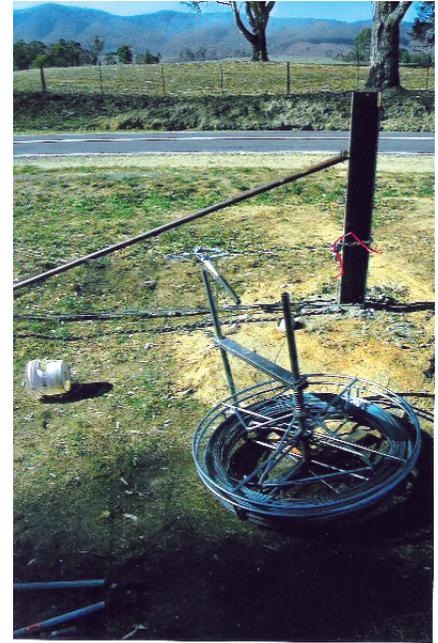
We were given free accommodation in the Dederang Hotel (courtesy of the publican) and the U.C. Fire Appeal paid for all our food.

We worked long hours (7.30 am start) but the camaraderie and fellowship of the blokes was great. We were only given work equal to our abilities and experience. I recommend it to anyone reasonably fit and well. You don't have to be a farmer. As we only put up about 6 km of new fencing, there is still plenty to do. It's also, of course, helping those less fortunate than ourselves in a most practical way. By all accounts, landowners were more than appreciative and some just wanted to talk and unburden themselves.

Work will continue until the end of April and may re-start later in the year. Contact Paul Creek at Rand (02) 6920 7252 if you feel you can help in any way.

Meanwhile the burnt out eucalypts and paddocks are slowly turning green again. The spiders are the first insects to return, followed by the birds. How appropriate as we celebrate the Resurrection again.

David Sloane (8 April 2009)



Try fencing – definitely recommended

A felicitous coincidence (March 4th, 2009)

The Wellspring Community encourages its members to pray for one another each month. Each year we are asked to write a brief note on some concerns we have. In using the Prayer Diary on the fourth of March this year [Day 4 of the 2008 edition] I read, "Mac and Margaret Nicoll ask for prayer for 'growing trust between Christians and Muslims in the local community.'"

A little later in the morning I attended our Wednesday morning Eucharist [Church of All Nations is the Carlton Uniting Church], and at the end of the service our minister, John Evans, invited us to lunch when there was to be an informal gathering to celebrate the fact that the first seven graduates of our work training group (all Africans from the local housing estate) were to begin regular employment this week in the hospitality industry.

At 12.20, I jumped on my old Malvern Star and rode down Drummond Street to the Church, there to spend a wonderful hour of conversation with a cosmopolitan group of Carlton citizens. The honoured guests were Amuna, Yirgalem, Nurhussen, Rawa, Ali, Lucy and Sheeba, all from Eritrea and Ethiopia. On this day they were enjoying the presentation of certificates, chatting with members of the congregation, grateful for the opportunity of ongoing employment and excited by the prospect of doing their first shifts the next week at Flemington Racecourse and the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

I was particularly moved as I listened to Yirgalem and Rawa telling of their friendship which has developed in their years on the Carlton Estate. Yirgalem is an Eritrean Christian

and her friend Rawa is an Eritrean Moslem. Rawa explained that they are often calling at one another's flats, sharing baby sitting and supporting one another. 'We are like sisters,' she exclaimed.

In the afternoon, towards the end of the homework programme at the local library, I was talking with Ramla, the organizer of the programme. Ramla is a student at Victoria University and a faithful Moslem. She took from her bag a library book she had been reading and thanked me for encouraging her to read it. It was Karen Armstrong's book *Muhamma*, a biography of the prophet which I had found most engaging and helpful when I encountered it several years ago. Two weeks ago, at the official service to mourn the bushfire disaster, hosted by the ABC news presenter

Ian Henderson, a group of faith community leaders spent a few minutes on the stage. Three of them [a Buddhist woman and two Christian men] brought a message of support on behalf of all the faith communities. When they had finished and were leaving the stage, Sheik Fehmi, the senior Imam in Australia, was looking fragile and in need of support. I was deeply touched as our Uniting Church Moderator, Jason Kioa, took Sheik Fehmi's arm and walked slowly with him down the steps. This was a beautiful symbol of our unity in the midst of great sorrow.

This morning I reflected on the experiences that have prompted my interest in relations between Moslems and Christians.

Twenty five years ago I heard Anglican bishop, David Penman, speaking of his years in Lebanon and describing an experience of walking up the rickety old stairs in a Beirut lane to speak with a Moslem scholar to see what he, David, could learn about prayer. This striking image has stayed with me... David Penman, keen evangelical, returned missionary, a passionate Christian, asking a Moslem to teach him about prayer!

At the same period of my life I was teaching at the local High School

with its wide range of nationalities and offering a middle school unit on Middle Eastern Studies. It seemed obvious that we should deal with Judaism, Christianity and Islam so I deepened my knowledge of Islam and for several years taught about the basic features of these three great faiths.

Alongside these experiences, possibly shaped by them, my theological pilgrimage was leading me to be much more open to the possibility of our gracious God being also present in the lives of people of other faiths and I had become increasingly troubled by our tendency to see the world in terms of Us and Them, whether it was Christians and Moslems, Catholics and Protestants, Labor and Liberal, public or private school, radicals or conservatives... whatever the division, I wondered why we needed to define ourselves as over against others. I am still wondering.

Some people fear the growing links between Christians and Moslems because they suspect this involves a watering down of their own faith and convictions and that it marks a descent [horror of horrors] into relativism.

For me, the growing trust and openness between faiths is not a retreat from the good news of the Kingdom or the prelude to the development of

some super world faith, but rather a response to the teaching of Jesus. Indeed one of the strengths of this movement is that, as we explore other faiths in a questing, open way, what often happens is a deepening of our understanding of our own faith. Furthermore it is as an opportunity to understand the other and to be involved together in matters of justice and peace with those from other faith communities.

Sometimes I am asked to lead the prayers of the people at our Sunday morning worship. Am I being faithful to Christ when I say these words ?

O God, we pray for people of our faith
for people of other faiths
for people of no faith
We are all created by you
All known by you
All loved by you.
Come Holy Spirit
Renew your whole creation.
In the name of Christ. Amen

You can see then why, on March 4th, I smiled with a deep sense of wonder and appreciation as I realised some Wellspring members would be thinking of us as we celebrated another tiny example of our reconciling God at work.

Mac Nicoll

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NEXT ISSUE: Theme for the September issue is 'Hospitality as Sacred Practice'. Editor: bonitafrank@hotmail.com, PO Box 903, Spit Junction NSW 2088, 02 9960 5795. **Deadline for material is Monday 3 August**