

## *Creativity as Prayer and Devotion*

### LEADER'S LETTER

Dear Wellspring friends,

What an interesting subject we have this time. *Creativity as Prayer and Devotion* - wow! I must admit that when I first heard this title I was thinking about creativity inspiring prayer and devotion especially when you encounter someone else's creativity. However, this title has made me think more about the actual process of creating something being the prayer and devotion. That makes it sound rather different doesn't it? I am sure that it can work both ways, but sometimes the process of creativity is definitely the prayer. I am thinking now of sacred dance and movement – very much the prayer in itself. I am thinking of a drawing in sand, which is only a temporary thing, but the creation of it is the devotion. Singing is another example of something that just about all of us do. When we join in a song in church or on a retreat or on a walk, we are lending our voice to be part of the devotion.

In thinking about why we react to beauty and even recognise something as beautiful, I have come to believe that it is the part of us that is made in God's image that is reacting. We recognise beauty because we resonate with the joy of creation that God feels

too. The world is a beautiful place and that is why we are so passionate about preserving it and making it sustainable. We are honouring God's creation.

As you may know, my particular hobby is calligraphy. I find myself drawn more and more to words that speak about my faith in one way or another. It takes a long time to create a piece of work that I am happy (enough) with and I find that the words have to be worth spending the time on! When I was first thinking about this edition of *Pipeline* I decided to write out the words of the Taizé chant that we learnt at the last National Gathering in Canberra that include the word 'wellspring.' It took many attempts before I came up with the version in this edition of *Pipeline*. I guess I can see the process of creating it as prayer and certainly I was wanting inspiration to get the feel of the words into the way they were written down. Now I am passing it on to you and hope you get some inspiration too. We are hoping to get some small versions printed as prayer cards so you may be interested in having some one day.

The Taizé community have given us permission to reproduce their words at no charge so that is great.



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*Credits: paintings by Alex Frank and Helen Barnes, photography by Isobel Hewitt, art by Margaret Nicoll, poems by Bonita Frank, calligraphy by Jill Robertson, sculpture at Iona Abbey.*

There are a lot of important issues in this edition of *Pipeline*, so please read it all. The AGM passed the proposal about the new way of electing our leaders. This is just putting the process that Neil introduced in 2007 into words and a timeline. The timetable is there for you to see, so please start thinking now about potential leaders.

Then there is the very important brochure about our next National Gathering in Perth. This event is coming together wonderfully well after some rocky bits to get over, which were valiantly scaled by our team of agile workers in West Australia. We now have a new venue – St John’s Retreat Centre in Shoalwater, near Rockingham, and this happens (!) to be near an environmental centre that Peter Newman would be very happy to go to with us. The dates are the same, so please start thinking now about making some bookings.

The different thing about this Gathering is that as so many of us will have travelled a long way to get there, we wanted to make it even more special by offering an optional trip afterwards. It will be a trip that includes New Norcia, Geraldton and Meekatharra, seeing places along the



*Calligraphy by Jill Robertson*

way and being led by Rev Lesley de Grussa Macaulay. She may get off the bus in Meekatharra – but that is reasonable as she lives there! Part way through that trip there will be an option to go off with Ian Robinson for a couple of days in the desert, then rejoining the others. Both Ian and Lesley are very experienced bushies and the time promises to be one of those unforgettable times of our lives. They promise we will see a billion stars! For this extra trip, we will need to know very soon if we have enough interest to go ahead with the detailed

bookings and planning. **Please let us know if you are interested asap - this is very important.** An email or phone call to Jan in the office on Mondays would be excellent.

During this last month we heard of the passing of Rev Dr Peter Stephens. Peter has been a long time Friend of Wellspring Community in Adelaide. We send our love and prayers to his wife, Angela, and thank God for Peter’s ministry.

God bless you richly,

*Jill Robertson*

## *Thoughts from the Editor*

We are all of us creative. However, we tend to think that certain kinds of people – other than ourselves – are the real creative artists. People whose work is published or on display or listened to, maybe bought and sold: painters, sculptors, composers, musicians, writers, poets, film-makers.

But we are all creative! Yes, all us cooks, sewers and knitters, and players with grandchildren, gardeners, builders and woodworkers, carers of our elders, singers (even the bathroom ones), photographers – all the everyday activities that go to make up normal everyday life.

Perhaps the most important creative ‘talent’ of all is the talent for loving, for building relationships with family, friends and community, for forgiveness, for compassion, for desiring and working to create a better world. And for giving God praise for God’s creation.

Now use your imagination. If it were possible, this *Pipeline* would be a box filled with knitting, crochet, weaving, tapestry, quilting, embroidery, pottery, sculpture, carving and engraving, scrapbooking, food, plants, woodwork, toys, sandcastles, a musical CD, a mantra, as well as the ‘usual’ paper products – a biography, poems,

a novel, non-fiction, a painting, a musical score, a liturgy: what an exciting box you’ve just received!

I have never thought of myself as a poet so I’m risking sharing a couple of my own little poems with you. How do you express yourself ‘creatively?’ In what ways do you express your loving devotion to God and God’s creation? Through meditation and mindfulness, perhaps?

You see, we are all creative. And these are **all** gifts from Creator God for our nurturing and sustaining, for self-expression and for sharing.

*Bonita Frank*

# Prayer and the call of silence and solitude

'Silence is the sister of the divine. Meister Eckhart said that there is nothing in the world that resembles God so much as silence. Silence is a great friend of the soul, it unveils the riches of solitude.' (John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara*, p. 145)

When I retired someone asked me, 'What are you going to do now, John?' My heart responded, I have retired, not so much to do as to be. I am drawn to the riches of silence, contemplative prayer and solitude – to the pattern of the monks, prayer, daily chores and reading. For several years I had been working as a pastor in the inner city, seeking to grow a church amongst people in an inner city housing estate. While that ministry had been very rewarding, towards the end of my time there I was beginning to feel somewhat burnt out. I am an introvert by nature and introverts tend to be drained emotionally and spiritually by a lot of outgoing activity. I was beginning to feel somewhat hollow inside.

*Photo right: On Staffa Island, off west coast of Scotland. © Isabel Hewitt*

On a journey to the UK during long service leave, Joy and I were introduced to the renewing depths of Celtic spirituality, but also to a new and what was for me a richer life of prayer. We stayed for a few days in a Franciscan monastery in Freeland, near Oxford, run by the 'Poor Clares,' the Franciscan women's order. There I encountered a book by an Anglican Franciscan, Brother Ramon, entitled

*The Heart of Prayer*. Brother Ramon had been an Anglican priest, then Prior to a Franciscan monastery and in the last years of his life a hermit living in the grounds of the Glasshampton monastery. His book opened new vistas for me into the life of prayer, meditation and solitude.

Brother Ramon explores different ways of praying – discursive  
*Continued page 4*



*The Iona Abbey Cloister carvings were commissioned by the Iona Community in 1967, and completed in 1997. The capitals depict various plants and flowers of the Bible, flowers of Iona and of the British Isles, and birds of the West Highlands. The additional carvings, called Locks, illustrate the parables of Jesus Christ and also the offering of bread and wine.*

*Each capital is an original carving and in many cases was donated as memorials. The subjects were variously chosen by the Iona Community, the donors, or by the sculptor Chris Hall himself.*

meditation, meditation using a mantra, contemplative prayer, praying with icons, the use of a healing variation of 'the Jesus Prayer', walking meditation and the pattern of prayer, study and manual work. There are also chapters entitled 'the journey into solitude', 'making a retreat', 'making a pilgrimage' and 'finding a soul friend'.

In the preface he writes of 'practical ways of praying, bringing body, mind and spirit together. The springs of spiritual creativity may well bubble up anew as you find new ways of praying and loving God, using spiritual muscles you never knew you had' (p. viii).

It was a book that spoke to my inner being and which has stimulated an ongoing journey into prayer, silence and solitude. The creativity has been in experimenting with different paths in meditation, prayer and pilgrimage and the place of silence and solitude as well as walking and meditation. It has been further stimulated through undergoing a spiritual direction training course and more recently as part of the program training team at Kincumber. It has been a course that has further opened my understanding of the spiritual heritage involved in areas beyond my background in conservative evangelicalism. This wide and rich heritage includes the spirituality of Julian of Norwich, the depths of the Christian mystics and those of other faith traditions, apophatic as well as kataphatic spirituality, Celtic spirituality, Eastern Orthodox, Catholic and High Anglican spirituality, the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola, John Cassian and Francis of Assisi. It has been deepened through renewed appreciation of Christian pilgrimage in more recent years. Joy and I have been privileged to go on pilgrimage in the UK and Spain. As this *Pipeline* goes to print we are walking part of the Camino in France. Finally it has deepened through our friendship with Eugene Stockton and his practice of silence and solitude. I have benefited from spiritual direction with Joy Crawford and more recently

from Josephite sister, Mary Hagan. I am finding an opportunity for service in the spiritual companionship of others, in the leadership of quiet days, the compilation of the *Wellspring Prayer Diary*, participation as part of the program team in the training course in spiritual direction at Kincumber, led by Sue Dunbar, in the shared leadership in the Gathering Community (the local ecumenical Christian fellowship of which we are a part), in participation in our local landcare group, daily household and gardening tasks, and in the important giving of time to grandparenting and family responsibilities.



Jesus  
© Alex Frank

We have been able to build a small one room hermitage at the rear of our land at Leura, where I go each morning for reading, meditation and prayer and which is available for one or two overnight stays for solitude, meditation and prayer.

Eugene introduced me to fellowships of solitaries in the UK and US who both publish regular prayer and information letters or magazines. I have found these to be a rich source of encouragement in this interior life of prayer. A glance through the membership lists reveals that solitaries live in a great variety of life situations - single or married, in lonely places or in cities, in differing relationships with the church, in varying situations

of work or retirement. A typical entry in the membership list includes - 'Joan Smith (not her real name) Ex Anglican religious. Retired Probation Officer. Content just to be, but being used to help people with prayer and their journey to wholeness.' Sr. Scholastica Egan writes, 'Ultimately for all solitude is interior, becomes independent of environment, is the inward journey towards God who alone can satisfy our restless hearts. In the process comes the discovery of the true self. Merton said somewhere that only the true self can be united to God.' (Fellowship of Solitaries, Letter 35, Advent, 2001)

Just six months before his death Thomas Merton wrote, 'Almost every day I have to write a letter to someone refusing an invitation to attend a conference or a workshop, or to give talks on the contemplative life, or poetry, etc. For me what matters is silence, meditation and writing: but writing is secondary. To willingly and deliberately abandon this to go out and talk would be stupidity - for me. And for others, retirement into my kind of solitude would be equally stupid. They could not do it - and I could not do what they do.' (Quoted in *Raven's Bread*, 'Food for Those in Solitude' Vol 10 No. 2, May 2006). God's interior call to each one of us is different according to the person he has called us to be.

*John Connor*

*John is a former school teacher. He trained for the Baptist ministry and served at churches in South Turramurra and Petersham; Industrial Chaplaincy with ITIM and then in inner city ministry and mission in the Glebe Housing Estate. Since retirement John has focussed on contemplative prayer, meditation and spiritual companionship.*

*More importantly for Wellspring Community, it is John's dedication that brings to us each year the selections for daily readings and reflections that make our Prayer Diary our most valuable resource. John, we are deeply thankful for your contribution to the spiritual life of our Community.*

# Spirituality and Creativity

What will Mary Mackillop's Canonisation mean to the Australian people? As an artist I felt drawn to express my own search for meaning in visible form. I found inspiration in Luci Shaw's book, *Breath for the Bones*. The sub-title 'Art, Imagination and Spirit' nurtured my search. Luci wrote of the importance of art as a bridging of the gap between heaven and earth. When we observe an image reflectively it is transformed into something sacred, for the eye sees what the heart feels. I chose the campfire as my metaphor.

In a darkened world the fire draws people to its light and warmth. Strangers make room for others and as they relax stories emerge. Then someone tells Mary's story. Sitting in silence people watch the wisps of smoke curling and twisting upwards and imagine Mary is present. She is Australian; a woman whose love for others flowed from her love for God. Her courage crossed boundaries and reached out to people of all faiths or no faith. She had a dream for a united Australia even before Federation.

Round the fire a disparate group are drawn together as they listen. A mystery unfolds as the Southern Cross above turns over and a new day dawns.

Hope rises in their hearts; a new spirit of love for the poor and needy is felt. There is an awakening to injustices in our day. There is a realization that together we can make a difference in our world.

*Helen Barnes*

## *Merging Hearts*

Darkness surrounds us  
as the Southern Cross turn over  
heralding the dawn.  
Flickering fire offering light;  
yielding warmth,  
kindling stories.  
Strangers attracted.  
There is room for all;  
lives interwoven.  
A story is shared.  
A life of inspiration,  
highlighting mystery.  
God's love is revealed  
in her care for the needy.  
her vision is clear.  
Listeners are touched  
Mary's life makes a difference.  
Hearts open and connect.  
Her spirit now our spirit....

*Helen Barnes, r.s.j*

*Sister Helen is the Artist in Residence  
at St Clement's Retreat & Conference  
Centre, Gaylong NSW.*

'There where you are  
you will find God.'  
*Mary MacKillop 1871*



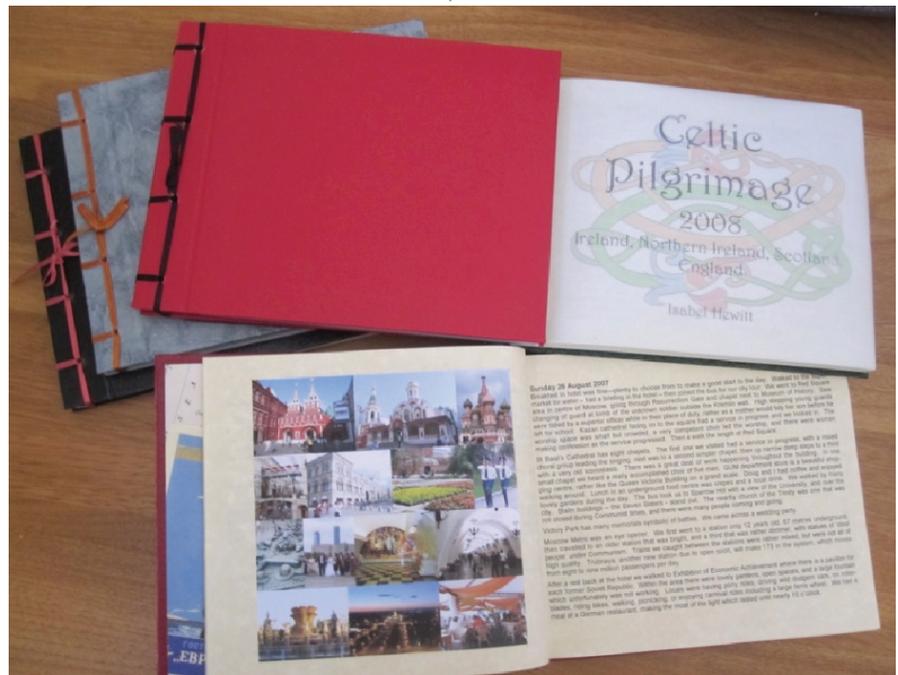
*Painting by Helen Barnes*

# Travel Diaries

While overseas for seven months in 1978 I wrote a diary, a reminder of places visited and life outside Australia, including Scotland, land of my parents' birth. Slides and photographs illustrated the trip. Subsequent trips have also been recorded, and in 1995 I was given a diary which allowed for a post card or photograph to accompany the entry for each day. Photo albums multiplied and their bulkiness became an issue requiring resolution when coloured photos replaced slides of our travels.

Buying a 'suitable' travel diary in 2002 meant spending more than I was prepared to pay, and I determined to use a small notebook while travelling and make a book on my return. From that time my diaries have developed, especially with the advent of digital cameras. Not only can I illustrate a page with appropriate thumbnail photos, but I can collect a 'mosaic' or 'quilt' of flowers, textures, colours to include as well. Every photo evokes a memory.

Travelling with groups organised by the NSW Ecumenical Council led to writing a summary in verse of the time



*Isabel's diaries*

spent together, to share with travelling companions – Chaucer eat your heart out! In some places inspiration came easily, in others it was more difficult to find.

And why do I continue to compile the diaries? My granddaughter has asked the question, and my response is, because I want to. Illustrated retrospective diaries back to 1978 are almost complete after scanning slides

and photos. Looking at the 'archives' reveals some things overlooked previously, but the joy of discovery is as pertinent as what is remembered.

My forays into creativity pale beside the wonderful world our travels have revealed. Nevertheless I am inspired to create, be it diaries, quilts, or meals, all reminders of our God-given creation and our part in it.

*Isabel Hewitt*

# Art, C.S. Lewis and some reflections

Thirty years ago I loved reading the Narnia stories to our daughters and I gained some profound insights about life as a result. I recently [2006] saw the current Disney film and was once again deeply moved by the account of Aslan's death and resurrection.

Why then am I so disturbed by the way in which some Christians overseas are using the film as a tool for evangelism, preparing study material to explicitly link this superb fantasy with the Christian faith?

I suspect it's something to do with the authentic role of the artist in the culture. My brother-in-law and my wife are both artists and Christians. While their work is an expression of who they are, they would both be uncomfortable to be asked what a painting means, for they would want to emphasise the role of viewers in finding their own meaning from the painting.

So it is with literature. The great value of Lewis' Narnia stories will be

experienced as people read the book or view the film, but as soon as others with a vested interest begin to intrude and to direct the reader or viewer to a particular meaning there is a great danger that the power and beauty of the work will be lost.

I am uncomfortable that some Christians are trying to capitalise on Lewis' work rather than standing back a little and allowing the story to speak for itself in a variety of ways. *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* is not a

substitute for Lewis' renowned book *Mere Christianity* and I fear that the attempt to make it so does an injustice both to Lewis and to the Christian faith.

We have already seen newspaper articles pointing out, with some validity, that Lewis' stories can be

seen as sexist, monarchist and racist. This sort of criticism, although it ignores the cultural context, is what happens when we begin to conscript art for some ulterior, even if noble, purpose.

Lewis was one of the finest Christian apologists of the twentieth century and his writings continue to engage people. By all means let us promote his work but let us beware lest we exalt his writings to the status of Holy Writ and somehow therefore rob them of their power to charm and inspire today's readers.

*A postscript or two*

A friend who is both an artist and a Christian sent me this quotation from Susan Sontag's book *Against Interpretation* [Vintage, 1994]

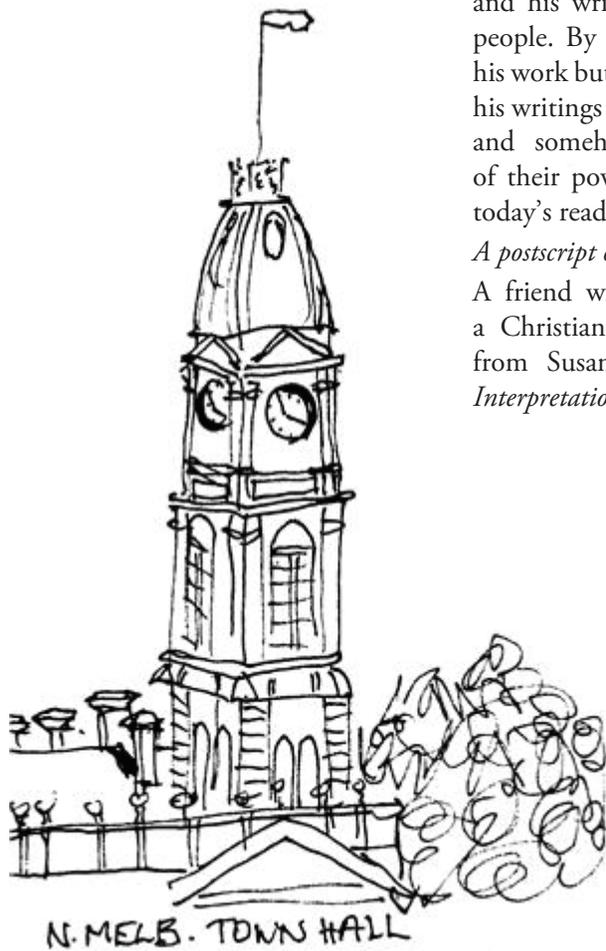
'Real art has the capacity to make us nervous. By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, comfortable.'

Sontag's comment reminds me of a memorable statement in Thomas Howard's autobiographical *Christ the Tiger*. [Shaw, 1967]

'In the figure of Jesus the Christ there is something that escapes us. He has been the subject of the greatest efforts at systematization in the history of man. But anyone who has ever tried this has had, in the end, to admit that the seams keep bursting. He sooner or later discovers that he is in touch, not with a pale Galilean, but with a towering and furious figure who will not be managed.'

*Mac Nicoll*

19/02/2006



*Drawings from a hospital bed.* © Margaret Nicoll (2010)

## SOME POEMS

### *God's gifts*

Moon turns sparkling water to strands of silver  
Sun turns raindrops to diamonds  
Birds weave rubies, sapphires, emeralds, topaz  
And ropes of pearls hang from leaf and flower  
God's jewel box  
Free gifts to the whole world.

### *New life*

The years dim slowly  
and I wonder how this happens  
the bright, clear shape  
of childhood  
fades to grey  
inchoate lines  
and meaning folds in  
upon itself  
like an introspective  
black hole.  
Bring, Lord  
a cloud burst  
of new bright light  
new life of resurrection  
to a yearning, questing Soul.

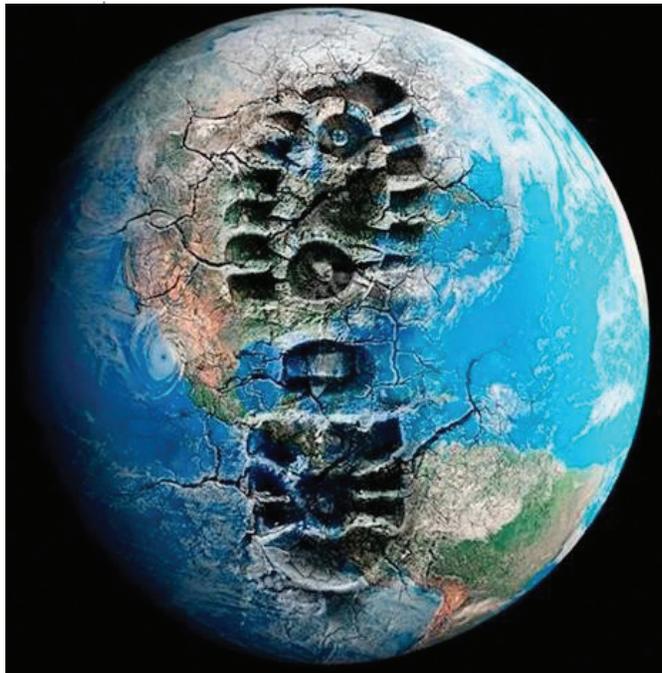
### *Some days are grey and dull*

Some days are grey and dull  
not full of sparkling light  
Then  
what joy surprises  
when all is clear and sharp and colours  
tinkle down the rainbow  
of God's love  
and heaven is everywhere  
to be found  
In birds' calls  
and flowers' faces  
and, ah,  
the laughter of our friends.  
*Bonita Frank*

# A GRAND STAND for the environment

Our group was initiated by grandparents and seniors from churches in the City of Manningham and is now an Incorporated Body. It grew out of deep concerns for our changing climate's impact upon the earth community and especially upon future generations.

The group has led several forums. Keynote speakers have included aboriginal voices whose profound contribution has enriched an understanding of our human identity as part of the earth community. It is our belief that the problem of harmful human impact on the earth results from an inadequate view of human identity as rulers of the earth, rather than dependent creatures of a creator spirit.



Poetry, music, art, drama, story-telling and ritual woven through the forums have inspired positive response, created awareness and affirmed the spiritual nature of the crisis we face.

'Table Talk,' a catalyst for the simplicity of conversation in homes and cafes, has evolved from A GRAND STAND for the Environment.

In these intimate groups as yet slowly emerging, heart-felt stories of hopes and fears for our earth community are given opportunity to be heard. In offering a 'safe' place of attentive listening and mutual vulnerability we seek to generate new hope, creativity and encouragement for those around the table.

A simple ritual of sharing a home-grown gift or piece of handcraft completes a precious gift of intimacy in a two hour 'communion' of a simple morning tea.

*Gail Pritchard*

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Please remember that you can see *Pipeline* in full glorious colour if you log-on to our website.

Theme for March 2011 will focus, with preparatory reading, on the forthcoming Gathering, "A Caring Future".

**NEXT ISSUE:** Theme for December 2010 issue is "A Covenant with Indigenous People?"

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**Deadline for material is 1 November 2010**