

## Thoughts on Cell Groups: Leader's Letter

This issue reveals the diversity within Wellspring cell groups. Reading all the descriptions it becomes clear that cell group members enjoy the activities and believe that they are worthwhile. I want to take a step back and consider the purpose of small groups such as cell groups.

Why do we have cell groups? Wellspring<sup>1</sup> endorses cell groups but we have no clear statement of their purpose. Our publications point to cell groups building community and offering personal support and encouragement. Anne McPherson, however, noted that Wellspring Community as a whole seeks to deepen and expand Christian experience, especially in the direction of radical discipleship (2007, p. 129). In response, Peter Millar encouraged Wellspring to strive for a radical stance, a commitment to prayer and the Word in an era of highly privatised and individualistic understanding of Christianity and he asserted that growth of the small cell groups is of central importance (p. 136). Anne's and Peter's insights form a valuable backdrop to the following discussion.

A 2011 article by Roger Walton<sup>2</sup> looks at the small group and discipleship in the UK. The author described a small group that met weekly for coffee followed by "chatting" followed by group prayer for issues raised in the discussion. The research concluded that the discussions were

not incidental but contained a process by which people engaged with the issues theologically. They considered the issues confronting them, were not passive in the face of them but expanded their view of God by constructing a theological response. Walton concluded that this kind of engagement leads to ownership and active discipleship.

Walton reviewed small groups in several churches. These churches asserted that the value of small groups lies in deepening knowledge of God, building meaningful relationships, and accountability for Christian living and outreach. He summed up several churches: in the minds of many, small groups are intentional structures that are a means of discipleship formation and active mission. However, ideals are often difficult to translate into practice.

According to this article, other research has shown that small groups do not necessarily lead to better Bible knowledge, or appreciation of denominational traditions, or serious engagement with theological discussion of truth claims. Instead, small groups often focus on the needs of group members, offering mutual support, empathy, and encouragement. The focus of the group is mutual help without deep challenge where God is viewed as a God of comfort, support, love, and security.

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These groups often support rather than challenge individualism and privatisation of faith. Consequently, notions of individualism and of faith as private rather than public that are widespread within the wider culture are translated into a Christian context. This process is described as 'secularisation within'. Discipleship is regarded as a private process that does not require ongoing corporate discernment. This research suggests that small groups are moulding Christian life into a secular shape. Rather than being glue holding the church community together, small groups may be a social solvent.

Walton's interview research revealed that only half the group members thought that belonging to the group made them more likely to help their neighbours, about one quarter thought that the group had helped them to become more involved in justice issues at an international level, and even fewer thought they were now more involved in local issues. Most groups focused on personal support and Bible study with almost no attention paid to daily work issues and dilemmas or national issues and concerns. In the Bible discussions, people rarely disagreed over the interpretation of texts and almost all contributions were affirmed rather than questioned or challenged.

Walton noted that the default model of the small group is a long way from models like the classes and bands of John Wesley<sup>3</sup>:

Wellspring Community is defined as being a prophetic community where we "listen to God, discern God's will, and where necessary to challenge both church and society."<sup>4</sup> If we are to grow in our prophetic role we need to learn how to exercise it among ourselves and within our cell groups. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul affirmed prophecy as a function of all within the church

*[T]hose who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation . . . . Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults . . . . [I]*

*fall prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all . . . . For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. (verses 3, 30, 24, 31, NRSV)*

Paul affirmed prophecy over tongues because those who speak in tongues build themselves up while those who prophesy build others up. Speaking in tongues is an expression of the individualism and privatised faith that concerned Walton. On the other hand, prophecy is a function of all. We exercise prophecy when we take turns in speaking to others and then by giving others opportunity to "weigh what is said" (v. 29). Prophecy is spoken about the events of everyday lives. As well as encouraging, teaching, and consoling, the task of prophecy includes reproofing others and holding them to account while at the same time allowing others to subject the reproof and calling into account to prayerful discernment. Reproof is a harsh word yet it has a history in the Christian faith. The Eleventh and Twelfth Meditations of John Baptist de La Salle<sup>5</sup> offered guidance in this task. In Hebrew tradition such as Proverbs 29, reproof is concerned with moral instruction. Reproof was learned through experience and through applying wisdom. It is a work of art or wholesome admonition. Reproof is the instruction offered by sages to inculcate ways of righteousness, justice, and equity.<sup>6</sup>

Although he did not use the term 'prophecy', Walton's research suggested that small groups limited the range of prophetic tasks. They did not encompass encouragement, instruction, consolation, and reproof and holding to account. Walton's groups encouraged, taught, and consoled but rarely stretched to admonition, holding to account, or inculcation of ways of righteousness, justice, and equity.

Of course, Wellspring groups may be different to those described by Walton. I know of one Wellspring group that discussed the PNG asylum seeker solution. Two members reported that "at our last [Wellspring] meeting we

were challenged as to how we could go on being in the Labor Party." At the next Labor Party Branch meeting they proposed a motion that indicated disapproval of the PNG solution and suggested other things Labor could do. This led to a tied vote. Prophecy was at work: two members held accountable and then a Labor Party Branch held accountable.

Nevertheless, Walton provides food for thought. I suggest that as you read through the following *Snapshot of Wellspring Cell Groups 2013* and as you reflect (perhaps as a group reflection) on any cell group that you belong to or may have belonged to, you ask yourself:

What evidence do I see of

1 discipleship? (Are we seeking to deepen and expand Christian experience, especially in the direction of radical discipleship?)

2 accountability?

3 'secularisation from within'? (are we captured by privatised and individualistic understandings of Christianity?)

4 the purpose of this group?

Finally, you might like to share your answers in the next issue of Pipeline.

1 Anne McPherson, *Wellspring Community: An Introduction*, Sydney: Wellspring Community, 2009. Anne McPherson and Peter Millar, *Campfires and Wellsprings in Surprising Places*, Sydney: Wellspring Community, 2007.

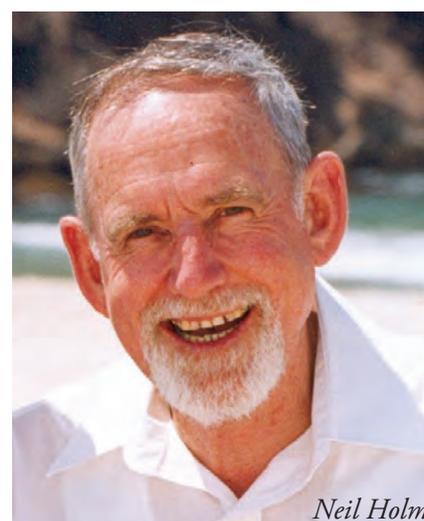
2 Roger Walton, 'Disciples Together: the small group as a vehicle for discipleship formation', *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, 8 (2), 2011, 99-114.

3 <http://bit.ly/17Ck25q>

4 McPherson (2009), p. 11.

5 <http://bit.ly/1cYkVeY> (pages 456-461)

6 <http://bit.ly/17WVzH4>



Neil Holm

# A Snapshot of Wellspring Cell Groups in 2013

We have been collecting information about the life of our cell groups. Here are the reports on the life of the various groups. Thanks to Peggy Goldsmith and Jim Tulip, Jane Pitman, Helen Weavers, Pat McKenzie, Val Bennett, Lynona Hawkins, Marie Thompson, Margaret Holm, Clabon Allen, and Betty Matthews for contributing.

See the Wellspring website for details of meeting times, places, and contact person for each cell group.

## INNOVATIVE EVENTS

### BLUE MOUNTAINS GROUP

Listening to one another in the cell group circle led us to hear of Isabel Barrell's long life with her own handicapped children and her excitement at hearing of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Past-announced innovations have led to many disappointments in the implementation of those innovations. On this occasion, the listening to each other each time we meet led us to invite Noel Hiffernan, a local disability advocate to talk to us. He came in his wheelchair, a bright and energetic man who knows the situation inside out, the bureaucracies and the politics. He encouraged us to look forward to and support a better future where disabled people can travel and work and support themselves in their own homes. He believes this can happen when disabled people have a say in the kind of care and support they receive. This should be possible under an NDIS.

### FISH GROUP (ADELAIDE SOUTH)

Each year Adelaide has a Festival of Ideas. We choose sessions that match the Wellspring Justice and Spirituality concerns. We go as a group and discuss the issues that arise. In addition, we often meet at Signatures Café at the Marion Culture Centre. It adjoins the art gallery and we have connected

with the SA Living Arts Month. One meeting we focused on the theme of Winter where we each offered prayers and poems. One of our most memorable times was when Peg Goodluck gave an amazing rendition of a kookaburra call.

### HUNTER AND CENTRAL COAST GROUP

Prayer breakfasts with a visiting speaker (eg Kathy Galloway, when leader of the Iona Community for example) have been successful. The first two were ecumenical clergy breakfasts with up to 80 participants. Another one open to all was not as popular for some reason.

Dinner with a guest speaker (Constantine Dubbagh, director of a Gaza medical centre) held at the Greek Orthodox Church's restaurant attracted about 90 people.

We joined forces with other organisations, eg Social Justice committee of the Hunter Presbytery in organising an art exhibition of works from Gaza done following the Israeli bombing.

### LAUNCESTON GROUP

We mainly focus on worship and sharing times. We value these times very much and we all feel confident and are open in what we say.

### NORTH ADELAIDE GROUP

Our group has a strong focus on Reconciliation. We have enjoyed walking tours around the Port Adelaide Inner Harbour where we have followed the Kaurna Heritage Trail and its interpretative plaques that have helped us to appreciate the cultural significance of the area. We are planning a more extensive tour in conjunction with the local First Australians. This will be a four-hour tour that will explore a wide range of local sites of significance. (*More about this in the next issue of Pipeline.*)

### NORTH SYDNEY GROUP

At one of our recent meetings, we used the Wellspring Community pamphlet as a basis for discussion. We were reminded what Wellspring is about. We reviewed our group life. The process was so effective that we will do it every 12 months. It has brought a heightened commitment to Wellspring and to each other, as well as a more varied programme, including:

- a silent Meditative Walk around a harbour-side park, followed by afternoon tea and discussion
- a train tip to Blue Mountains, picnic lunch and reflection in a park in Springwood.
- Joining in the 'Welcome to Australia' March in support of refugees
- Linking up with South Sydney Wellspring Group for lunch in a local café, followed by a conducted tour and talk at the Auburn Mosque

### QUEENSLAND GROUP

We organised a bus trip to Toowoomba to visit Jonathan and Penny Inkipin who provided a great morning tea followed by a time of worship with a few of their congregation and then time for an exploration of their beautiful church. We had lunch in the park that was the main focus of the Toowoomba Carnival of Flowers and then explored the great beauty of the display.

### SOUTH SYDNEY GROUP

Probably the most innovative thing we have done is to have visits first to the Gallipoli Mosque and then to the Nan Tian Buddhist temple. In both we had a chance to have serious dialogue, not with official leaders but with keen and dedicated laypeople who had a good overview of their faith. This stimulated us to think about our efforts to communicate our faith.

## WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GROUP

One highlight had been the planning of an event held in 2012 to encourage people to understand the situation of asylum seekers and humanitarian refugees. We invited several church groups to join us as well as the public through publicity in local papers and flyers being distributed wherever we could. We had several people who came, some from church groups and 3 or 4 from other areas of interest.

We connected with CARAD (Coalition Assisting Refugees and Detainees), a group that commenced in 1999/2000 when Asylum seekers were being released in large numbers to Perth with no real support) by inviting one of the Anglican Deacons to speak and tell of her experience with CARAD and also as a Migrant Agent. Although there were only about 25 people present a number of them have responded positively to the day by following up.

Other highlights could have been getting 10 to the Canberra Gathering, and then hosting 2011 Gathering or the few retreats we have during past years.

## CHALLENGES

### BLUE MOUNTAINS GROUP

One challenge is how the 'common good' theme can become grounded in the Australian situation. Rev Dorothy McRae McMahan's recent visit to our group highlighted South Sydney's positive approach to indigenous and youth concerns as 'good news' in the South Sydney Herald.

### FISH GROUP

One challenge is that when we have the Gathering or other 'interruptions' to our program we end up with long gaps and it becomes difficult to draw people together again. Another challenge is trying to ensure that our events are attractive – we went to a film festival that focused on the poor but the film we chose ended up being very long and quite dreary.

## HUNTER AND CENTRAL COAST GROUP

Sadly, our group faced a threat to its continued existence. One of our group sought to take control of the group in ways that did not suit others. One of us was alienated by this process and did not continue to join with us. We also lost the would-be leader and spouse. We have not really recovered from this time. Furthermore, in an attempt to overcome difficulties associated with travelling relatively large distances, our original group split in two. Unfortunately, neither group has prospered.

In an attempt to move forward, we are trying to rebuild engagement through some joint meetings with Christians for Peace, an active ecumenical group interested in refugee issues as well as commemorating Hiroshima Day. Most Hunter-based Wellspring people have a connection with Christians for Peace and we have had joint meetings over a meal.

### LAUNCESTON GROUP

Our challenges stem from events outside of Wellspring. We are small and we feel the impact when several members have family responsibilities or other obligations that must take precedence.

### NORTH ADELAIDE GROUP

Aging is the main challenge we face as individual members – where once we walked extensively to explore areas, now we drive! Likewise, we need to keep in contact with those who are too frail to attend meetings regularly.

Other challenges include nurturing one another in faith; attracting younger interest; and proposing opportunities for involvement while at the same time recognising that many people are already fully committed within their local faith communities.

How do we respond to these challenges? Lynona Hawkins, as Sate Contact person, comments that within the wider context of all South Australian groups, we have responded

by inviting a 'younger' person to share her life-changing journey in India and Nepal. She was very nervous but she appreciated the support and encouragement she received in response to her talk. Another younger person is helping out with advertising the events as they come up. Neither of these are presently Friends of Wellspring but the contact is important. In addition, I email or send letters to everyone to keep them informed so that even if unable to attend they know what is happening. We try to factor a Quiet Day into the year's program as a time of nurturing and balancing our doing.

### NORTH SYDNEY GROUP

We have found it a challenge to grow our group. We have found that people who have 'Wellspring Interests' are usually very involved in local churches, and other organisations. These other organisations e.g. Amnesty International or Refugee Support Groups, have a higher profile and one can easily understand the work and see the results of the work they do. It is more difficult to explain the benefits of being a Wellspring member.

### QUEENSLAND GROUP

Remote members are one challenge that we face. One member lives over 850 km from Brisbane and another lives 100 km away. We maintain contact by phone and email, by trying to ensure that our meetings might coincide with times when our distant members visit Brisbane, and proactively offering hospitality when they visit Brisbane.

### SOUTH SYDNEY GROUP

Our biggest challenge is to get more people involved. Over the years quite a few people have come for a few meetings but not many have stayed on. One thing we are trying is to ask those on the fringes to come and lead a session on something that is important to them.

Our cell group has considerable benefits in our times of sharing. Maybe we have to accept that people

have other priorities and be grateful for the degree of interest they have shown.

#### WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GROUP

The biggest challenge we have is getting people together when all are busy in their special fields, mostly in the Churches usually in their Social Justice, or World Mission area. We have responded to this challenge by ringing people occasionally. This is an important initiative for all WA members, not just the Contact person. We had a challenge last year and into this year with one of members caring for her husband with Mesothelioma. Contact was usually by email.

#### OTHER THOUGHTS ON GROUP LIFE

#### BLUE MOUNTAINS GROUP

Other challenges are: 1. an awareness of aging of members of the group; 2. we have a gentle approach towards new people joining. There is also a difficulty in persuading Friends to become Members. They are involved in church and social justice issues and feel that they cannot commit more time to the Wellspring Community as Members. 3. There is a challenge to intensify the spirituality and commitment of members of our group.

#### FISH GROUP

It is important that we recognise that each Wellspring cell group will have its own life, its own pattern of meeting, and its own culture. Each must be allowed to evolve naturally and organically.

#### HUNTER AND CENTRAL COAST GROUP

It seems that efforts put into a cell group meeting often meet up with the phenomenon of STBO - 'subject to better offer'. This means that Wellspring cell group meetings can always be left off the agenda if something more attractive comes along.

Peter Millar's view is that the Iona Community family groups commit to each other that they will always attend family meetings as top priority, nothing except illness prevents their attendance. It is part of their commitment to their community.

We have more success when organising an event, but our local group now has smaller numbers than previous years.

#### LAUNCESTON GROUP

We see great benefits in our cell group. We value the openness and the sense of other people accompanying us on our journey.

### Proposed Trip to Iona

*Marie Thompson (Chatswood NSW, Day 28) inspired by Jan Sutch Pickard's portrayal of Iona as a place of sending out is planning a trip to experience Iona at first hand.*

Are you interested in spending a week on Iona? The Wellspring Community has been allocated up to 20 places in the Abbey from 6 – 12 September 2014.

The focus for the week is "Economic Justice". Kathy Galloway will be Leader. Jan Sutch Pickard will be assisting Kathy.

There are a few places left.

For more information:  
contact: Marie Thompson -  
andrew.marie1@optusnet.com.au  
(or phone 02 9410.1965)

#### NORTH SYDNEY GROUP

One of the great positives of group life is that it is wonderful to share with people who have an interest in affairs outside of their own local church; people with a broad understanding of the gospel message, in an environment of love and open sharing.

#### QUEENSLAND GROUP

We are trying to connect more frequently with the wider public and other groups. A wide group of people attended our blessings writing workshop and our public meeting on Palestine with Jan Sutch Pickard. We had a lively meeting with members of the Progressive Christianity group and a few others when Peter Millar visited.

#### WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GROUP

We have been greatly encouraged by the prayerful support from our local group as well as the wider community. The National and Ecumenical perspectives are meaningful to us. We had great encouragement by visits from Leaders, or others of the National Community when we have occasionally been able to visit some of our widespread members (several hundred miles from the city).

Even if they do not physically meet very often local groups are important especially when members get to know each other and their interests and concerns.

### For Your Diary

#### 2015 National Gathering

Thursday 17 to Sunday 20 September 2015  
Ballarat Grammar School, Ballarat Vic



Ballarat Grammar School is an Anglican school in extensive parklands near Lake Wendouree. It provides boarding facilities for over 200 students in family-oriented boarding houses.

## *Wellspring: My Cell Group Beyond Borders!*

*Amy Daniel (Day 31, Singapore), a recent Friend reflects on how Wellspring has become a form of cell group for her. Amy has also contributed to our website.*

Cell groups play a crucial role in Christian life. Jesus said he would be present “where two or three are gathered”. Cell groups are indispensable in a country like Singapore where I live, where Sunday worship is a crowded and anonymous affair because church attendance is high.

On my return to Singapore after being away for some years, I searched for a cell group I could belong to. Over a period of three years, I tried joining no less than 5 different several cell groups in various Churches. I participated at Sunday worship services at each Church as well. Regretfully, I was unable to find a cell group in which I could feel comfortable. I was seriously disillusioned and it was hard not to feel like a misfit!

I was forced to make do with anonymous Sunday worship. I started praying the Divine Office and doing spiritual reading on my own at home. Buying the three-volume Divine Office set while studying theology overseas proved to be an inspired investment. Slowly but surely, I began to recognize I am called to contemplative spirituality and became very comfortable praying alone and in silence. No wonder I didn't fit into any cell group!

I was then inspired to start combining my overseas holidays with attending a retreat at some overseas retreat centre. I was surprised to find I could connect more easily with kindred spirits overseas than with anyone I met in the local cell groups. I discovered the God who ministers to me more powerfully overseas than when I am home in Singapore.

In 2010, I decided to revisit Perth where I had studied at UWA. It was while searching online for a retreat to attend that I first encountered the Wellspring Western Australia group. The venue of the Annual Retreat was



*Amy Daniel*

Perth! Its theme was Jesus' parables which I love, and without any hesitation I signed up. As a result I connected with Janelle Macgregor who volunteered to pick me up from the airport at 1 am! Actually, problems at immigration control meant it was way past 2 am when I finally emerged at Arrivals. It made SUCH a difference to be met by patiently-waiting Janelle. We were both amazed at how we instantly recognized one another.

I was comfortable with Janelle right from the start. I felt welcomed and accepted. Yet I was somewhat overwhelmed - it was the-then Wellspring National Leader who had come to pick me up at the airport! She also volunteered to provide transport from Perth to the Retreat venue at Shoalwater. And she was the one conducting the Retreat! Wellspring was proving to be bag of surprises!

I had a good experience of the Retreat both spiritually and socially. Wellspring members received me warmly and I appreciated Janelle's use of poetry and art to communicate the depth of meaning of Jesus' parables. I fitted right in and made new friends. I have been in email contact with a few of them regularly since then. It was with joy in my heart that I returned to Singapore after my first Wellspring retreat.

I joined Wellspring as a Friend not long after. In March 2011 I received

the Prayer Diary which fascinated me tremendously. I had searched for years for a cell group I could belong and failed. You cannot imagine how I felt discovering a group that focused on members actually praying for each other! I use the Prayer Diary daily, and I pray for the other members as faithfully as I can. It comforts me greatly to know that other members are praying for me. [Sincere thanks to all those who pray for me on my Prayer Day.]

In addition, the issues that Wellspring focuses on, as indicated by its website, the Prayer Diary, and in *Pipeline*, are issues that matter to me as well: social justice, multiculturalism and diversity issues - all intrinsically linked to a form of contemplative spirituality I had grown accustomed to by then. I am particularly impressed by Wellspring's ecumenical spirit - it is hardly mentioned because it is actually assumed! Indeed I felt quite at home!

Although most cell groups are small and meet face to face, for me Wellspring Australia now serves as a kind of cell group meets my needs. It has done much more than give me a sense of belonging. Discovering that a sense of belonging in the Christian community need not be restricted by geographic borders has helped to ground my restless spirit somewhat. During my month long holiday in May this year, I was “accompanied in prayer” by Wellspringers Margaret and Neil Holm in Brisbane. They actually asked for my itinerary and prayed for me each day. [This has NEVER happened before.] I also have a standing invitation from Mary Gilchrist to visit Sydney.

In addition, the Prayer Diary has ignited a spiritual renewal in my life by introducing me to Celtic spirituality with its focus on immanent divine presence in nature, and to new authors I have enjoyed reading.

Indeed Wellspring has surpassed what I was looking for in a cell group!

Thank you Wellspring.

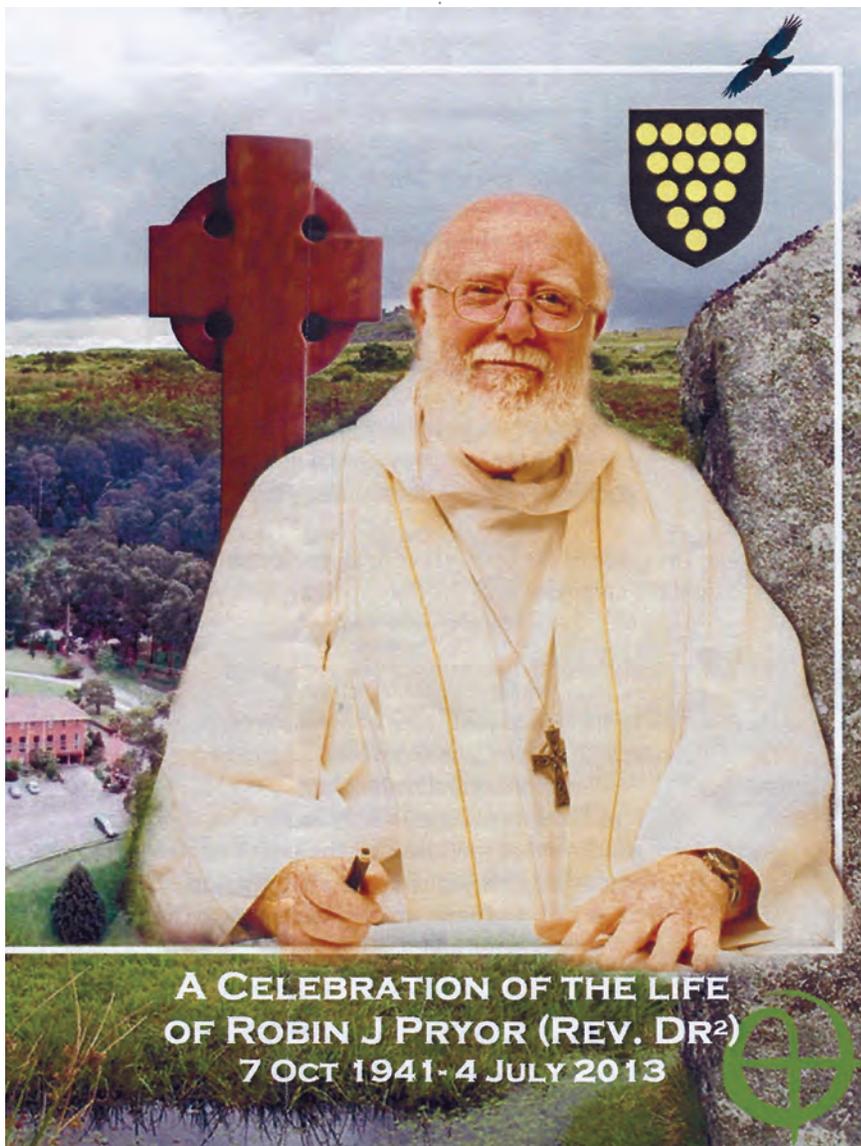
# BAMM: BOOKS, ART, MUSIC, MOVIES



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

## BAMM: ART

*Robin Pryor (St Andrew's Beach, Vic, Day 22) was a former Deputy Leader and State Contact for Wellspring Community. He died on 4 July 2013. His reflections on Wellspring and a snapshot of his life is on the website [<http://wellspringcommunity.org.au/index.php/news>]. Jack and Peg Goodluck, who had known Robin for many years, represented us at his funeral. Many of us remember Robin's contribution to the 2005 Canberra National Gathering. During his illness Robin wrote a series of poems and reflections ("Ode to the Pancreas") to record his journey.*



## GOD IS IN THE FACTS

"God is in the facts"  
"God is in the moment"  
These mantras  
of my Jesuit mentor  
Gerry Hughes\*  
whisper their way  
between heart and head today,  
inviting all the senses  
to recall, note,  
inwardly digest  
and give thanks  
for their profound simplicity  
yet their life-giving impetus.  
Even rolling them  
literally around with the tongue  
brings savour and relish  
to a mouth and a body  
uninterested in other food and drink  
which is likely to be expelled  
soon afterwards anyway  
The 'facts'  
and the 'moment'  
are not outwardly very promising  
except God  
and the journey with and to God  
hold the ultimate promise  
secure.

Fri 21 June 2013

\*Author of *God of Surprises*

*Jill Robertson's (Dunlop ACT, Day 21) calligraphic interpretation of Jan Sutch Pickard's poem, A Fly Called Alice.*

See next page:

A fly called Alice by Jan Suteh Rickard



I sat under  
the trees:  
you dropped by  
to say 'Hello'.

I went for  
a walk:  
you wanted  
to come too.



I put on  
a sun-hat:  
you came to  
admire it.

Sun-cream,  
fly-repellent:  
you seemed  
to desire it.

Opened the  
screen-door:  
you rushed  
to come in.



I poured out  
a drink:  
you said  
'Time for a swim'.



Spoke to you  
sternly:  
'Oh push off,  
steer clear!'



But you looked  
me in the eye,  
had a word  
in my ear.

Made me  
so welcome  
to your hot,  
dry home.



Made me  
so welcome:  
wouldn't leave  
me alone.....



So I left  
for the airport  
for a no-fly zone.

Walked on to  
the tarmac,  
still waving:  
'Shoo! Shoo!'

O fly called  
Alice, I know  
it's hard,



When I got  
to the plane,  
you said  
'I can fly too!'

But I've  
squashed you  
flat with my  
boarding card.



## BAMM: MOVIES

### Thirteen Days (2000)

(Director Roger Donaldson)



This movie focuses on the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. It examines the decision-making process within the White House as President John F Kennedy (Bruce Greenwood), the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Air Force General, Kennedy's diplomatic and political advisors (led by Chief of Staff Kenneth O'Donnell (Kevin Costner) whose role in the film, according to historians, assumed far greater importance than in actuality) respond to the crisis.

Despite its historical inaccuracies, the film is highly entertaining and perhaps, more importantly, it is an excellent dramatisation of the

role of groupthink in decision making. Groupthink can prevail in a small group that is characterised by overconfidence where members are highly optimistic and have a tendency to take great risks and who have a overweening confidence in their own morality (if we do it then it must be ethical). Such groups also exhibit close-mindedness: they protect their operating assumptions from challenge through collectively holding on to self-justifying explanations; they regard all other groups and experts as inferior and even stupid. These groups also exhibit signs of group pressure: within the group dissenters are coerced to cede to the majority view; a pressure develops that causes individuals to keep doubts to themselves and this leads to an illusion of unanimity within the group; and some members assume the role of mind guards (they protect the leader and others from dissenting opinions that might disrupt consensus).

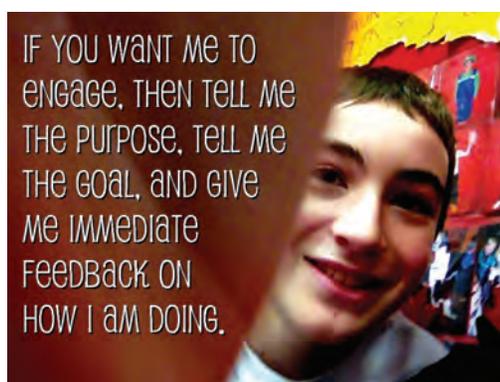
The film is a useful tool for groups to reflect on their decision-making processes. Wellspring Council that

has its own built in pressure through time-constrained meetings and the lack of body language including the simple gesture of putting your hand up to speak. These factors have the potential to prevent 'dissenters' from sharing their thoughts. Decision making is not a major function of cell groups but some aspects of groupthink can manifest themselves when the viewpoint of some (lefties or Liberals, conservatives or progressives, Catholics or UCs) begins to seem unanimous or simply taken-for-granted.

The full 2 hour 19 minute movie is on YouTube for free <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tho5ZYLiuoc> or you can pay \$3.99 to watch it on <https://www.youtube.com/movie/thirteen-days>

Another movie that explores similar themes is 'Twelve Angry Men' (1957, directed by Sidney Lumet. This 1 hour 36 minute film is about blind agreement and dissent on a jury with Henry Fonda as the sole holdout. You can watch it on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrnXDHYb-9s>

## ENGAGEMENT



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

### St Columba's Day on Iona

In the June 2013 edition of *Pipeline*, Jan Sutch Pickard drew on her experience at Iona. Mary Esselmont (Margaret River WA, Day 6) reflects on her recent experience at Iona.

St Columba's Day 9th June, 2013, I passed a little building to the left of the West door on my way to worship.

When I was a child, all that was there was a stone-course or two, dating back to the 9th century. According to

legend, that this was all that was left of a stone chapel built over the original monastery church - the place where

St Columba died at the great age of 75 in the year 597.

A child named Crimthann was born into the noble Ui Neill family, overlords of today's County Donegal in Northern Ireland. He was fostered out to a priestly family, who gave him a Gaelic Christian name - Colum Cille, which means "Dove of the Church". However, Latin was the formal language of the church, and so we better know him as Columba.

Something happened to the princely Colum Cille on a battlefield at Cooldrevne – in those days it wasn't at all unusual for a nobleman be both a warrior and in holy orders - something that convinced him to leave home and become a pilgrim for Christ. So with a group of twelve relatives, he crossed the sea to visit Conall mac Comgall. This man ruled the Argyll part of the great kingdom of Dal Riata, which encompassed parts of modern Northern Ireland and Western Scotland. Columba and his group later moved to Iona – the story goes that the little island was a gift from Conall. The group arrived on Iona in the summer of the year Columba turned 40. But why settle on such a remote island?

Nowadays, on Monday mornings, a special early ferry leaves at 6am, taking the students of high school age to Fionnphort; then they bus across the Island of Mull to Craignure, where they catch another ferry to Oban. These weekly boarders reach school just in time for lessons at 9am, and they repeat the journey home on Friday afternoon. Yes, Iona is remote even today, but in Columba's time, it was situated right on a main sea-faring highway. It was an excellent base. The kingdom of Dal Riata was already Christian, so Columba would have been priest to the people as he travelled around the islands.

Columba's monastery was segregated from the rest of the island, by a 'vallum' - a deep ditch bordered by banks of earth. Parts are still visible. As well as the church, there would have been work and living areas, made of wood and thatch, for the monks and



*Mary Esselmont*

their visitors. The scriptorium was the most important work area – where the Book of Kells and other manuscripts were produced. Excavation shows us some of the other activities - metal work, glass-making, leather and wood-work – and obviously stone carving was popular, we know that from the high crosses and the grave-slabs.

We learn from his biographer Adomnan that when he was home on Iona, Columba copied manuscripts, prayed and meditated; he led his monks in work and worship; and he was spiritual advisor to visitors who would come to the island to seek his counsel.

Once his monastery on Iona was established, Columba founded a monastic confederation, setting up branches on already Christianised Hinba, Tiree, and Durrow in Ireland. He also visited the Picts, who were not yet Christian, so he may well have established monasteries and evangelized areas round them. Certainly the confederation long outlived him and his monks went on to found daughter houses. In 634 King Oswald of Northumbria donated Lindisfarne for the foundation of an Iona-type monastery.

The legend is that as he approached death, Columba blessed every part of the land of Iona – and the people, the cattle and the crops.

However, Viking raids began to trouble the islands, and in 806 some 68 lives were lost on Iona, at what is now called Martyr's Bay. It was probably at this point that the Book of Kells was taken to the Kells in Ireland, where an abbey was built for its safe-keeping.

After the death of Columba, Iona became a place of pilgrimage. People would arrive at Martyrs Bay and visit various holy places around the island before coming to their final destination, the shrine. Though diminished because of the Viking invasions, a small monastic community continued on Iona, and one of the things they did was build the stone chapel whose foundations I knew as a child. Vikings settled on the islands, intermarried with local people, and became Christian. One of their descendants, Somerled became known as the Lord of the Isles. It was his son Ranald who founded the Clan MacDonald and invited the Benedictine Monks and Augustinian Nuns to Iona in 1200.

The Benedictines had become established in Dunfermline in the time of King Malcolm and Queen (St) Margaret. Now a time of great building began on Iona. Benedictine monasticism was different from Columba's rule, but the Lords of the Isles were devoted to his memory and to the spirituality of Iona. Monastic life flourished on the island until the Reformation.

Gradually the Abbey and the Nunnery fell into ruin. However, reversal began when the 8th Duke of Argyll had preservative work done, and gave the buildings into a Cathedral Trust. Then in 1938, Rev George MacLeod founded the Iona Community, with a project to rebuild the Abbey.

And so, the little stone building to the left of the West Door was built over the stone courses I remember as a child, and completed in 1962. It's known as St Columba's Shrine.

My husband Iain remembers being on Iona as a Boy Scout, and seeing the already legendary Dr George MacLeod. I recall listening to him

preach when I was a schoolgirl in Glasgow. So much has changed! George MacLeod has returned to his Maker, and his Community is now 75 years old.

And so on 9th June, St Columba's Day, Iain and I sat in the Abbey with my childhood friend - a present-day MacDonald of Iona, and her husband. We'd arrived in style by car - the only vehicles on the island belong to the locals! Passing the Shrine, the probable place of Columba's death, this day 1416 years ago, and walking under the shadow of the great High Cross of St John, we went into the Abbey and down the aisle to sit in the Crossing - the junction of the four arms of the church. We were early, so we settled ourselves opposite the desk where Joanna Anderson, Iona Community's Island Centres Director would sit, and the lectern from which Dr Ian Bradley of St Andrews University would give the sermon. This morning's ecumenical worship was entitled Bell, Book and Candle. A long table was symbolically set up at the crossing with candles, a bell and a Bible. The Order of Service Booklet explained:

The Title of this service may surprise some of you. 'Bell, Book and Candle' were used in the past when those who

earned the dire disapproval of the Church - heretics and wrongdoers - were cursed, using these symbols of religious authority. However, each of these has associations that are more positive. For the Celtic monks, and for ourselves, they could be symbols of blessing; the blessing of being called; the blessing of hearing and studying God's word; the blessing of being sent out, carrying the Good News. That's what we celebrate today.

After Rev. Joanna Anderson had welcomed us, and the packed congregation had sung that wonderful hymn with its Celtic Christian themes, and its unmistakably Gaelic melody (Be thou my vision), we settled down to hear a story from Elizabeth Kennedy of the Parish Church. Then Tobin Lewis, Warden of the Episcopal Bishop's House led these beautiful responses:

*Creator God, ever-present like the steady fall of waves on the shore*

*We hear your call*

*Jesus, Companion, as close to us as the beating of our hearts*

*We hear your call.*

*Holy Spirit, on the wind, in the heart-stirring music of the wild geese*

*We hear your call.*

Rev. Joyce Watson of the Scottish Episcopal Church read the Gospel. The sermon, by Dr Ian Bradley whose books are well known to many of us, was a joy to hear. We sang that other wonderful Celtic hymn, *I bind unto Myself Today*, before Sr Jean Lawson of the Roman Catholic House of Prayer led the Intercessions. Candles were distributed as we left - to take home, symbolizing the teaching of Columba being taken out to the whole world.

Finally, the Blessing was given in both English and the Gaelic by the Rt Rev. Lorna Hood, who has just begun her term as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

It's always hard to leave Iona, to leave this island of spirituality and to part for another while from very dear friends. However, this time I had four little tea candles in my bag. - one for each of the centres in the widespread parish of Augusta/Margaret River in the South-West Corner of W.A. And so the light of Iona has gone half was round the world with me. I wonder where all the other candles might have reached! Together on Iona, we had truly celebrated the blessing of being called; the blessing of hearing and studying God's word; and the blessing of being sent out, carrying the Good News - the message of Columba, the Dove of the Church.

## The State of the Community

Roy Lanigan (Hampton Park Vic, Day 13) wrote a four foolscap paged letter in which he connected with Bonhoeffer's ideas in the *State of Community (Leader's Letter)* article in the June 2013 issue of Pipeline. Here are some of his thoughts.

Christians are continually reminded that while we are not of this world we are citizens of it and we are required to love God and Jesus, first by loving those whom we touch, whatever our calling or activity, wherever we stand and in who we are.

What may be called secular relationships are to be decided by the individual believer. These relationships include sport, study for further advancement or for any honest activity such as work, as long as the believer can devote it to Christ for his honour, as all personal work should be for him as well as personal enjoyment.



Roy Lanigan

As part of my community involvement, I am a trade unionist. I am involved in party political affairs especially those that concern standards of public life and welfare such as public health,

housing, transport, and power that all affect the daily lives of all citizens and their secular standard of living.

In this endeavour I engage with many who hold different beliefs and who have different allegiances. Some challenge the ownership of material resources and how they are to be publically enjoyed and by whom. Christians of the left believe that God gave the resources of the earth to the people of the earth. These resources are to be developed and used by the God-given talents of each person, to the glory of God, for the common good through the agency of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

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**NEXT ISSUE:** December 2013 will focus on the broad themes of Spirituality and Aging. You might like to consider issues such as the relationship of spirituality and aging to retirement, aged care, Christian service, wisdom, prayer, isolation and solitude, stages of faith, spiritual development etc. Please consider contributing.

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**Deadline for material** is Monday 4th November.