TUI MOTU InterIslands

Independent Catholic Magazine CELEBRATING 23 YEARS 1997–2020 Issue 245 February 2020 $7

WHAKANUIA IA TANGATA
APPRECIATING EVERY PERSON

What makes us feel human and valued? How do we grow in understanding of others? What helps us overcome our fear of difference? Why is inclusion so important? MIKE RIDDELL, DONALD MILLER, PATTY FAWKNER, MIKE NICHOLAS, ALISON PHIPPS, HELEN DEW and others discuss these questions

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EDITORIAL

Valuing Every Person — Te Tangata

Happy new year to you! Although we're already into our second month with the year's newness worn slightly at the corners, we give you a "first" for the year — this issue of Tui Motu magazine. New year reminds me of poet Mary Oliver's "Instructions for living a life. Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it." We'll keep this in mind for the year.

We intend to use as our monthly themes what Jean Vanier described as principles of humanity. "All humans are sacred," he said "and shouldn't be treated with less respect or appreciation because of their differences." He demonstrated this in the L'Arche communities. Our writers suggest that we'll be challenged and inspired by the principle of humanity in many areas of our lives.

We've seen human courage and kindness blossoming lately.

While the politicians stumbled before the Australian bushfire onslaught, we saw firefighters, ambulance crews, local groups and individuals risking their lives to save human and other life from the fires ravaging homes and countryside. And we felt the impact of empathy and generosity of young and old here — fundraising, collecting and sending medical and other supplies to our neighbours across the Tasman. They drew us into practical solidarity with those suffering.

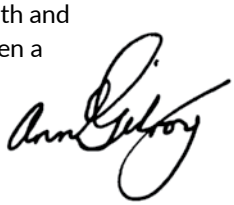
When the measles epidemic struck in Samoa before Christmas and the coronavirus in China this year, we witnessed the heroism of local health workers and those arriving from elsewhere to help in the deadly emergencies. They worked to relieve the suffering of those with the virus and also to prevent it spreading around the world community. We've felt the threat and fragility of the world community as much as our inclusion and unity.

And Greta Thunberg addressed world leaders again, this time at the World Economic Forum. She begged them to consider how their decisions impact Earth and its potential for supporting all life into the future. A young prophet, she faced the uber-rich — like David before Goliath, Kate Shepherd before the male electorate, the Boston Globe before the Archdiocese of Boston. She makes us feel our responsibility for our children's future and to care about our own footprint on the environment.

And we saw the battle to save Ihumātao from becoming a housing development. For months on end, protestors — with a sense of the sacredness of this land — have been pitted against government and business — under pressure to relieve the housing crisis in Auckland. But the power of negotiation brought a positive outcome for both. We feel the challenge to understand and support the initiatives of our indigenous people.

Our writers in this issue offer other aspects of appreciating and respecting every person. We thank them and all our contributors whose art and craft, thoughtfulness and study, faith and encouragement make this issue a good read — even a preparation for slipping into Lent at the end of the month.

Welcome to 2020! As is our custom, our last words are of blessing.



BUSH FIRES, CLIMATE CHANGE AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

New Year's Eve was different in Australia. Yes, there were the Sydney fireworks. Yes, there were the celebrations, but there was also something far bigger playing out around the nation.

Australia was, and is, witnessing its worst bushfire season in living memory. On NYE many, including friends of mine, saw in the new year huddled together in evacuation centres on the country's south coast. The sheer scale of the blazes shut down highways, cut off supplies and left thousands stranded. Unable to leave, they were also unable to escape the reality of blood-red skies filled with thick smoke.

They were the fortunate ones. These holidaymakers had lost their vacation, but not their homes. They had lost a few days at the beach, but not their lives.

Many across the country have not been so lucky. By mid-January more than 2,000 houses had been destroyed and at least 28 people had been killed in this bushfire season. Some 11 million hectares had been burned in four different states, and an estimated 1 billion animals are dead.

The destruction has left little in its wake other than smoke which has spread over New Zealand and as far as Chile and Argentina. It's a national obituary written across the sky.

By the time you read this, all those figures will have risen. Largely to blame is the weather. It is the hottest, driest year on record exacerbated by a drought which had already robbed the land of any moisture.

Dry lightning strikes, the result of rainless thunderstorms, have provided the spark to this environmental powder keg. Small fires have exploded into out-of-control blazes. Some 72,000 firefighters, the largest contingent in the world, have done their best to keep the fires somewhat contained. They've braved intense conditions, ferocious heat and long, exhausting days and nights to do so. Alongside charities and entire communities, they have demonstrated an indomitable national spirit.

Of course, the bushfire crisis is as multifaceted as it is large. Australia is now engaged in fierce public discussion about what can be done to minimise damage, and to prevent and prepare for future fires. Importantly, Australians are also asking why the fires are so intense and why they are happening now — about the bigger picture of climate change.

As a result, Prime Minister Scott Morrison and his Coalition government in power since 2013, has found itself under intense pressure.

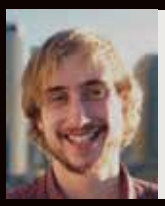
In what could prove one of the defining moments of his prime ministership, Morrison was discovered to be on holiday in Hawaii in December while his own country burned. It took sustained scrutiny to draw him back, a tardiness which incensed even his party's supporters.

And he has been on the back foot since. Many are questioning his government's slow response to the crisis. Tens of thousands have marched in Australia's capital cities, demanding that the government tackle climate change rather than let the nation simply suffer its ill effects.

While not causing the bushfires, climate change does increase their ferocity and frequency. Climate change has proved the number one political thorn in the side of federal governments for years. The current government's support of the large coal industry and history of climate denial are a terrible mistake given the current crisis.

There has been some backpedalling as a result, but few believe it will lead to any substantial change in policy. This is the latest sign of a total absence of leadership in Australian politics. Allusions to Nero fiddling while Rome burned are rife, and unfortunately, apt.

Photo: Karl Hoffman/Shutterstock.com



Jack Derwin is a senior reporter at *Business Insider Australia*. His interests include all aspects of social justice particularly in the South Pacific region.

The Face of God

MIKE RIDDELL **reflects on Jean Vanier's practice of walking alongside others without judgement.**

"Each person is sacred, no matter what his or her culture, religion, handicap or fragility. Each person is created in God's image; each one has a heart, a capacity to love and to be loved."

— Jean Vanier

The irony when we encounter difference is the belief that our own lives are the yardstick of what constitutes normality. Because of this we associate with people who seem similar to ourselves, gathering in social ghettoes that reinforce our sense of what is acceptable. We fear those who display strange behaviour, and subtly judge them as somehow different and possibly beneath us.

It doesn't take a great deal to subvert this illusion — mostly the willingness to engage with people unlike us, or to recognise our own suffering. Suffering is, of course, the essential quality that makes us human, and the unwillingness to suffer is the quality which deprives us of it. Resistance to physical or emotional pain distances us not only from others but from ourselves. It may be that it's the attempt to anaesthetise ourselves that tempts us to commune only with the like-minded.

When we open our hearts to our own inadequacies, it becomes possible to recognise others who are as vulnerable and hurting as we are. As Jean Vanier so clearly recognised, love and acceptance are the qualities all people need and seek. His motivation wasn't to "save" people, but to join with them in the common lot of their humanity. Healing is never one-sided, but always mutual.

Compassion and Communion

Compassion is suffering alongside, rather than the strong person aiding the weak. The communion of brokenness is sweet and redemptive. Vanier taught us to simply walk alongside others in an absence of judgement.

The first step toward genuine love is surrendering our own sense of superiority. Only then do we begin to

recognise what we proclaim: that each of us is made in the image of God.

Entering a Different World

In my own life, I learned this through entering into the world of what was then called "the psychiatric community". In the company of people who were drugged and incarcerated because of their strange behaviour, I discovered that I was regarded as the odd one—a man who had a stable life, a long-term relationship and financial security. But they were willing to forgive me.

Tania

There was Tania, a lost child who had a purely innocent love of Jesus. She lived in a boarding house where she practised prostitution to support her drug habit. When I rang one time to ask for her, one of the other residents informed me she was "out making love". Her eyes consistently bulged with kindness, even when her face was bruised through bad encounters. She committed suicide one night when it all got too much for her.

Roger

There was Roger, who liked to think of himself as an Elvis impersonator. Given the slightest of chances he'd grab the microphone from the pulpit at church and begin crooning to the startled congregation. Often when I went to his home (provided by our Vanier-inspired Community of Refuge) he'd be at the door in his underpants and sunglasses. He died of AIDS a few years after I last saw him.

John

There was John who swung wildly between depression and extravagant delirium. He was torn between the fact that he was gay and the knowledge that his deeply-religious parents considered this an aberration. On one dramatic occasion he entered church twirling a bright purple parasol, minced his way across the sanctuary and apologised loudly that he was late. The visiting preacher was startled.

Taffy

There was Taffy, an old man whom I had the privilege of burying. He'd spent his last years in a large boarding house. A merchant seaman at one time in his life, everything had fallen apart in ways he couldn't control. Part way through the funeral, his estranged wife began berating the people gathered for the service as bodysnatchers, sparking a huge argument before we all retired for a cup of tea together. We finally packed his borrowed coffin in the back of our van to take him to the funeral parlour.

As Jean Vanier so clearly recognised, love and acceptance are the qualities all people need and seek. His motivation wasn't to "save" people, but to join with them in the common lot of their humanity.

Maryanne

There was Maryanne, who we thought we'd honour by providing a surprise birthday party at her flat. We all brought food and drinks and settled in for a good evening. But once the candles on the cake were blown out, Maryanne announced that she was going out and asked us all to leave. She later surprised some with the news that she'd spent time in prison for murder.

These folk were not "clients" that we cared for, but friends who enlivened us, educated us and shared their struggles as we shared ours. I was, many times, humbled by the generosity and acceptance offered to me by those who were regarded by wider society as dangerous or unpredictable. Because they had been through hard times themselves, they had a much greater tolerance for those around them.

Dignity isn't something that needs to be earned — it is given by virtue of humanity. That is the core belief that Vanier so gently expressed through his life and his words. One of my favourite parts of the Bible is the metaphor in which God scoops up earth and breathes life—*ruach*—into it, in the act of creating us to be human. We remain a mix of common dirt and the breath of God.

I've also been fascinated by the cognate terms *humanity, humus* and *humour.* Much as people might want to imagine their sacrality is something pious and ethereal, it is in fact founded in the soil of the earth. This is part of what it means to be human, and we misrepresent ourselves if we pretend we are above such matters. And the sign of accepting our status is revealed through humour—the ability to laugh at ourselves.

People who are marginalised in our disapproving society don't need redemption from themselves—they already have it. The ones who could use a little enlightenment are those who distance themselves from the messy business of being human for fear of somehow being sullied. I used to joke that many kept their distance from those with obvious mental illness for fear that it might be contagious.

It's no surprise that Jesus was more often to be found in the seemingly scandalous company of his society's rejects. I'm not at all sure that it was because he saw these people as more in need of being saved. Rather he felt at home among those who didn't pretend to be anything other than what they were. These were, literally, the friends of Jesus.

The image of God is within us — each one. In this age with its fascination with image, this is the only one that matters. When we are fearful of others, perhaps outraged by them or simply ignorant of their behaviour, it is a sign that we are not yet comfortable with our own difference. It may be we need to find that deep acceptance within before we're ready to celebrate the face of God in those around us.

Painting: *Jean Vanier* by Ronald Patrick Raab CSC

Mike Riddell writes novels, plays, films and apology notes. He cooks when he can and breathes intentionally on a daily basis.

BECOMING HUMAN AGAIN

DONALD MILLER describes the struggle for survivors of the Rwandan genocide to feel they have value as persons.

One of the first survivors that I interviewed in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide told me that his Catholic priest refused to give him communion because he did not give the body and blood of Christ to a "cockroach"—which is what Tutsis were referred to by Hutu extremists.

In 100 days, beginning in April 1994, more than 800,000 Tutsis were killed by militia, but more astoundingly, by their Hutu neighbours, with whom they had previously enjoyed good relations, including being the godparents to their children.

Building Up to Genocide

How can such atrocities occur? In every instance of genocide, it is preceded by demonising the target group, making them less than human. Humans do not kill one another on a mass scale for fun; they concoct theories that justify their extermination. This is the role of propaganda: To dehumanise people so that they can be killed without ruffling one's conscience.

In the case of Rwanda, tens of thousands of women were raped, sometimes in front of their children. And not raped once, but multiple times. One survivor told us that every man in the village knew her body.

Family structures were destroyed. The roles of mother, grandparent, sister or brother were lost when nearly everyone in the family unit was killed. Houses were destroyed, ensuring that survivors would not return. Social roles related to employment no longer existed. And for many survivors, their religious views were called into question: Where was God? Why didn't God intervene? Did God not care about his children?

Destroying Moral Compass

Genocide is not just about death. It is a moral rupture in one's world view, which is the basis of psychological trauma after a genocide. Nothing makes sense anymore. Indeed, in the process of interviewing hundreds of survivors, of both the Rwanda genocide and the Armenian genocide, which occurred in 1915 in Turkey, my world view was shaken. I experienced a form of vicarious trauma.

For those of us who identify with the Christian tradition, there are many questions to ponder. In the case of Rwanda, it was Christians killing fellow Christians. The only thing that separated victim from perpetrator was their tribal identification. In fact, there were more people killed in churches than any other location, because Tutsis often fled to their local church when the killing started, thinking they would be safe. But, instead, too often clergy were bystanders to the violence and, in some instances, had actually set the

stage for genocide by spewing racist rhetoric in their sermons.

In the post-genocide period, orphans were wandering the streets; women had been infected with the AIDS virus from rapes; survivors were nursing amputations and wounds. And institutions had failed to function.

Can Religion Help Recover Personhood?

The question is whether religion can play any function in a post-genocide situation such as Rwanda. Can it help survivors regain their humanity, their sense of dignity?

My answer is ambivalent since I am troubled by the fact that most Churches, both Catholic and Protestant, did not counter the racist propaganda prior to the genocide, and only a few Hutu priests chose to die with the people of their congregations in active resistance to the killers.

Nevertheless, I would like to share my experience of Solace Ministries, a faith-based programme that emerged after the genocide in Rwanda. I believe it is a model that has lessons for other experiences of genocide, and, more generally, any situation in which large numbers of people have experienced a collective trauma.

Jean Gakwandi, the founder of Solace Ministries, lost all of his extended family in 1994, although miraculously his immediate family survived because they were sheltered in the home of a German living in Rwanda. When the genocide ended, Jean said that he felt numb, unable to feel anything. However, during the 100 days of the genocide, he read a verse from the Old Testament book of Isaiah (40:1) that kept echoing in his mind after the genocide ended: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God."

Comfort My People

In response to this command, Jean invited some survivors to meet with him. Initially, only a handful of women came. Jean invited them to tell their stories, and he wept with them. Although a layman — an Anglican by religious background — he prayed with these survivors as they cried, comforting them and acknowledging their pain.

Before long, a hundred and more survivors were meeting weekly. The format that evolved was the following: Those who gathered would sing for a long time to the beat of a drum, but with no other accompaniment. Jean would read comforting passages of scripture. And then survivors would be invited to "testify" about their experience.

Telling the Story

Initially, survivors would stand and choke out a few sentences about how their husbands, and often their children, were killed. They might refer to rape with a euphemism such as "the killers did whatever they wanted with me."

It was Christians killing fellow Christians. There were more people killed in churches than any other location, because Tutsis often fled to their local church when the killing started, thinking they would be safe.

Sometimes a survivor would ramble on for a long time, giving a completely disjointed account of what happened. Then survivors would collapse in tears, and women sitting next to them would gather around and comfort them.

One time I remember a young boy telling the most horrific story of how his mother was beheaded, and he didn't shed a tear. Jean whispered to me that tears would come with the healing of his trauma. His experiences were still too raw and undigested. Later, Jean told me that survivors who had jumped from one experience to another in their telling, would gradually develop a narrative about their lives, locating the genocide within a larger context of purpose that would enable them to move forward in life.

Finding Purpose

These testimony meetings were only one element of a larger experience for survivors. Solace Ministries took a very holistic approach — helping survivors with food and housing, assisting with the educational needs of children and, more generally, becoming the extended family that survivors had lost in the genocide.

Orphans found surrogate parents and grandparents; widows found new purpose in life caring for orphans. And this was done within the larger framework of a loving community that believed in the possibility of new life.

Jean Gakwandi told me that when he first meets survivors, their identity is totally wrapped up in their problems — that is how they see themselves. The point of sharing their trauma with a community is that it helps release the revolving thoughts of revenge, anger and repetitious memories so that survivors can live in the present. And, maybe at some future point they may experience the beneficial catharsis of forgiving the perpetrator, although doing this prior to significant healing often results in emotional blunting — the inability to feel, love and play, because the wound has been covered over prematurely without processing the trauma.

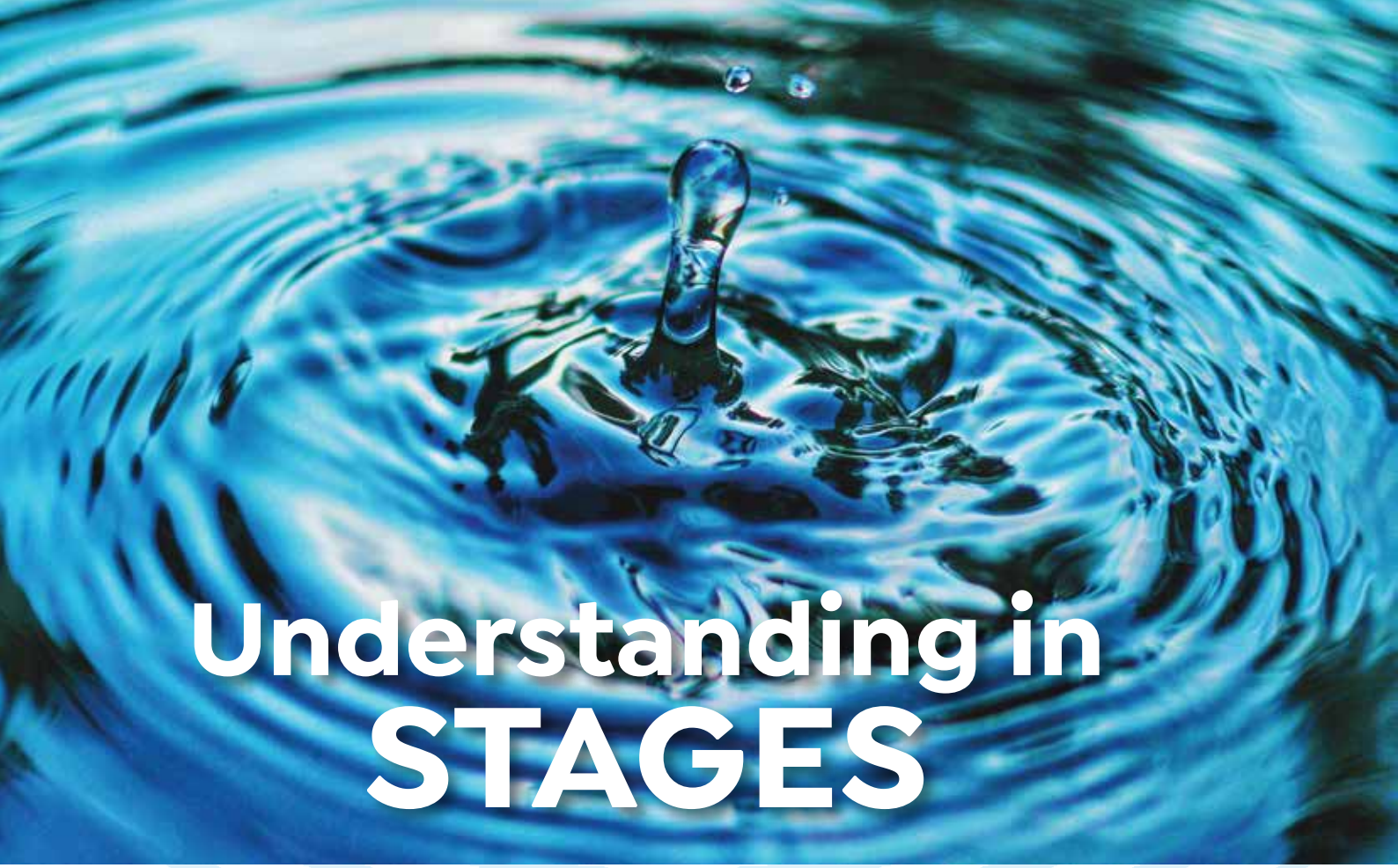
Nurturing Community

In interviewing members of the Solace, they frequently described how they had become human again through the nurture of this healing community. Psychotherapy has its benefits — although it is often not possible in the face of mass disasters. This is where religious communities can play an important role — being a place where tears can freely flow; where a person can find an extended family of nurture and care; where in a holistic way life can be put back together.

However, would it not be even better, at least in the case of genocide, if Churches were prophetic, and challenge the hate and racism that gives rise to violence?

Painting: ***Avega Women*** by Helen Wilson-Roe © Used with permission www.helenwilsonroe.com

Donald Miller is the Leonard K Firestone Professor of Religion at University of Southern California and author of *Becoming Human Again.*



Understanding in STAGES

In response to the tragedy of institutional child sexual abuse, PATTY FAWKNER discusses distinct "stages" on the journey towards understanding the crisis and keeping children safe.

"It's just a stage she's going through," was my father's universal explanation for any aberrant behaviour of his six children. As a rebellious teen, Dad's "take" on my misdemeanours made me seethe. Only later, when I trained to become a teacher, did I realise the truth of his words.

As trainee teachers we were introduced to "stage theory"; that of Jean Piaget's theory of the Four Stages of Cognitive Development, Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development, James Fowler and Faith Development, Lawrence Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development and, of course, the more widely known Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Stages of Grief.

It occurs to me that in regard to awareness of, and response to, the tragedy of child sexual abuse within our Church, many of us make a similar journey through distinct stages.

Patty Fawkner, Leader of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, lives in Sydney. She is an adult educator, writer, facilitator.

Denial and Disbelief

The first stage is denial and disbelief. When I was a very young Sister, another community member began supporting a young man who claimed that, as a child, he had been abused by a priest. Naïve and disbelieving, I could not get my head around this situation. I thought, but did not say: "Why are you befriending a troublemaker?" **Blaming the Victim** accompanies this stage.

Misdiagnosis

The next stage could be called the misdiagnosis stage. In the early days of this unfolding crisis within the Church, two key dynamics were at play: we neither understood paedophilia, nor did we understand the impact of sexual abuse on children.

We believed that sexual abuse was a moral problem and did not name it for the pathological crime it was. There would be an allegation, the priest would either deny or show remorse and beg for forgiveness—a forgiveness which was all too easily given. He was given a second chance and moved on, where he would abuse again. The devastating pattern was set: forgiveness, move on, abuse; forgiveness, move on, abuse.

Secondly, something blocked us from seeing and hearing the children. There was an appalling lack of duty of care. If children did speak up—and most didn't—they were not believed. We didn't understand the lifelong trauma these children would carry and we consistently subordinated their needs to those of the perpetrators.

We only discovered later that the chief concern of Church authorities at that time was managing institutional reputation.

Minimising

Once more, victims came forward and perpetrators were found to be guilty. I, like so many others, thought it was a case of the proverbial "few bad apples". One could call this the minimising stage.

Acceptance

But slowly, the truth began to emerge, often thanks to the media and police, and Church officials began to play "catch up". Perhaps we could call this the acceptance stage. Collaboratively, religious leaders and bishops developed documents and protocols called *Towards Healing*, *Integrity in Ministry and Integrity in the Service of the Church*. Corresponding training programmes were introduced. These programmes and documents, though not perfect, were and continue to be an honest attempt to be faithful to their intended aim of bringing some healing to victims and survivors, and to enhancing the professional conduct of Church personnel.

For perpetrators, forgiveness gave way to treatment and many were sent to specialised therapeutic programmes. However, subsequent recidivism alerted Church authorities that still more was needed.

Game Changing

Then came the "shock and awe" of *The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*. I, with others, was not prepared for the scale of the crisis within the Catholic Church in Australia. In the aftermath of the revelations and public shaming this has become the game-changing stage.

The Royal Commission in Australia was a blessing, enabling thousands upon thousands of people to come forward to tell their story for the first time—and to be believed for the first time.

It shone a light into dark places within institutions, particularly within the Catholic Church. This may be the same as the Royal Commission progresses in New Zealand.

Unequivocally, the Australian Royal Commission said that we are not dealing with the case of a "few bad apples". It critiqued seminary formation, noted the absence of women in leadership roles and—though not the sole cause—said that clericalism was the single most significant contributing factor to a culture which enabled abuse to go unchecked for decades. Most significantly, it called for structural and cultural change within the Church.

So where are we today?

Creating a Child-Safe Culture

The Church is now committed to a stage of creating a child-safe culture which includes risk prevention for vulnerable adults. *National Catholic Safeguarding Standards* have been developed and every Church agency will be audited and supported to ensure that they comply with these Standards, and are held accountable for the safety of children and vulnerable adults.

We didn't understand the lifelong trauma these children would carry and we consistently subordinated their needs to those of the perpetrators.

Child-safe policies, procedures and training programmes for all Church personnel are now the "new normal", but as Sophie Hageman, a social work consultant in the area of child protection, says: "It is easier to document a culture than to change a culture."

Not all within the Church are at this stage. Recently I had a conversation with a former teacher about an alleged case of sexual abuse by a priest with whom she had worked decades earlier. The former teacher didn't know who the claimant was but confidently asserted that they were "just after the money"! As we all come to understand this history of abuse within our Church, my father's words echo—perhaps "It's just a stage she's going through".

This article was published in the November 2019 edition of *The Good Oil*, the e-magazine of the Good Samaritan Sisters.

Photo by Jimmy Chang on Unsplash

Dear Joan Chittister: Conversations with Women in the Church

Edited by Jessie Bazan
Published by Twenty-Third Publications, 2019
Reviewed by Amy Armstrong

BOOK

"The women are coming!" This is how Joan Chittister introduces this book, giving us hope for the future of the Catholic Church and the wider world. She reminds us that women are now better educated than ever before (there are now more women studying at universities than men) and are slowly beginning to occupy leadership positions around the world.

Dear Joan Chittister is a collection of correspondence between women and Joan. In their letters the women tell of very personal struggles they are having in the Church. Joan responds to each with encouragement and wisdom. The struggles are real and the sharing is honest. It is a privilege to read these intimate conversations about some of the most vulnerable experiences of the women within the Church.

Joan does not placate the women with easy answers, but urges them to persevere through the tough times. She counsels the sisterhood to keep speaking their truths while listening to how God is calling them to be leaders of the future generation that will move us forward, inch by inch, within the murky institution that is Church.

This book is for women and for men who care about women in the Church.

Coming to Terms with Sexual Abuse

When I started at St Patrick's College in Wellington in 1960 the Vice-Rector was Fr Frank Durning SM. Before coming to St Patrick's, Durning was Rector of St Patrick's College at Silverstream. Reports of his abuse activities at that college have been published since in the New Zealand media.

While all New Zealand priests enjoyed considerable status in the early 60s, Durning had more status than most. As well as being Vice-Rector, he was the spiritual director to the students. And while he taught at the college he also lectured in history at Victoria University of Wellington.

In his role of spiritual director Durning called individual students to his room to tell them the "facts of life". At one point in my second year Durning called me to his room. The appointment was for after he had celebrated Benediction one Friday. The abuse began immediately I entered his room. I quickly became uncomfortable with what was happening. I pulled myself away from him and ran out of the room.

The incident left me quite confused. Here was a "holy priest" involving himself in inappropriate actions. How could it be that he was responsible for the actions he performed against me? I was an immature teenager and decided that it must have been my fault.

Only years later when I found the courage to reflect on what had happened could I acknowledge that I had contributed nothing to our encounter other than to comply with the priest's request.

Effect on My Life

So, what was the effect? The personally disabling impacts were many and lasting. For example, my trust in priests was eroded. I wondered if the clergy really believed in what they were preaching regarding moral issues or anything else. For a short period I questioned my own sexual identity. I found all these issues too much to cope with, so I parked them in the "attic" of my mind and tried to ignore them. It was Bishop Geoffrey Robinson's book *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church* that gave me the "attic" image and the understanding of the experience on me. I kept them "parked" for over 30 years. Looking back now I can see that the "attic" was affecting me even though I was unconscious of it at the time.

In the 90s a family connection rang me mid-week suggesting that we go for a social hour the following Saturday. I went along. The subject of sex abuse in the Church came up and my family connection told me how he was abused as were most of his brothers including the brother married to a sister of my wife. I told my wife the "news" when I got home. Not surprisingly, we were both upset.

And at that time clerical sex abuse was beginning to be reported in the world media. Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of the Archdiocese of Detroit spoke out about his own experience of being abused. For some reason Bishop Gumbleton's statement gave me "permission" to acknowledge to my wife and family that I had been abused. As more cases of clerical sex abuse came to light I became more open about my own abuse and began to share it—with anyone. All the while anger grew inside me.

Taking Hold Again

Then 10 years ago the issue of sex abuse came up as I was talking to my friend Robert after Mass one Sunday. I told him that I had been abused.

A couple of weeks later Robert invited me around for a coffee. I greatly respect Robert as do many others so was pleased to meet up. After getting our coffees Robert explained that while he had not been sexually abused, he had other issues that he had to deal with. Those issues needed the help of good clinical psychologists, and after counselling he was able to come to terms with his problems. He recommended that I get therapy for myself. He said also that resolving his issues enabled him to be "free". Robert advised me to report the offending to the Marist Order so that the abuse was on the record. I took Robert's advice on both counts and I am very grateful to him.

Soon after I reported the issue to the deputy-head of the Society of Mary I started psychotherapy. After months of regular sessions I was able to finally "flush" Durning out of my life. At that point I understood what Robert meant when he said that the therapy had made him "free". I felt liberated and was able to let my anger go and start living differently.

I'm writing this in the hope that others who have been abused may find the strength to come forward to put their experience on the record and particularly to get psychological help. My own experience of engaging with therapy has benefitted me beyond what I could ever have imagined.

Painting: ***Separation of Light from the Darkness*** by Veronica Skimanovskaya © Used with permission www.absolutearts.com/portfolios/s/shimanovskaya/

Mike Nicholas is married to Madeleine and they are parishioners of St Mary and St James, Christchurch East. Mike is employed by NZ Post.

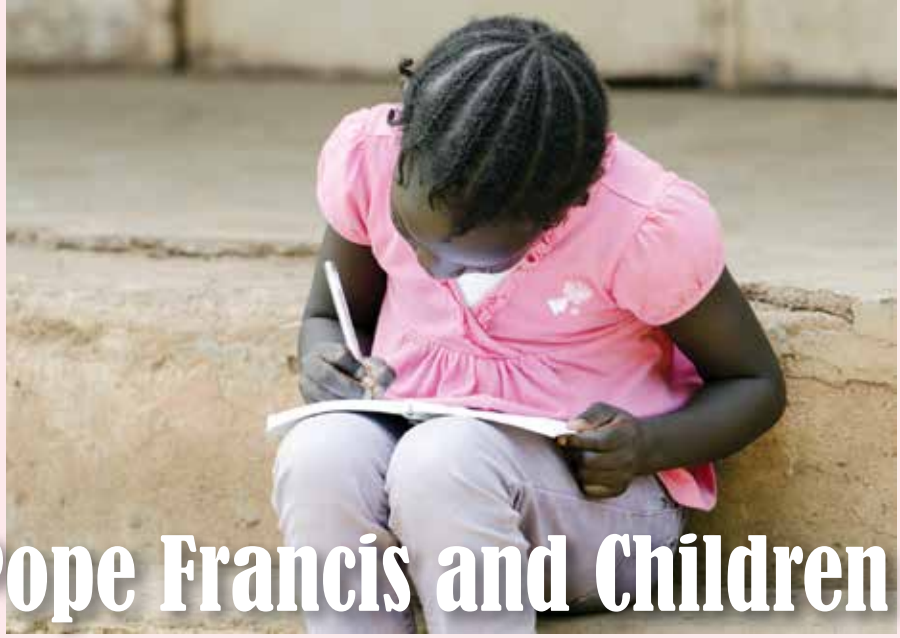


Photo: Shutterstock.com

Pope Francis and Children

People all over the world, including children, write to Pope Francis. *Dear Pope Francis* is a collection of letters. We asked the children at St Mary MacKillop Catholic School in Mangere, Auckland to comment on this correspondence between the Pope and young children from around the world.

David Kaihea explained: "The book is about kids giving Pope Francis their questions about him so he could answer them one by one so the kids could know what Pope Francis did when he became a saint. What I liked about the book was that people were asking Pope Francis about what he likes and what he does when he becomes a saint."

Skykar Castillo wrote: "It's great that little kids from around the world get to ask Pope Francis questions and he answers them. They also help Pope Francis love and teach kids how he became a saint. It also helps Pope Francis to become a better person. Kids can also learn from the questions if they weren't able to write one to him. The thing I liked about this book was how everyone learns something different when the questions are asked."

For Kien Cielo Panadero: "The best thing about this book is that it has proper questions from real children and not just a story that is made up. It makes me think about how we are so lucky in New Zealand to be able to go to church freely and learn in a Catholic school."

Children described why they liked the book

"I liked how I could also learn things even if I didn't get the chance to write to Pope Francis. Also it's good how the children who wrote letters to him are from different areas around the world. Then how he wrote back to them and taught them more about that subject," wrote Ana Taufa.

Lola Filoa said: "What I liked about this book is that the kids opened up to Pope Francis to get some feedback. So that they can succeed more in their lives and live like saints."

David Fa'alili imagined how the children receiving the letters must feel: "I liked the answers that Pope Francis sent to all the children. He says good words to all of them. The children must feel happy to write him letters."

Seth Kirisome commented on the questions: "I really enjoyed reading the different questions the children had to ask the Pope. It's a different kind of story but I liked reading the Pope's replies to all the children. It was nice of the Pope to reply to the letters."

"I like how some of the students from around the world asked similar questions that I would ask the Pope. I also wonder if the Pope could visit us in New Zealand and we can host a Kiwi Mass for him. I also wonder if the children ever think about becoming a Pope in the future," wrote Aga Tanuvasa.

How they felt reading the letters

"I liked the way Pope Francis replies to the kids like he's their grandpa writing from Samoa. I think the students that got a reply from Pope Francis are very lucky because not everyone can be so lucky," said Junior Pritchard Sula.

Oziah Ah See said: "It made me sad to read about a child who thinks about their mum in heaven. But when I read the Pope's reply, it made me feel better because it's sad how some kids have lost their parents."

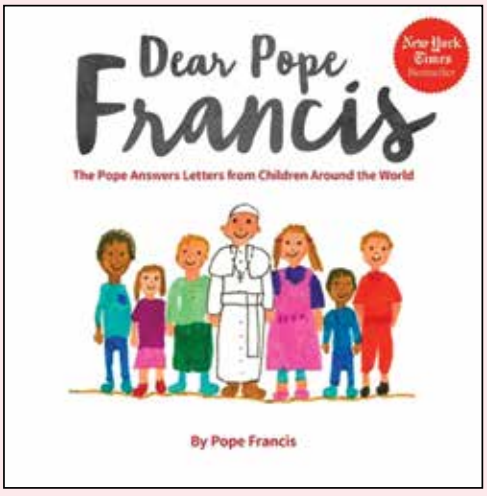
"I think the pictures that some kids drew were nice. I enjoyed reading all of the letters from Pope Francis. He sounds like a really kind person. It's good how he is taking the time to reply to all the letters from the kids," commented Jericha Kelsall.

David Filo noted: "This is a good way to teach what Catholics believe to other faiths and people around the world. It's good to know some of the things that the Pope believes in and makes me proud to be a Catholic."

What they would like to ask Pope Francis

"I really enjoyed reading these letters and they made me think about the questions that I would like to ask the Pope, too. In some of the letters I think we are lucky to live in a free country like New Zealand because we can just go to church all the time," commented Maylene Fuimaono.

And Marieta Tevaga had the idea: "I think it would be nice if there would be a book like this one but have older students to write letters to the Pope. I think their letters would be longer and have more questions. I'm sure the Pope would reply to them all too."



Dear Pope Francis: The Pope Answers Letters from Children Around the World
by Pope Francis
Published by Loyola Press, 2016

HOSPITALITY IN ACTION

ALISON PHIPPS discusses the challenges and necessity of involving local communities when resettling refugee and asylum seeking people in new places.

From my seat in the café in the Botanical Gardens I watch a young girl feeding the birds. She's a little nervous. They might peck. Their feathers are close to her face. Their smell is different from human creatures. A bird lands on her arm. Rests for a moment then she levers it back up into the sky and it flies off. I muse, this movement is life, and bathed in the winter sunshine after the storm, it is beautiful. It's showing something carefree in the simple delight of sharing kai, of co-habiting and being an hospitable landing place for those in flight.

This is as real as it is metaphorical. I've been in Dunedin a week and as I watch I'm also drawing connections between the bird feeding, my professional experience of resettling refugees and a recent newspaper report. I read about a dispute between migrant advocates and local iwi over the resettlement and housing of refugees in Whanganui. The report outlined the unfairness towards local people who have been waiting for housing for years and that now housing is being found for refugee arrivals. It's a story I've encountered over and over in my work. War breaks out producing refugees who arrive in another country and the locals waiting for essential services feel the newly arrived are being given preference on the waiting lists. Local poor people are being disadvantaged.

I've found that it is more complex than this. And if the situation is not given serious consideration, problems can take root.

This situation can institute competition for resources and produce divide-and-rule elements. I've seen it in Ireland, in my home city of Glasgow, in Khartoum, in Bududuram, Ghana, in the Gaza strip. Quite frankly, it's a story I hear in many of the places my work has taken me — to listen and lean in to the land, the local people, the government and international agencies and the refugee arrivals.

In countries around the world the resettling and housing of migrant populations is a huge challenge. Regardless of whether they were forcibly displaced or not, the arrival of people who may scare us a little or a lot provokes reaction. Different ways of living, sounding, looking, can unsettle us and cause us to reframe our assumptions about what it means to be human.

Glasgow Story

In 2000 the city of Glasgow offered housing stock, which they were shifting local residents out of in readiness for demolition, to asylum seekers in the UK. The city had done nothing to prepare for the arrival of asylum seekers and offered no useful support. Local interpreters went from interpreting for people who had always lived in peace times, to interpreting for those with harrowing stories of rape, murder, destruction and loss.

The dilapidated housing locals had been moved out of suddenly became a symbol of jealousy. They saw new fridges and washing machines being provided for the new comers. Their complaints about the housing being "unfit for us to live in" changed

to "why are they getting a new white fridge?" Their long-festering grievances of living in poverty and scarce resources surfaced publicly.

It came to a head in 2001 when Firsat Yildiz, one of the Kurd asylum seekers, was murdered. His murder galvanised the city — not unlike the way the Christchurch mosque shootings of 15th March 2019 galvanised Kiwis. Suddenly the locals were saying: "This is not who we are." And they made common cause, drawing on the city's stories of solidarity and advocacy to effect change — the strong trade union movement, activism and solidarity in various struggles. Fortunately, the City Council listened and Refugee Integration Networks, led by refugees, were formed in the communities receiving asylum seekers. This was so that ALL could work at integrating as community and sharing in the resources.

It's shown that communities work far more effectively when the migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, locals, rent and housing campaigners and other such groups, join together to ask for what is enshrined in the Right to Housing in international law (Article 25 (1)). Glasgow now has a worldwide reputation for integrating work and community advocacy.

Attend to Tensions

The tensions relating to housing in Aotearoa New Zealand, such as in the Whanganui news report, are legitimate as they result from the inadequate social housing policy of the last decade. I hear them echoing those in Glasgow 20 years ago. The reliance on the private housing sector has produced the present catastrophe in New Zealand housing. Profit-only housing produces social unrest, tensions, jealousies, scarcity and greed. It's good that the government here is taking steps to address the housing crisis.

Suggestions for Community Making

I am often asked by local and international agencies to advise on how to settle refugees in new places. The following is what I've seen work.

1. Make common cause. Solidarity matters.
2. Resist divide-and-rule methods, pitting refugees against other groups with valid grievances and experiences of long-term poverty.
3. Don't accuse locals of intolerance, greed or racism. Find the common grievances and work from there.

> *"How can we give manaakitanga and at the same time not exhaust our resources? How can we provide housing without creating grievances and envy among the locals towards the new, vulnerable population? How can we identify what we have, so that we can share it generously within the community?*

4. Listen to the wisdom of elders. This can change everything in a conflict. I have come to appreciate the wisdom of people like Moana Maniapoto, Teanau Tuionoon and Te Ururoa Flavell.
5. Don't let old arguments around housing shortage prevent resettlement. People come with skills and given time and the opportunity, they will make their way in this country.
6. Reframe the problem of scarce resources. "How can we give manaakitanga and at the same time not exhaust our resources? How can we provide housing without creating grievances and envy among the locals towards the new, vulnerable population? How can we identify what we have, so that we can share it generously within the community?
7. Decision-makers in statutory bodies must consult with those at the grassroots. Government and city councils need to ask every day: "How are we ensuring that our processes are inclusive, accessible, on others' terms, not just our perspectives?"
8. Keep away from sensational news stories. Issues are always more complicated and more simple than they might seem.

Hospitality not Impoverishment

The deeper, structural, human-planetary question beneath the story of the conflict is that of hospitality. Hospitality is both universal and diverse in its practice in communities. It relies on a deep knowledge of what we have to share, on what is abundant and what is scarce, on what will enable us to sharing, and when sharing will mean suffering. How we practise hospitality individually is different from being ordered to do so in public.

Yet the essential questions remain: How can we to live together — be a safe landing place? Who will offer hospitality to whom? In a bi-cultural land these questions have depth, nuance and arouse passions. If we focus on the disagreements and divisions, we miss the crucial value of hospitality, manaakitanga, as the sacred ritual among human beings and with other creatures in our common home, Earth. The actual work of forming community is the responsibility of us all.

Painting: ***Refugees La Sagrada Familia*** by Kelly Latimore © Used with permission www.kellylatimoreicons.com

Alison Phipps is the 2019 De Carle Distinguished Lecturer at the University of Otago, and UNESCO Chair for Refugee Integration at the University of Glasgow.

The Gift of a Chat

HELEN DEW **describes the ways a local group alleviates loneliness and reduces social isolation in the community.**

Our vision is for people of all generations to feel connected and included in our community. We started the group "Joy for all Generations" and we are very active bringing people together in simple, practical ways.

Beginning in Rest Homes

Lucy Adlam, mother of two children in Carterton, started our group. Her passion for alleviating loneliness took shape when she volunteered at her local rest home four years ago. With 3-month old daughter Sage she began visiting residents every week. She realised the benefits for residents to spend time with her and the baby and just have the opportunity to chat. And it was mutual—Lucy got a lot of joy out of it, too, and the baby loved all the attention!

Lucy then invited her mothers' group to join in, and soon "intergenerational playgroups" developed. Everyone involved enjoyed the interaction. It wasn't long before the idea spread to 10 rest homes and aged care facilities in our region and more are eager to join in.

In the Library

The idea developed further. A programme, "Stories for Generations", which included reading or telling themed stories and simple intergenerational craft-making sessions, began at the Masterton Library.

With Music

And music sessions became popular, led by talented musician Jonáš Koukl from Connecting Music NZ. Jonáš encourages old and young alike to select an instrument to play from his huge array of percussion instruments. The resulting rhythms get wee ones dancing and oldies tapping their toes.

A Dedicated Bench

Yet another initiative is our "Happy to Chat" bench—a dedicated space in the community for people to sit and talk to others. Lucy was inspired by the bench initiative overseas, and saw it as an opportunity to build on Carterton's growing reputation as a "friendly" town.

Our bench, donated by Carterton District Council, sits at the corner of the street leading to our civic centre. It's position is highlighted by a colourful mural encouraging people to kōrero mai—have a chat.

At the time of setting it up Lucy explained: "We've no pre-conceived idea of how the bench will be used in Carterton. We'll just let it evolve into what's needed in the community. It may serve multiple purposes, for example, Carterton's Neighbourhood Support coordinator may designate times to invite residents to link up to the system and to meet those new to the town; service groups and clubs may offer to chat with enquirers and explore possibilities with them."

While I can see heaps of

possibilities for how the bench could be used in normal times, I think it could have a real impact in times of difficulty.

I'm reminded of the community heart initiative, a spontaneous local response in the wake of the 2011 series of earthquakes in Christchurch which I read about in the Civil Defence journal IMPACT:

"A small group of women started sewing hearts—brooches for people and banners for the damaged buildings—which they attached to the safety barriers. They set up by the coffee machine. People donated threads, buttons and material. Adults and children came by, stopped for a few minutes or for the whole day. They chatted, found out the latest information, hugged, helped one another, sat silently, listened, learned that there are many ways people react to the same shared experience and all these are OK. They made hearts for themselves and for all who passed by. Thousands of them. It challenged some that these were for free. Making these hearts was feeding our compassion for one another."

Our bench could be a meeting place at times like that, too.

"Happy to Chat" on the Train

Last October Lucy and I went to the Women of Influence Awards in Auckland. Although not a finalist, I had been nominated under the Community Hero category for my long-standing service to the Carterton community and my environmental initiatives encouraging sustainability and resilience.

We travelled to Auckland on the Northern Explorer and KiwiRail sponsored a "Happy to Chat" table in the train for fellow passengers to chat with us.

We soon found though that we needed to make the first move in inviting people to chat. Lucy put our feelings into words: "People seemed so closed off, isolated in their own bubble. We'd initially wondered whether we'd have to search the whole train for people not already involved with laptops, phones or conversations with companions, but in the end we didn't make it past the first carriage!"

***Happy to Chat** is just one practical way of reaching out to our neighbours and inviting them into conversation showing them they are not alone.*

Our first attempt to engage with an American couple got off to a shaky start. The wife was open to chat, but her husband was rather guarded.

Lesson one: We learnt the importance of assuring people that we had no agenda other than to engage in friendly chat, dispelling their apprehension that we may be hoping to sell something or solicit donations for a worthy cause!

To our delight after we'd returned to base the husband approached us saying he'd thought of something else he wanted to share with us.

His coming showed others that it's fine for passengers to leave their seats to engage with fellow travellers. Trips down the aisle are not just to visit the bathroom or cafeteria!

Sharing Conversations

I spoke with a man on his way to a climate change conference. He said he was taking the train for obvious reasons and was perplexed as to why his colleagues attending the meeting had chosen to fly. When I invited him to come with me to the "Happy to Chat" table to share our conversation with Lucy, people seated nearby asked if they could also come!

Lucy laughed to see me coming along the carriage like the Pied Piper with a mob of people behind me. We talked with that group for about an hour.

We met so many amazing people. The "Happy to Chat" initiative was about breaking down social barriers and building relationships in the community. The social experiment on the train took this one step further.

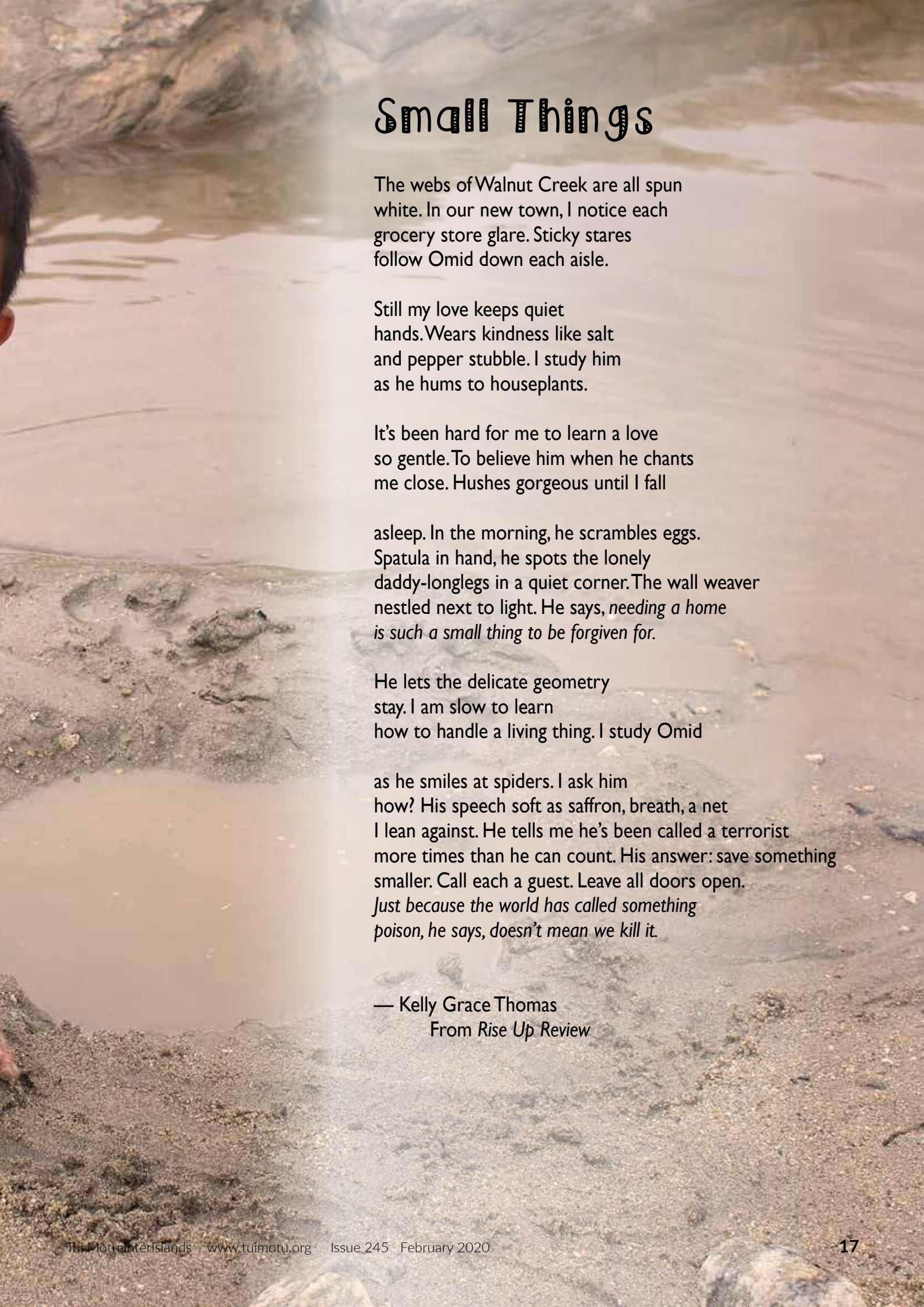
Rebecca Vergunst, our Deputy Mayor of Carterton District Council, also attended the Awards celebration and shared in the experiment. We continued our "Happy to Chat" activity in cafés, parks and over the fence during walks in the nearby community during our stay in Auckland.

The "Happy to Chat" initiative, an example of collaboration between council and community, is just one practical way of reaching out to our neighbours and inviting them into conversation, showing them they are not alone.

To read more about **"Joy for Generations"**: www.joyforgenerations.org/

Photo top right by Dobo Kristian/Shutterstock

Helen Dew lives in Carterton and is indefatigable and inspiring in her practice and promotion of sustainable gardening and community involvement.



Small Things

The webs of Walnut Creek are all spun
white. In our new town, I notice each
grocery store glare. Sticky stares
follow Omid down each aisle.

Still my love keeps quiet
hands. Wears kindness like salt
and pepper stubble. I study him
as he hums to houseplants.

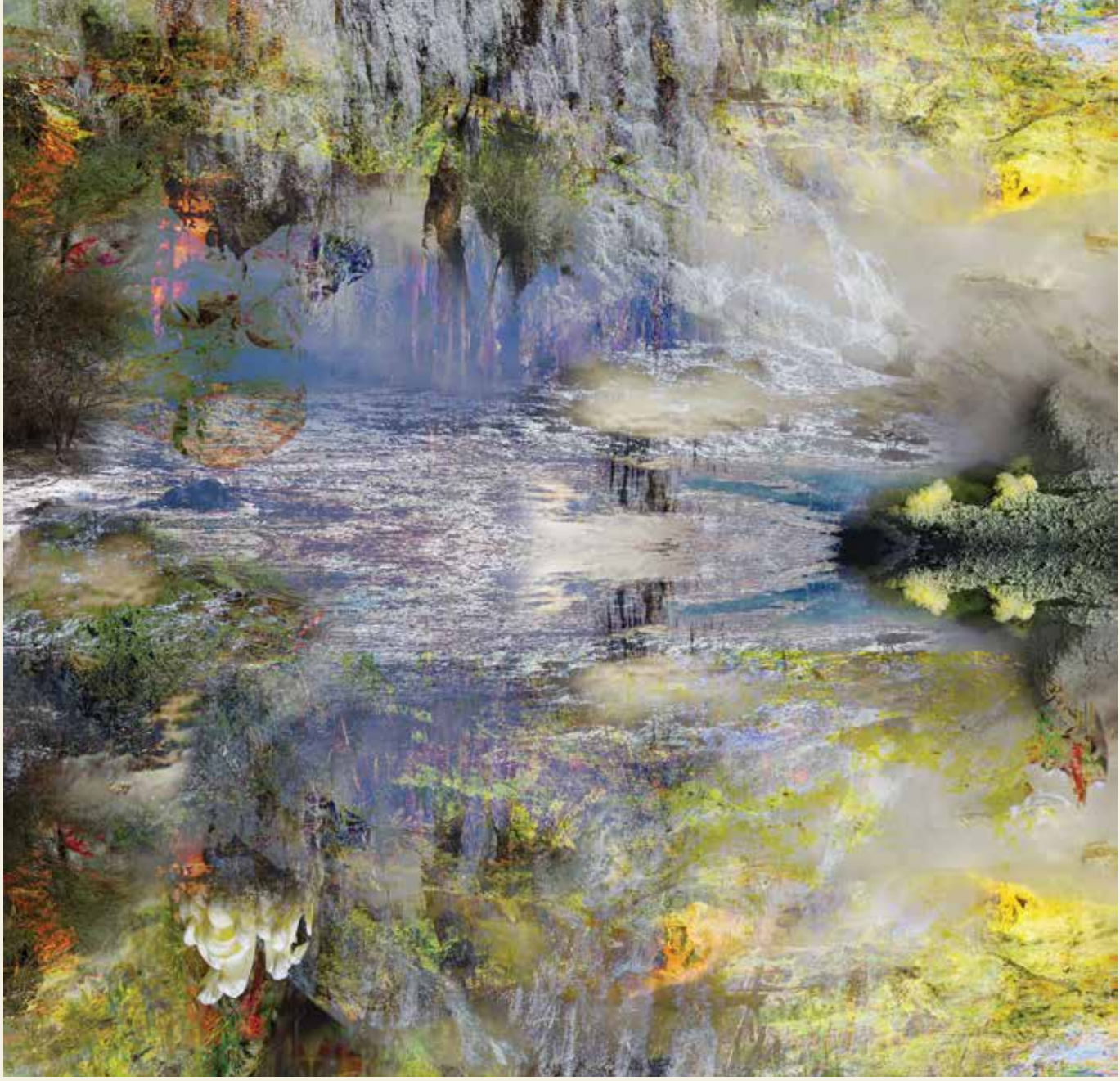
It's been hard for me to learn a love
so gentle. To believe him when he chants
me close. Hushes gorgeous until I fall

asleep. In the morning, he scrambles eggs.
Spatula in hand, he spots the lonely
daddy-longlegs in a quiet corner. The wall weaver
nestled next to light. He says, *needing a home*
is such a small thing to be forgiven for.

He lets the delicate geometry
stay. I am slow to learn
how to handle a living thing. I study Omid

as he smiles at spiders. I ask him
how? His speech soft as saffron, breath, a net
I lean against. He tells me he's been called a terrorist
more times than he can count. His answer: save something
smaller. Call each a guest. Leave all doors open.
Just because the world has called something
poison, he says, doesn't mean we kill it.

— Kelly Grace Thomas
From *Rise Up Review*



Be Attentive to Life

MICHAEL FITZSIMONS talks with Jesuit retreat master and spiritual director Monty Williams about the commonplace spirituality of St Ignatius.

Interviewing Jesuit priest Monty Williams is a mind-sharpening experience. Over the course of an absorbing hour together, his Jesuit-trained mind regularly reframes questions that I have scribbled down on my piece of paper. Asking the right question turns out to be quite a challenge.

Monty teaches at Regis College, a Jesuit College in Toronto, Canada. His area is spirituality, specifically the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius of Loyola, and cultural contemporary theory which he is fascinated by. He is the author or co-author of a number of prize-winning books including: *Finding God in the Dark: Taking the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius to the Movies.*

"I live a very simple life," he says. "During the academic year I teach, I write and in summers I usually travel giving workshops and retreats."

He is in New Zealand at the invitation of Ignatian Spirituality NZ and has just finished running a workshop at the Suzanne Aubert Centre in Wellington. Next stop is Kuala Lumpur.

What interests Monty Williams after 40 years of doing what he does? Is it the world of meditation and contemplation, living a spiritual life?

"I wouldn't say living a spiritual life. I would say being attentive to the life you do live. I think there's a difference because people can separate spirituality from reality and make it a bit esoteric. I think that isn't what St Ignatius was interested in and its certainly not what I am interested in.

"I'm interested in the way people become attentive to their lives, and the way life becomes attentive to people. St Ignatius in the Exercises has something called the Principle of Foundation. It opens with this very strange statement: It says humans are created to praise, reverence and serve God and by

this means to save their souls. It's provocative in a certain way.

"What I find fascinating is the notion that our response is part of the call, that we are created, in a sense called, to respond in a certain way. I am intrigued by the ways in which we are called beyond ourselves and the ways in which we pay attention to being called beyond ourselves."

Monty Williams has been involved in spiritual direction and the Exercises of St Ignatius for the last 40 years. What would he say the Exercises have to offer people today?

"I think it's a way, within a particular tradition, of people learning how to recognise themselves more truly.

"Using that tradition, I would say that God recognises us in a certain way—as lovable and capable of loving. Probably we don't recognise ourselves that way. What the Exercises do is create controlled experiments which put you in a position where something can happen. And the thing that can happen is you have an encounter with God in such a way that you start recognising yourself in a different way."

What does it mean to have a relationship with God?

Monty rephrases my question.

"The question I would interpret out of your question is: what does it mean to recognise your relationship with God? Because I think God has a relationship with us constantly. I don't think that necessarily means that we have a conscious relationship with God.

"The interesting thing is what happens when you start recognising that you have a relationship with God, when you realise that God is not a character in your story but you are a character in God's story. When that happens, things change. This God is quite different from the theologies that we have that make God either punitive or absurd.

"I don't want to use that overworked word that God is love. Near the end of his Exercises Ignatius makes an interesting comment that love manifests itself more in deeds than in words. So the question is: how have you experienced God? It's a peculiar mystery that refuses to behave in ways that we think it should behave. That's the question: what happens when you encounter such a mystery? That's the beginning of the recognition."

Is God unknowable? — Monty rephrases my question, heads for the question behind my question.

"I wouldn't say God is unknowable. I would say we have a limited knowledge of God. God allows us to know aspects of God as a gift just as if you fall in love with somebody, you allow them to know aspects of you. It doesn't mean they know all of you, or can accept all you have to give. If we can accept what is given, we can come to some knowledge of God as the giver.

"The Ignatian Exercises involves a fourfold process. The first process is to discover you are loved, the second process is to discover how to live out of that love. Then comes the discovery of the limits of the journey, when you come to the limits of your imagination and you experience a form of emptiness. The fourth process is accepting what comes out of that emptiness. That carries you back to the first process at a deeper level.

"You can offer this process to anybody," says Monty. "I've given it to Buddhists, to people who profess not to be Christian and aren't particularly interested in religion. It's fascinating for people to sit with their stories in a sense of mystery and see how that mystery interacts with them. It's a very experiential process."

Monty is clearly unimpressed with the contemporary vogue for Ignatian spirituality — these days there are endless books on Ignatian Exercises and many attempts to use Ignatian spirituality for ideological reasons.

"Books on Ignatius and heroic leadership, the greening of Ignatius, Ignatius and the business world, Ignatius and feminist teaching. Ignatian spirituality is a big fad these days.

"The Exercises themselves don't make great reading," says Monty. "They are very dry. I wouldn't recommend it.

"To get into the world of Ignatius, I'd say find somebody who knows what they are talking about. I'm actually of the opinion if you can find somebody who loves you, you don't need the Exercises.

> **"When you think of yourself as spiritual, then you try and find ways in which that spirit can be fed."**

Being exposed to love in a way that carries you beyond yourself, basically that's it. So the husband who goes to work every day and works in a job he doesn't particularly like and comes home and the kids are screaming, that is what the Exercises are about. Living a life of love that serves others to give them life."

Monty has given retreats for much of his life and says that a retreat is simply a state of mind. It's more about a change of thinking than a change of scenery, he says.

"People do lots of retreats without actually calling them retreats. It's happening all over the place, when they go into a private world and do a kind of interior work. The woman walking her dog in the early morning, the man praying in an empty church during his lunch break, the teenager with his headphones on during the subway ride home — they are all potentially on retreat.

"All they need to do is look at things a little differently. The recognition that we are spiritual people is a good way to begin. When you think of yourself as spiritual, then you try and find ways in which that spirit can be fed. That doesn't require a monastic withdrawal from the world. That's one way of doing it, but it is not the only way."

Artwork: ***An Other World*** by Deborah Crowe © Used with permission www.deborahcrowe.net

Jesuit **Monty Williams** is Adjunct Professor, Ignatian Spirituality at Regius College in Toronto, Canada.

Michael Fitzsimons is a professional writer and director of FitzBeck Creative. He lives in Worser Bay, Wellington and particularly enjoys walking long distances and wine-tasting.

Reflecting on Suicide

JIM CONSEDINE shares a new perspective on a person's death by suicide.

Photo by Kim Boll from Pixabay

In New Zealand last year 685 people of all ages and backgrounds died by suicide. That is nearly two every day. This is double the traffic accident rate. Yet, so often we don't talk of suicide with the same freedom, insight and openness with which we speak of other forms of death. We need to change this attitude.

Ronald Rolheiser, priest, spiritual writer and former lecturer, has written an article on suicide every year since 1986 for his weekly worldwide syndicated columns which are read in more than 30 countries.

He says that too often we define our relationship with the deceased through the prism of the person's death — and not their life. I think he is right. We have difficulty placing the early, middle and later years of a suicide victim's life to the forefront of our remembering, because of the sadness and shock of what has happened at death.

Rolheiser says suicide is the least glamourous and most misunderstood of all deaths. I think his advice on how to approach a death by suicide is wise and helpful. He offers four points for us to consider.

First, he says that in most cases, suicide is the result of a disease, a sickness, an illness, a tragic breakdown within the emotional immune system, or simply, a mortal bio-chemical illness.

His second point is that for most suicides, the person dies as does the victim of any terminal illness or fatal accident, not by their own choice. When people die from heart attacks, strokes, cancer and accidents, they die against their will. The same is true in suicide.

Third, he says that we should not worry unduly about the ongoing life of a suicide victim, still believing as we used to, that suicide is the ultimate act of despair. This is rarely the case. He reminds us that God's hands are infinitely more understanding and gentler than our own.

We need not worry about the fate of any person, no matter the cause of their death especially those who leave this world honest, over-sensitive, over-wrought, too bruised to touch and emotionally crushed as is the case with most who suicide. Often those who have died by suicide are spiritual seekers who can find no relief for their pain this side of death's curtain. We need to trust that God's understanding and compassion exceed our own.

And his fourth point is that we should not unduly second-guess or blame ourselves when we lose a loved one to suicide. Questions such as: What might I have done? Where did I let this person down? If only I had been there at the right time! are not helpful. Rarely would this have made a difference. Most of the time we weren't there because the person who fell victim to the disease did not want us there. They probably picked the moment, the spot and the means precisely so we wouldn't be there.

Suicide seems to be a disease that picks its victim precisely in such a way so as to exclude others and their attentiveness. This is not an excuse for insensitivity or neglect. Rather, it is a healthy check against false guilt and fruitless second-guessing.

Indigenous cultures, including Māori, and mainstream traditional religions have for thousands of years reminded us that life and death are two sides of the same coin. We develop maturity as humans by accepting the light and dark parts of our lives and working out ways whereby one doesn't dominate and control us to the detriment of the other. These cultures and spiritual traditions teach us that physical death simply moves us to another phase of living.

For most, suicide is a result of a disease of the mind, a collapse of the emotional immune system. There are some diseases that all the love and care in the world cannot cure, hard as we may try.

It is incumbent upon us as the loved ones of suicide victims, to cherish their memory and not allow the manner of their deaths to become a false prism through which we see their lives. A good person remains a good person in eternity and a sad death and misunderstanding does not change that.

Jim Consedine, a priest in the Christchurch Diocese, is a writer and has a strong interest in social justice.

NATIONAL HELPLINES

Need to talk? Free call or text 1737 any time for support from a trained counsellor

Lifeline — 0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) or free text 4357 (HELP)

Suicide Crisis Helpline — 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO)

Healthline — 0800 611 116

Samaritans — 0800 726 666

TRUMP AND THE EVANGELICALS

Photo by Christine Ruddy/Shutterstock

PETER MATHESON asks why Southern evangelical groups support President Trump.

To innocents abroad (like ourselves!) it's an almost impenetrable mystery. How does Donald Trump manage to line up behind him not only the ultra-rich business and finance classes and the disoriented white blue-collar workers but also Bible-belt men and women, famed for their moral conservatism? Given his sexual proclivities, apart from anything else, what on earth do passionate Protestants and the amoral Donald Trump have in common?

Is it simply another case study in American "know-nothingism" or, more ominously, in the superficial nature of religious adherence? Or are deeper currents running here? We could think automatically of the vast number of German Protestants who fell for the populist rhetoric of National Socialism, or of the Catholics who backed Franco and Mussolini, but such glib comparisons limp and take us nowhere. These Southern Baptists and their like are committed and enthusiastic churchgoers. Conviction is their second name. Many of them tithe and praise the Lord from their hearts. Good people, we would think.

So what is going on here? We need to remember that the Puritan tradition, transplanted from the English Civil War across the Atlantic, nurtured a profound suspicion of central government. These Puritans were independents, challenging the Anglican and Presbyterian nexus of Church and State. So Trump's critique of anything smacking of socialism, of big government, which of course delights the ultra-rich by slashing taxes, also has resonance with those, like the Baptists, in the separatist tradition.

Likewise the great American revivals had hammered home the Arminian message that it is up to the individual to carve out their own destiny. For many Southern Evangelicals, therefore, it is government itself which is sinful. Trump's dismissive attitude to Washington — drain that swamp — seems, therefore, to hit the jackpot for them.

Then there are substantial issues of identity. Trump speaks to their deep suspicion of globalism, of cosmopolitanism. Whom can you trust? Certainly not the Hillary Clintons, with their contempt for "deplorables" like themselves. Certainly not the smart, critical dissectors of Scripture in theological schools. Not liberation theologians and their Latino followers who talk about structural injustices oppressing the poor. Rather, trust those who "speak your language", or seem to, who stand for the local, the familiar, the region, or for that nostalgic American imaginary, "America First". Gun ownership, after all, is also associated with this staunch faith in individual freedom, with fantasies about the American Frontier.

By no means all American evangelicals line up behind Trump. As in Britain, and of course in New Zealand itself, there has always been a robust evangelical commitment to justice issues. The Social Gospel in America, after all, spawned a wonderful harvest of social activism as the 20th century began. I vividly remember my own students' delight in reading about Walter Rauschenbusch's campaigns for social justice.

In a recent article academic Marcia Pally noted that about a quarter of US evangelicals want nothing at all to do with Trump and some leading figures are so appalled by recent developments that they are no longer happy to be called evangelicals, as it is taken to mean "white Protestants who vote Republican". Princeton Evangelical Fellowship, for example, recently changed its name to Princeton Christian Fellowship: "We're interested in being people who are defined by our faith and by our faith commitments and not by any sort of political agenda."

Yet for the majority of evangelicals Trump's crusade against feminism is a winner. They believe that he shares their views on abortion and gay marriage as his appointments to the Supreme Court suggest, and that his championing of Israel supports their conviction that the return of Jews to Israel will bring closer the Second Coming of Christ.

What are we to make of all this? Our moral outrage at Trump's demagoguery may well be entirely justified. However, it is unhelpful to point a moral finger at his evangelical followers. Their tragedy lies not in a lack of moral integrity, but in a misreading of some of the central tenets of the Gospel, in the shoddy theological leadership they have been given and in the unsettling cultural and environmental challenges which have left them baffled. They have become putty in the hands of an incredibly skilled political operator. They need our compassion and our prayers.

Peter Matheson is a peace activist, a Church historian, Emeritus Professor of Knox Theological College, Dunedin and author.

TURN AGAIN

Joel 2:12-18

12 Yet even now, says our God,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
13 rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to your God,
who is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and relents from punishing.
14 Who knows whether God will not turn and relent,
and leave a blessing behind,
a grain offering and a drink offering
for your God?
15 Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sanctify a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
16 gather the people.
Sanctify the congregation;
assemble the aged;
gather the children,
even infants at the breast.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,
and the bride her canopy.
17 Between the vestibule and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of God, weep.
Let them say, "Spare your people, O God,
and do not make your heritage a mockery,
a byword among the nations.
Why should it be said among the peoples,
'Where is their God?'"
18 Then God became jealous for this land,
and had pity on this people.

ELAINE WAINWRIGHT **offers an ecological reading of the Ash Wednesday readings Joel 2:12-18 and Matthew 6:1-6; 16-18.**

Ash Wednesday is at the end of February and begins the season of Lent. The readings for this day are characterised by a call to conversion and this theme weaves through the six weeks of Lent. I have chosen the first reading Joel 2:12-18 and the Gospel Matthew 6:1-6,16-18 to begin our year of ecological readings of lectionary texts.

Reading biblical texts ecologically is an approach that is informed by the ecological consciousness emerging among many people in our world. It is about paying attention to the whole Earth community — the human characters and their relationships as well as the other-than-human, such as the land and animals, and to the presence or absence of right relations among these. It is a "critical" approach like other ethical approaches to reading the Scriptures such as feminist and postcolonial interpretations. The significant difference characterising an ecological approach is that the other-than-human relationships are often not explicit in the text — they're encoded.

The first reading for Ash Wednesday is an extract from the prophet Joel (2:12-18). We're not exactly sure of the historical time when Joel was active as a prophet. However, his prophetic challenge is as relevant for us as it was for the people during his ministry. The prophet's call is to "return", to "come back" — come back to a way of living in right relationships within the human community and the ecological community. This re-turn is not to be an external (and perhaps exaggerated) show of repentance but rather a breaking of our heart. We are experiencing this heart breaking as the bush fires have ravaged Australia over the past months destroying all in their pathway and leaving a scorched earth. They've devastated wildlife, destroyed human and animal homes and caused suffering and trauma.

We feel the heartbreak around the world as arable land becomes a desert — human-induced climate change is taking its toll. Our hearts break for the many animal species whose

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habitats and survival are threatened by humanity's heavy footprint on planet Earth. We can join those who hear the prophetic voice echoing today — "turn back; return!"

The voice of God in the text reiterates the call: "Let your hearts be broken not your garments torn; turn to your God again." God's cry can reach us from every local, national and international ecological disaster.

Then Joel asks a question that challenges the belief that our behaviour doesn't matter: "Who knows if God will not turn again and repent and leave a blessing in passing?" Just as this was a question for Israel, it is a question for us today as we face the ecological challenges of the world.

In response to this penetrating question the prophet gathers the people to cry out to God. And, likewise, we can ask as a community: "Is it possible to reverse the profound damage the human community is wreaking on the planet? What does this challenge mean in relation to our image of divinity and divine creativity?"

The prophet seems to point toward an answer in the final verses: "Then our God, jealous on behalf of this land took pity on God's people." We hear that it is God's relationship with the land which informs God's mercy for the people.

Lenten Practices

The gospel extract, Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18, comes from the longer story of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. Jesus addresses the practices of giving alms, praying and fasting that come under the evangelist's description of "doing righteousness" or "right living/living rightly". We are also familiar with these themes but this Lent we can explore them in terms of ecological challenges.

Almsgiving is the first practice mentioned. We probably think of what the Gospel calls "giving alms" in terms of fundraising, sponsoring or giving donations today. And we also understand it in terms of a just distribution of resources. This calls for a communal process in which we all participate in sharing resources more inclusively and justly.

Prayer is the second practice. Jesus was critical of those making prayer an ostentatious performance to look good in other's eyes. He encouraged the disciples to pray silently and in a hidden way. We can take this to heart and explore new ways to pray authentically, prayer that is appropriate to our time and place and which is both personal and communal.

Fasting is the third practice. Christians today probably don't think about fasting as much as giving alms and praying. We think of fasting primarily as abstaining from food and probably don't think about why it is a Christian practice. We can extend our understanding of fasting by exploring a right relationship to food. This could include eating locally grown food and other practices that relieve our damaging impact on Earth. We could fast by limiting our recreational activities and giving some personal time to those in need within the human and Earth communities. During this Lenten season we could consider how we understand "fasting" and begin to practice it more radically.

Photo by Lindsay Lenard on Unsplash

Matt 6:1-6, 16-18

"Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.
2 "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
5 "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you . . .

Matt. 6:16 "And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

LIVING HONOURABLY

KATHLEEN RUSHTON gives insight into the community life Jesus describes in Matthew 5:13-37.

Jesus's words in Matthew 5:13–37 are taken from the two-chapter Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5–7). Leading up to the sermon, we read that Jesus has moved throughout Galilee "teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every kind of disease and sickness" (Mt 4:23). "Great crowds" followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and beyond the Jordan.

Significance of Sermon on the Mountain

We read "*seeing the crowds*, Jesus *went up the mountain; and after he sat down on the ground, on the earth, his disciples came to him.* Then, opening his mouth, he began to teach them" (Mt 5:1–2). The crowds inspired Jesus's sermon — tax collectors, peasants, those with leprosy, sickness, disabilities, those possessed by demons, small farmers, labourers, artisans, widows, women, children. They, like all Jews, lived under Roman occupation and exploitation.

And as Jews they would recognise a *mountain* as a place of revelation (eg, Ex 19:3) and as a place where people learn of God's new age and ways (eg, Is 2:3). Jesus *sat down*. He took the posture of a rabbi about to give an authoritative teaching. *His disciples came to him.* They form his audience. His sermon applies to all disciples — the 12 called during Jesus's ministry, the wider group of disciples and all who will become disciples (Mt 28:19) through the Church.

Jesus Becomes Interpreter of Scripture

The beatitudes (Mt 5:1–16) form the foundation of Jesus's sermon. The repeated "Blessed are . . .", which introduces states of being not obviously blessed, can draw our attention away from the radical nature of the community Jesus is describing. A better translation is "How honourable are . . ." or "How full of honour are . . .". Warren Carter, a specialist in the Gospel of Matthew, explains that the beatitudes show us conditions and behaviours that "God values or finds honourable, and which therefore the community of disciples is also to value and esteem". Jesus speaks to disciples about those God finds honourable in the light of a new future that will come about through God's power and faithfulness. All disciples are to live in an inclusive, non-competitive, non-grasping way.

Jesus comes to "fulfil the scriptures" (Mt 1:22–23; 2:15). In the beatitudes Jesus cites and evokes biblical verses and images. Earlier he has not related his teaching to the Scriptures. But in the Sermon Jesus is establishing that he is an authoritative interpreter of the Torah. He does not come to destroy but to fulfil "the Torah and the prophets" (Mt 5:17–20).

He is different from the Pharisees and the Scribes who govern in alliance with Rome and do not promote change and reform. Their interests lie in keeping the unjust hierarchical structure of society in place. And Jesus challenges them: "you … have neglected the weightier matters of the Torah: justice and mercy and faith" (Mt 23:23).

Kathleen Rushton RSM lives in Ōtautahi Christchurch where, in the sight of the Southern Alps and the hills, she continues to delight in learning and writing about Scripture.

Pointers to Community Life

In the section Mt 5:21-48 Jesus offers six pointers to a life imbued in God's present and future reign. They concern human relationships. Each begins with a statement "you have heard it said" followed by a command introduced by "but I say to you". Each refers to right behaviour beginning in the heart and developed as an attitude. The heart is where decisions are made (Mt 15:18–20). Jesus goes to the heart of the matter in describing how the "honourable" community lives.

The first pointer (Mt 5:21–26) deals with hostility between people. A person is to work on their anger in order to make good relationships. And if a disciple goes to worship God and remembers their brother or sister has something against them they are stretched not only to deal with their own feelings of anger but also to reach out to the other who is feeling aggrieved.

The second pointer is about sexual behaviour (5:27–30). Adultery was forbidden (Ex 20:14). But sexuality is to do with the whole person and concerns an understanding from the heart. To shock hearers into a new way of thinking Jesus uses exaggerated commands which are not to be taken literally — eg, tearing out one's eyes, cutting off one's hand.

The third pointer is about divorce — albeit the effect of male-initiated divorce of the time on those involved (Mt 5:31–32).

The fourth pointer addresses faithfulness and honesty in relationships (Mt 5:33–37). Trust and transparency should exist within the honourable community. This makes it unnecessary for a practice of taking oaths.

For Us Now

What might inspire our vison of action for inclusive, wholehearted, honourable communities? We can reflect on Matthew's gospel passage in relation to our own lives. And we can look for good examples of those living an honourable life.

This month is the 30-year anniversary of Nelson Mandela's release from prison. He campaigned against apartheid in South Africa, where the majority of the population was oppressed because of their skin colour. His release February 1990 after a 27-year imprisonment came about through the intense domestic and international pressure of individuals and groups on the South African government.

Freed, Mandela with the people imagined and worked towards a new South Africa: an inclusive "rainbow" community. Through their Truth and Reconciliation Commission government agents and individuals acknowledged the gross injustice and unspeakable acts perpetuated on the people. The initiative was to bring about a new community way of living.

Trust and transparency should exist within the honourable community.

Jean Vanier, who died last year, began a community movement based on the principle that all humans are sacred and those with disabilities should be appreciated and treated with human dignity. His L'Arche communities are committed to abled and disabled living together.

The vision of these two leaders for change would not have been put into practice without ordinary people — like us — understanding and supporting their dreams.

We know of many blocks to community at regional, national and world levels — for example modern slavery, gender inequality, child poverty, inactivity about causes of climate change — and we can feel powerless to effect change and overwhelmed by the enormity of the problems. The very basic triple A principles — Agency, Access and Action — may give us a method for engaging for change.

Agency refers to having or nurturing the understanding that as individuals and as Church we can do something about these global concerns.

Access means we need to become informed and educated on the issues, their root causes and core concerns.

And action means we need to do something about them within our particular sphere of influence. This could be talking about the issue in our family and among our friends. It could be joining a community or national group. It could be using our influence in the national or international arena.

One of my spheres of influence is through this monthly Scripture column. I find that my study of the scriptural passage unearths new insights for me and hopefully opens insights about discipleship for readers.

Reading: 9 and 16 February

RL 5th and 6th Sundays of Ordinary Time – Mt 5:13–16 and 5:17–37

RCL 5th and 6th Sundays after Epiphany – Mt 5:13–20 and 5:21–37

REMEMBERING A MAN OF HOPE

Nelson Mandela became my hero. On 11 February 2020 it will be 30 years since Mandela was released from prison. Will we remember this anniversary? With South Africa facing broken promises on load shedding, the Eskom Board in crisis, staggering levels of corruption, Zuma ducking the Zondo Commission and, elsewhere, wildfires in Australia and Trump trying to start World War III, will we pause, remember, be grateful? Will the world reflect on the sense of anticipation and hope that was projected on Mandela at the time? We must — for on that hot summer's day as he walked down the dusty road, Nelson Mandela began leading our country into a new era.

Madiba (as he became known) was imprisoned in 1964. By 1980 an international campaign for his release had begun across the world. Most of my generation in South Africa born around and after the time of his imprisonment knew nothing about Mandela unless they came from a "liberal" family or went to a "white" university. The government of the time banned photographs of Mandela and the state press seldom reported about him.

With the international campaign for Mandela's release revving up, the 1980s were a heady time in student life. The anti-apartheid movement grew at home and overseas and the absence of photographs and news about Mandela only added to his heroic status and helped transform him into an international icon.

We placed enormous expectations on him — a man who had spent 27 years in confinement. His jailers, fellow inmates and some family members were among the only people he saw. Suddenly he was thrust into the limelight and hailed as the national saviour. He'd had no training or experience, no think tanks or war rooms to support him on that day. He carried his written notes but he had forgotten his glasses in prison. His last public speech, though rousing, had been in 1964. He was expected to lead the nation and be in the spotlight of not only South Africa but the world. And he was already 71 years old.

We believed he was up to it! Though the world was a very different place from when he was last free, Madiba hit the ground running. He had to accommodate the young black activists who had been working during his imprisonment, broker negotiations with the apartheid government, deal with factions in the black community, appease sceptical whites and be everything to the worshipping crowd of supporters.

Madiba was all that and more. He has his detractors — taking a negative view seems to be part of every society — but to my generation he will remain a hero. He led us out of dark times into the new era. He continued to give to us until his death aged 95. He was dignified and gracious and led his people to freedom.

Thirty years ago South Africa's economy was battling international economic sanctions. Mandela dedicated himself to removing oppression and restoring dignity. Yet I think his most important contribution was his message of healing and forgiveness. We South Africans don't all see it like this. Black South Africans can be highly critical of white South Africans' professed "love" of Mandela. They challenge the commitment of white South Africans who have never hosted a black person in their homes, have no social cause where they really engage with black people, yet hang pictures of Madiba on their walls and love his smile. They claim that White South Africans have turned Mandela into a saint, a teddy bear, a commercialised product and not really taken his message to heart. They want white South Africans to acknowledge that when Madiba was pushing for forgiveness, he was appeasing white South Africans in order that there would be nothing to stand in the way of black people's freedom.

Young black South Africans say that Mandela made too many compromises. The legacy of apartheid and "separateness" lingers in our complex country. The arguments that abound are most often dualistic — still about black and white people. We are more. As Madiba reminded us, we are the rainbow nation. And we will pause and remember that 30 years ago Nelson Mandela was released from a prison, became our leader, remains our hero and challenges us for the sake of our future.

Photo by Leonard Zhukovsky/Shutterstock

Sarah Pugsley practises law in Durban, South Africa. She is also a Small Claims Court commissioner, writes for legal publications and cycles to keep fit.

STORIES CONNECT US

Photo by Phil Hearing on Unsplash

This summer, as I've revisited former homes and holiday spots, I've been thinking a lot about storytelling — about the stories of ourselves (our "life stories") and also about the bigger story we sometimes only glimpse.

I visit a black sand beach for the first time in a year. I remember all the times I've been here: football games, walking with friends, dancing, walking, talking, holding hands. What I notice is that since I was last here I've become better at paying attention — more aware of what's around me and more conscious of my previous experiences in this place.

In town I light a candle in a church I used to call my own. It's full of unfamiliar faces now, but God is still here. God doesn't leave a place or people because I do. I've written before about how I fit faith into my routine. Now I'm on summer holiday — released from that routine — but I'm still filled with a longing to pray.

On a night-time bus trip up the spine of the country, I blink at the lights of unfamiliar towns: Levin, Pukekohe, Taupo. I pray for the people in these houses. I don't know them or their stories but I feel connected. My prayers and thoughts float silently into the night, inevitably generic but no less well meant.

As well as these moments of new attention to the world around, I have new stories of my own to tell. Now that I'm living away from my family, I have lots to share with them and in the telling we're drawn together. On our family holiday, my memory of stories is expanded by other family members' perspectives and take on new facets.

But there's a larger story, too, beyond my individual life and our family stories. In Te Papa I look at the ridges of an eel ear bone. The only way to tell the age of an eel is through this calcified history, one ring per year. The ring is wider in the years of abundance, when an eel grows faster. This experience connects me to the story of our world and of the life in the world. Such a little detail opens me to that much larger story.

I have a longing for narrative cohesion. I want the pieces of my life to fit together as tidy anecdotes, things I can offer easily to other people. I often can't find this, can't figure out the way a single incident or relationship or hope unfulfilled fits into the story of my life. To overextend the metaphor, I don't know what my eel's ear bone is — and the only way to find out is by patience — age, I'm told, offers perspective.

I try, too, to hold on to God's faithfulness, to the corners of the promised kingdom in Earth. I might not find a larger story in my individuality, or even in other people's tales of mistakes and adventures. Wherever I am, in experiences old and new, God is present, too, even if I'm not aware of it.

In the midst of my fragmented life, I find that stories about who I am, and who God is, ground me. I'm trying to get better at listening to these, to embrace complexity which defies simple storytelling. The Gospels, for instance, are different versions of the same larger story, differing in details but united in message. I'm not sure how to reconcile that with my longing for a clearer personal story, but God doesn't ask me to be straightforward.

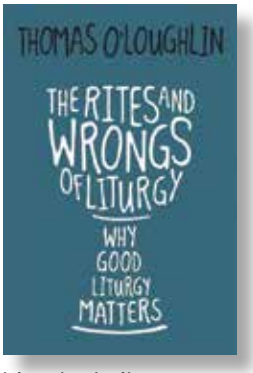
I do not know what awaits me in this new year. I don't know what aspects of growth and challenge will mark me. But I have great hope that I will work with God in my ongoing personal story and continue to learn more and contribute more to the larger story.

Shanti Mathias is at Victoria University, Wellington, enjoying using long words and immersing herself in the intricacies of media, politics and literature.

The Rites and Wrongs of Liturgy: Why Good Liturgy Matters

by Thomas O'Loughlin
Published by Liturgical Press, 2018
Reviewed by Mary Betz

BOOK



Whatever our perspectives on liturgy, its purposes or how we celebrate it, this book by Thomas O'Loughlin will not fail to educate and challenge. The author's reason for writing? "Good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations weaken and destroy it."

O'Loughlin encourages us to ask questions about our liturgies: Are we welcomed and valued? Do we experience God's love, mercy and hope? Do we go away energised and empowered? Does liturgy alert us to what is going on in the depths of our lives, link us with others and open us to mystery?

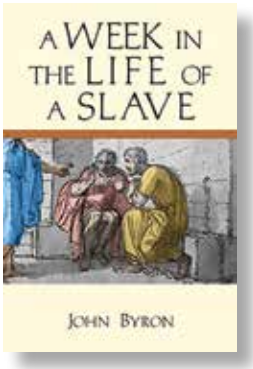
Ten chapters explore the principles of good liturgy, including honesty (do we practise what we preach), joyfulness, inclusiveness, rootedness in creation, prioritising the marginalised, avoiding clutter, being incarnational and open. The most thought-provoking for me were on celebrating community and facilitating engagement. The former asks how we express community identity in liturgy; the latter whether liturgy stirs our hands, feet, minds and spirits to action.

Rites and Wrongs will be helpful to all who desire liturgies which celebrate the mystery of God caught both in shadowy glimpses and in the joys and struggles of everyday life.

A Week in the Life of a Slave

by John Byron
Published by InterVarsity Press, 2019
Reviewed by Kathleen Rushton

BOOK



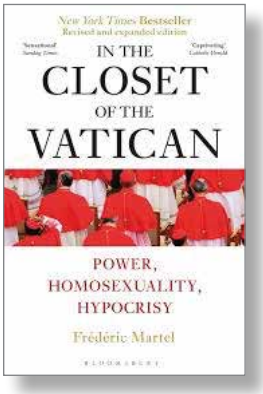
Paul's Letter to Philemon, the shortest book in the Bible, can be troubling for Christians today because by sending the runaway slave Onesimus back to his master Philemon, it can be understood to support slavery. *A Week in the Life of a Slave*, a short readable book by John Byron, a specialist in Greco-Roman slavery, gives a vivid imaging of that story. The reader follows Onesimus from his arrival in Ephesus where Paul is imprisoned, into the cultural world of the cities of Asia Minor and the plight of slaves. Sidebars and historical images are inserted to give background information.

In this historical fiction Byron provides a social and theological critique of slavery. Early Christianity was a household movement. Those who met could not envisage life without slavery which was an accepted fact of life for Jews and for the Roman Empire. However, as their slaves became Christians, struggles developed for both owners and slaves around worshipping and eating together as sisters and brothers (Galatians 3:28). Bryon's expertise and imagination opens new understandings of not only the Letter to Philemon but to slavery in the New Testament and, by extension, for Christians today where modern slavery and exploitation of labour underpins our way of life.

In the Closet of the Vatican: Power, Homosexuality, Hypocrisy

by Frédéric Martel
Published by Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019
Reviewed by Mike Riddell

BOOK



Written by a French journalist after four years of research both in the inner world of the Vatican and through wider enquiry, this book makes startling claims. Martel asserts that the majority of Catholic cardinals are homosexual by nature, if not indeed practising. They, and most of the Curia, he asserts, are "of the parish" — a shorthand recognition of those clergy who exhibit homophilia, with many engaged in active relationships.

This in itself is perhaps not as surprising as it first might seem. The rampant clericalism entrenched in the Vatican leads to many aberrations, especially in the hothouse environment in which male authority is coupled with enforced celibacy and rigid secrecy. The book itself is an exposé, translated into eight languages and published simultaneously in 20 countries. The publisher describes it as "investigative writing".

Therein lies my chief discomfort with this book. I have no way of knowing how accurate the representations of gay sex among cardinals are. But the point is that I feel the same way after reading the work. Its style is *breathless* rather than journalistic, with conversations apparently representing inside opinion being unnecessarily gossipy, and lacking in verification. The work is also at least a third too long, and clumsily written.

Nothing would surprise me regarding skewed behaviour in the Vatican (though I'd assume only skewed in terms of vows of celibacy — if clergy in Rome are wont to break their vow, it might as well be with a man as a woman). However, I came away from the book feeling that it had been rather over-egged. If you are going to assert such a raucous gay capital of licentiousness, you better have facts to back it up. I remained unconvinced and, therefore, dissatisfied.

1917

Directed by Sam Mendes
Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

FILM

While this film has attracted considerable attention ahead of this year's Oscars, it's important to say what *1917* is not, as much as what it is. While it offers no great insights into male friendship or the nature of war — as we might have expected given all the hype — it presents a compelling adventure story in which spectacle and intimacy are effectively combined.

The film is based on the ancient narrative theme of the quest. Two young soldiers, Lance Corporals Blake and Schofield, are charged with delivering a message across no man's land and enemy-held territory that will save 1,600 British troops from dying in a German ambush; they include the officer brother of Blake.

The shtick of *1917* is the way in which it is filmed. A technical *tour de force*, the film gives the impression that it was shot in one long take. The great advantage of this technique is that the audience is emotionally drawn into the unfolding story, literally following in the footsteps of the two protagonists as they set off on their seemingly impossible mission. This approach allows director Mendes to achieve a level of immersion rarely experienced in films about war — when the pair are thrust up against decomposing corpses or giant rats in foxholes and dugouts, we are right there with them.

As Mendes has pointed out, this is a film of exteriors, shot in the open air, both in daylight and at night — even interior scenes are filmed in buildings so badly damaged that they are open to the elements.

This is not a deep film. At base, *1917* is a Boy's Own yarn that keeps us engaged through the skilful handling of tension and suspense. There is no real attempt to develop themes of mateship, especially as the link between the two messengers is broken early on. However, Schofield's character is rounded out through various encounters; we see him jostled by infantrymen amid cheery banter in the back of a troop transport and comforting a young Frenchwoman tending a baby (the mother is dead or missing) in a burning village. Officers' attitudes range from the wooden rectitude of the top brass (Colin Firth and Benedict Cumberbatch in cameo roles) to responses between sardonic detachment and warm humanity shown by middle-ranking officers.

Whether *1917* has anything more to offer than a gripping story and superlative production values is something viewers will have to decide for themselves.

CROSS CURRENTS

by Susan Smith

Revisiting *Laudato Si'*

I'd love all diocesan and parish councils to identify ways that Catholics could respond to Pope Francis's call for people to embrace "an ecological conversion … because natural resources, the many forms of life and Earth itself have been entrusted to us to till and keep, also for future generations". The conversations around the causes of climate change is often about blame. Regardless of who is to blame, Earth is impacted as the climate changes. Over the last months we've seen the catastrophic bush fires in Australia, terrifying floods in parts of New Zealand and, in Zambia, the mighty Victoria Falls have been reduced to a trickle.

I wonder how many agree with Israel Folau's fundamentalist biblical interpretations attributing Australia's catastrophic bushfires to same-sex marriages and abortion? Or an Auckland evangelical pastor's recent claim that there is no need to worry about climate change and its potential to destroy Earth because after the flood, God promised: "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind . . . nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done" (Gen 8:21)? Fortunately, not many Catholics are committed to Folau-like interpretations of the biblical text. But despite Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*, official Catholic rhetoric around climate change is not matched by strategies for Church action.

Prophetic voices are being raised outside of the institutional Church. Sixteen year-old Swede Greta Thunberg has rallied youth around the world to action but was roundly condemned by two of New Zealand's more right wing media commentators for telling it like it is. And 94 year-old environmentalist David Attenborough warns that "we risk a devastating future" if we don't take action. Drought and fire is making Australia face the future. And the drought currently impacting East Africa, South Africa and the Horn of Africa means hundreds of millions of Africans and other life in that part of the world are already experiencing a "devastating future". The young and the old, often ignored in Western society, seem to have a greater awareness of what is happening than those in between.

Online Shopping

Our "postie's" van on the rural postal delivery was stacked with cartons and packages. The fruits of online shopping she explained. I am beginning to like online shopping. That's why I was interested to read that on-line shopping enthusiasts need to think about how their purchases reach them. Importantly we need to be aware of the miles — air miles, shipping miles, road miles — that lie behind the delivery of a single packet. On-line shopping contributes to the traffic snarl-ups in our cities, roads are even more congested when courier vans park, while the drivers rush in and out of buildings, delivering on-line orders. Cars queue up, air is polluted, drivers become irate and local traders lose out to behemoth businesses like Amazon.

And, there is the packaging — cardboard, plastic bubble wrap and cellophane — with every purchase. Not only does online shopping hurt local retailers, it also contributes to damaging the environment. *National Catholic Reporter* writer Michael Winters commented that Christmas is not so much about "Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes, but more about Mammon packaged in cardboard and coloured paper".

What if parishes focused each month on a particular aspect of environmental care, such as the ecological damage caused by online shopping, and parishioners took positive action on behalf of God's wonderful yet threatened creation. Month by month we could move through aspects — water conservation, rubbish disposal, or how often we really need to mow our lawns. It's a shame to be able to say that the aspects are almost limitless. But that must not stop us from beginning.

TUI MOTU InterIslands
The Independent Catholic Magazine Limited

Tui Motu magazine provides Catholic as well as ecumenical and inter-faith perspectives and discussion on current issues in church and society. It focuses particularly on issues affecting Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific. Its intent is to promote the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, engaging faith and the world through informed, thoughtful comment and discussion for a general readership. The magazine publishes 11 issues per year in print and regular digital postings on social media.

The magazine invites contributions from writers of Catholic and other Christian traditions or faith backgrounds, who can offer our readers insights which resonate with the Gospel as it affects us today. We value diversity and seek contributions which are representative of our church and our society: Maori, Pakeha, Pasifika, other cultures, a range of ages and genders, lay and ordained. We offer feature articles, interviews, reviews, poetry, comment and opinion on theology, spirituality and history, as well as on social justice and ecology.

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Printers: Southern Colour Print, Dunedin

Board Directors: Neil Darragh (chair), Rita Cahill RSJ, Philip Casey, Cathrine Harrison, Agnes Hermans, Judith McGinley OP, Chris Loughnan OP

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Bank: BNZ 02-0929-0277471-00

ISSN 1174-8931
Issue number 245

We welcome letters of comment, discussion, response, affirmation or argument of up to 200 words. The editor reserves the right to abridge longer letters, while keeping the meaning.

If you or someone you know has been abused by a Catholic priest or member of a religious congregation, we urge you to seek counselling and healing.

You do not have to report the abuse to the Church, but if you do the Church will take your story seriously — even if you prefer to remain anonymous, and even if the abuse happened many years ago.

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NOT THE WAY TO GO

I think Bishop Martin is creating a major rift within the Catholic Diocese of Christchurch. In the commercial world his plans would be described as a takeover bid. Does he have the absolute authority to direct parishes on how they are to administer their property and their cash resources?

Bishop Martin's view is that he has the right to compel certain parishes to amalgamate and pool their resources, to demolish existing churches and to build new churches. But does he have those rights? Is he claiming that the parishes and the laity do not have any rights which he must respect?

He intends to raise $26 million from the sale of existing community churches and to build a cathedral complex costing $85 million. In comparison the environmentally friendly transitional Anglican cathedral cost $7 million to build. There is no need to sell off solvent, vibrant, packed community churches to fund an overly expensive, environmentally unfriendly, cathedral build. There are other less fractious options he could be considering if he were to act wisely.

Kathleen Gallagher

ABOUT PAPAL INFALLIBILITY

Catholic dismay over challenges to papal statements is a direct product of our tradition of papal fallibility. We forget that papal statements claiming to be infallible occur about once in a century. The privilege of infallibility is not transferable, so statements by heads of Vatican departments cannot be infallible and are therefore open to debate. We should also remember that the dogma of papal infallibility has quite doubtful origins and is certainly not central to Catholic belief. In the preliminary vote on its definition at the 1870 Council, 88 bishops voted against; between 80 and 90 abstained; 62 said they were unhappy with its wording. Then politics entered.

Pope Pius IX wanted the dogma proclaimed. There were 200 Italian bishops present all dependent on papal preferment. Some of the opposition bishops left the Council. In the final vote only three bishops voted against. About one third of the bishops present had changed their minds very quickly! That fact tells us that this dogma was considered to be of marginal importance. It should also alert us to the menace of the creeping infallibility that has stifled meaningful dialogue and creative debate for the past 150 years.

Michael Walsh

Michael, I Thought You Were Dead

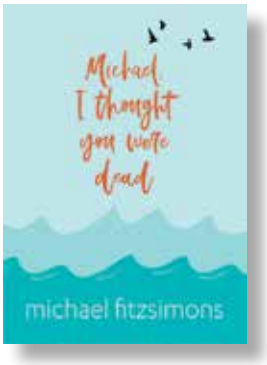
by Michael Fitzsimons
Published by The Cuba Press, 2019
Reviewed by Bruce Drysdale

BOOK

The very personal (and somewhat quirky) nature of the title *Michael, I thought you were dead* is carried into many of the poems in this interesting little book.

Before reading this book the only examples of Michael Fitzsimons's poems I had read were those few that have appeared in *Tui Motu*. I am familiar with some of Michael's photography, however, and it seems his poetry has a similar purpose: capturing life's more poignant moments, be it in a fleeting snapshot or a few well-chosen words.

While the deeply personal perspective of much of Michael's poetry may limit the breadth of its appeal to some readers, the section entitled "Markings" presents a deep spirituality that may well be (at once) uplifting, challenging and reassuring to anyone going through a significant, difficult or life-changing experience. Drawing on his own well-pondered life experience, and on the spiritual writings of such as Teresa of Avila and our own Joy Cowley, Michael allows the reader to accompany him on a difficult and honest journey confronting and sometimes befriending the demons of bad medical news and the resulting prognoses.



Michael's own words sum up the book for me: "Writing poems is my way of facing danger. Words on a page, however they tumble out, are my prayer."

Looking OUT and IN

Photo by Emagnetic/Shutterstock

It was on that golden and blue evening out on the wild, woolly west coast beach of Karekare that I felt sure I was back in NZ for the summer. It was nearly the last day of 2019 and the beach was achingly empty. It took 15 minutes of scampering across the black sand to reach the eager, ragged surf. Our children and their friends swam in the frolicking waves until they were blue with excited cold. Meantime I walked with Helen and my Mum along to the rocks and their green ribbons of kelp. Then it was off to the sand-dunes and jubilantly jumping superhuman distances. Jeph and Grant built a fire from sandy limbs of driftwood. Against the blue sky were silhouettes of the NZ coastal rockband plants — dreadlocks of flax, the gelled up-spikes of ti kouka (cabbage tree), the 80s-look fluffy locks of toitoi and punk nikau palms. We shared food and toasted marshmallows, exuberant dogs orbiting the happy sandy company. The vast velvet of the dark sky twinkled with starlight.

How blue. How green. How litter free. How remote. How beautiful. How beloved these faces and plants.

Yet for most of the days since, the sun has been shrouded in a strange orange haze. Smoke from bush fires thousands of kilometres away reminds me, reminds us, that remote Aotearoa is intrinsically part of this blue-green Earth. The myth of keeping oneself unsullied by sitting in non-smoking aeroplane seats was exposed decades ago now. A small child who pees in a swimming pool doesn't realise they contaminate all the water. Pollution doesn't stay in its corner. Ultimately on planet Earth there is nowhere smokefree or free from the impact of rising carbon dioxide. We who are many are one body, for we all share the one bread — and air.

Facing now to 2020 and a new decade, how can we find hope through this growing sense of apocalypse? For 2020 or maybe the whole decade I am turning to poets and plants for comfort and hope. There is a vast and reassuring evidence of God's creativity and the resilience of Earth when I stop to notice plants, ecosystems and creatures. In poetry there are words and ideas beautiful and compressed that can unlock my unspoken fears of doom. The poet Adrienne Rich wrote:

". . . so much has been destroyed.
I have to cast my lot with those
who age after age, perversely,
with no extraordinary power,
reconstitute the world. "

Writer, historian and activist Rebecca Solnit wrote *Letter to a Young Climate Activist on the First Day of a New Decade*. She talks about how blessed we are to be alive now when the world is so tender and beautiful. Earth is full of things to love and protect. It is my joy and my job as a co-creature and steward of God's creation to speak about and notice that the created world is "good" and to care for and protect it. I owe it to nikau and kelp, to tui and toitoi.

Kaaren Mathias lives on the outskirts of a busy bazaar, on steep forested hills above the Gangetic plains of North India. She is a parent, adventurer, public health doctor and follower of Jesus of Galilee.

Source of Life
favour us
with family cohesion
with neighbourly appreciation
with community solidarity
with Earth consciousness
and with abundant energy for love.

From the Tui Motu team

Photo: Shutterstock.com