



# TUI MOTU

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### Water for the Thirsty

*Jana Matusz*  
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Detail from *Glass of Water* by Jana Matusz,  
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## EDITORIAL

### All Water is Holy

I think it's hubris to assume we can bless water and make it "holy". Although blessing ourselves with water is a Catholic tradition reminding us to live as baptised people, to divide water into "holy" and "ordinary" is nonsense. And it's especially so in these post-*Laudato Si'* days when we are integrating ecological appreciation into our spirituality. Blessing ourselves with water – from the water font or the kitchen sink – is an acknowledgement of Divine care of us.

As our writers in this issue remind us, every drop of water is pure gift – of Earth, of our geographical environments and of Divine Providence. Every drop is sacred, holy, precious, and welling with symbolic resonances. Rather than think we're making water holy by mumbling from a prayer book, we can sing, dance, splash, drink and pray in gratitude for life-sustaining, spirit-lifting, dream-satisfying water. With humility we can ask for forgiveness for the ways we damage water through pollution, taking more than our share, interfering with waterways and letting it slime in holy water fonts. And we can become active in protecting our water sources as carefully as we would our new baby.

In this May issue we continue exploring the works of mercy with *Water for the Thirsty*. It offers a range of articles that describe the lives of people in places where water is so scarce it's eked out to the last drop, where seafaring is a way of life and where climatic changes have made water collection problematic. They open us to different parts of Earth where life is precarious and water is an arterial network of community hope.

Other contributions evoke the symbolic power of water – the deep thirst of our spirit, the call of the waves, and the gushing of the Spirit – surging up as invitations to restore relationships, to be mindful of community and to celebrate the gift of water.

We have deep gratitude to all those who have contributed to this issue – writers, artists, poets, photographers, designer, proof readers – so many. We're encouraged to find that the young writers, Alice Snedden, Louise Carr-Neil, Jack Derwin and David Brophy are tarred with the values and social conscience of their Vatican II parents and offer us the thinking, spirituality and ideals of another generation.

We give you this May issue as drink for the thirsty and as is our custom, the last word is of blessing and gratitude. ■



# Critical Want and the Plant Nanny

**T**ui Motu initially approached Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand and current nominee for UN Secretary General, to author a discussion piece about how access to clean water is essential for development. Unfortunately she was busy. Fortunately, as a young comedian with no personal experience of working for the UN or in leading a nation, I was naturally considered an apt substitute. All my experience and knowledge come from being an occupant of the developed world where I benefit daily from readily available potable water. However there exists an enormous disparity between the developing and the developed world, especially considering this most basic, fundamental and essential human right of access to clean water.

Last week, on the advice of a friend, I downloaded a phone app that reminds me to drink water. The app, called “Plant Nanny”, assigns users a virtual plant which the person has to water. It works like this – every time you drink a glass of water you should open the app and record this apparently notable achievement by pressing and holding a button. Throughout the day then, the app tracks your water consumption and proportionately waters your virtual plant. Its aim is to make drinking water a fun, desirable activity again. Presumably that’s because the fact that we need water to survive is no longer considered motivation enough to drink. We need something more exciting than the threat of death. And, apparently, that excitement is the threat of the death of your virtual plant.

You would think that just knowing how essential water is to our health and well-being would be sufficient motivation to stay hydrated. And knowing that for some, water is a scarce resource, should be sufficient reason not to take water for granted.



Knowing that we can access free, clean, drinking tap water in New Zealand should mean we never buy it bottled. Even as educated and accomplished as I am, I admit I frequently let myself get dehydrated. I sometimes wash dishes under a running tap instead of filling the sink and for convenience I buy bottled water.

Our relationship to water, its availability and quality, directly correlates to where we live geographically and our socio-economic status. That there is a market for “Plant Nanny”, is absurd when we consider that globally one-in-ten people lack access to clean water. While I may need an app to remind me to make a trip to the tap, for many the collection of water is a daily task, with women and children spending an average of “125 million hours each day collecting water”.

Of course the existence of global inequality is not news. An uneven distribution of resources is present in everything from food security through to investment in infrastructure. However, that inequality also exists in the supply and demand of water, the resource most necessary for survival, is reprehensible. Those of us in the

developed world are so removed from the need to collect and distribute water that we forget that job unfairly dominates the lives of many.

Recently I caught myself complaining about the price of bottled water, completely disregarding the fact that I could get it free from the tap and obnoxiously ignoring how lucky this made me. Most of us forget just how easy we have it. So much of our lives is about increasing convenience and efficiency that we don’t think of the many people still struggling for the necessities of survival.

I deleted the “Plant Nanny” yesterday. The constant reminders to drink water became just another completely unnecessary distraction. Plus, my virtual plant kept dying. Though the app didn’t change my habits, its mere existence succeeded in providing another reminder of the rampant inequality that exists and the importance to stay aware and active in closing that gap. ■



**Alice Snedden** is a law and political studies graduate who is also trying her hand at comedy.

# YEARNING TO SLAKE OUR THIRST

**Mary Thorne** reflects on thirst as an image of spiritual longing.

**L**ife-giving, thirst-quenching water is a potent metaphor, perhaps less well understood in green Aotearoa than it was in semi-arid Israel where the scriptures tell of God as the source of living waters. The poet in Psalm 42 says:

*As a deer yearns for streams of water, so I yearn for You, O God.  
My whole being thirsts for God,  
for the living God.*

And Psalm 63 says:

*God, my God, for You I search.  
My throat thirsts for You,  
my flesh yearns for You  
in a land waste and parched  
with no water.*

Longing and thirst are integral to our humanity. We thirst for knowledge and beauty and order. We thirst for connection and life-giving relationship. We hunger and thirst for justice. We long for peace. Mystics and spiritual teachers tell us that this continual longing is, in truth, a thirst for God. The Beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel assure us that the thirst for justice and right order is in accord with the mind of Christ and those who experience this thirst are, indeed, blessed.

When we reflect on this aspect of the human spirit it may be easier to observe the thirsts and needs of others than it is to dwell deeply on our own existential thirst.

## Blocks to Water

In my work with imprisoned women the thirst to be heard and known, accepted and cared for, is clear and urgent. I could write at length of their need. My own deep dissatisfactions and longings are harder to articulate but to do so seems a more authentic endeavour. You see, my own thirst is growing and it becomes disturbing to me. It may indicate that I have to face the responsibilities of adulthood as a Catholic Christian and speak. I thirst

for a new wave of conversion within my Catholic Church which would bring about recognition of women as eligible to participate fully in decision making and leadership.

Pope Francis is reported as identifying clericalism as a sin in today's Church which blocks personal conversion and structural renewal. The challenge of retrieving a Church that is derived more purely from the gospels than from imperial Rome, the feudal middle ages, and the divine right monarchies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is monumental.

***The Church needs to hold itself to the same high standard within — opposing discrimination within the church based on gender, on race, on ethnic background, on sexual orientation or on economic status.***

However, nowadays when lay women and men are better educated and more theologically aware, the consequence of not acknowledging and tackling this challenge may be dire. Many Catholic families find their young adult children completely indifferent to the Church, which they perceive as anachronistic and irrelevant — lacking what they need to quench their thirsts.

## Drink for the Pilgrim People

The prevailing Vatican II image of the Church as God's pilgrim people on Earth, alive with God's own Spirit, awake to the signs of the

times through which they move, is a dynamic and life affirming image.

When we participate in celebrations informed by this image the thirst and weariness we bring to Church are relieved. We are refreshed and renewed. The promise of Jesus, the anointed one of God, that he is Living Water, is experienced in our lives.

## Access to Living Water

What, then, would assuage this thirst of mine?

That my Church recognise me as an adult Catholic Christian and forgo the benign superiority that says: "We are the experts in these matters. They are ancient and complex beyond your understanding. Leave them to us. We will not discuss it further."

That my Church acknowledge that questions and challenges are motivated by profound respect and love for the Tradition and posed by people to whom it is precious and cherished.

That my Church be willing to listen and learn from the voices of its people, be open to new insights and points of view, sensitive to the signs of the times.

That my Church exhibit the courage and humility to implement all modern methods of scholarship in the investigation of our ancient Judeo-Christian roots and analyse factors which caused belief or practice to arise. And then carefully and prayerfully relinquish what is no longer relevant to us today.

That my Church have the integrity to apply the main elements of Catholic social teaching to the church itself and not preach about discrimination only outside its own perimeter.

That it hold itself to the same high standard within — opposing discrimination within the Church based on gender, on race, on ethnic background, on sexual orientation or on economic status.



***“As we are constantly renewed by God’s Spirit we grow in our understanding that our human thirst is quenched, our brokenness is healed by our experience of unconditional love.”***

### **Women Need Water**

The longing and thirst of women within the Church is not a new theme to *Tui Motu* magazine. A growing number of ordinary Catholic women in parishes feel unheard and disheartened.

We hold our breath and pray that the Church will hear and accept the invitation of Pope Francis to return to the open and vigorous discussions that characterised Vatican Council II and to the practice of synodality.

Francis is quoted as saying that open debate on an equal basis, makes theological and pastoral thought grow. He says: “That doesn’t frighten me. What’s more, I look for it.” Certainly healthy communication requires it.

### **Drinking Living Water**

In this season of Pentecost the Church rejoices that we are a people animated by the Holy Spirit. In our community celebrations of Pentecost let us grasp the understanding that this Spirit which formed the brand-new church is God’s own Spirit – a Spirit of outrageous, profligate love.

A Spirit which enables communication beyond the confines of individual limitation; communication as a result of seeing with eyes of love. It is characterised by openness, wonder and joy.

The Spirit perceives connection and beauty before any awareness of being “other”. It trusts that all things are possible.

As we are constantly renewed by God’s Spirit we grow in our understanding that our human thirst is quenched, our brokenness is healed by our experience of unconditional love.

We believe that the risen Jesus carries in his body the marks of torture and death signifying that this is an integral part of the path to liberation and fullness of life.



### **Steeped in Living Water**

Together, we who believe are the Body of Christ on Earth. We bear the wounds of our struggle and difficulty yet to be fully transformed into marks of wisdom and mercy.

Together, we become Living Water called to give drink to the thirsty. May we be alert to the great thirsts of

human-kind wherever they occur in ourselves or others. ■



**Mary Thorne** has been a parishioner of St Mary’s Catholic parish in Papakura for 36 years. She works with imprisoned women.





# HARVESTING WATER

**John Gould** outlines how new technology applied to the ancient practice of collecting rain water has transformed the lives of Chinese families in semi-arid regions of China and moved them out of poverty.

**W**e have watched the phenomenal growth of China since the early 1980s and its unprecedented industrialisation, urban growth and modernisation. Mega water projects, like the Three Gorges Dam (the world's largest) have helped to drive this development. A key motivation for the dam was controlling the Yangtze River's notorious floods which have caused untold loss of life, crops and property for millennia.

Nevertheless, the real impetus for embarking on this \$30 billion project was for its economic and prestige value. Although its economic benefits, such as the provision of huge quantities of hydroelectric power for cities in China's booming southeast are undeniable, the costs are high and extend far beyond the purely monetary.

The social, environmental and cultural impact of the 600km-long reservoir alone is enormous and has displaced over 1.3 million people.

While such projects and impressive urban development steal the global headlines, in the Chinese countryside a quiet but dramatic revolution in rural development has been taking place also. Here the fruits of ancient wisdom and the pent-up energy and enterprise of millions of farmers have been unleashed.

## **New Encouragement**

For centuries peasants have struggled to survive at a subsistence level, toiling relentlessly just to feed their families. There were few incentives to encourage the production of surpluses for sale in local markets. In recent decades, however, rural communities have been given far more freedom to run their own farms and reap the rewards.

Furthermore they have been assisted in doing so with technical support, advice and government grants to improve agricultural

practices and rural infrastructure. The impacts of the changes are unprecedented in human history as around 100 million rural families have been lifted out of poverty.

## **Moving out of Poverty**

For over 20 years, I have had an opportunity to gain a small insight into how the miraculous transformation in the fortunes of China's rural poor has unfolded, through helping to document a highly successful rainwater harvesting initiative in Gansu Province.

This is the same province where Canterbury-born Rewi Alley did some of his most important educational work after the war and eventually led to the sister city link between Christchurch and Gansu.

On my first visit in 1995, the rural people in this poor semi-arid region lying high on the loess plateau in northwest China were facing an extremely

severe drought. Coincidentally, a small rainwater harvesting pilot project was just beginning. Although not the best time to harvest rainwater, no drought lasts forever, and even during these prolonged dry periods some rain falls occasionally.

Many rural families in this region had in fact relied for centuries on stored rainwater as their primary domestic water supply, as they had no suitable surface and groundwater sources.

Traditionally, runoff from sloping ground was directed into large underground water cellars known as *shuijiao*. These bottle-shaped tanks, typically storing up to 30 cubic metres, were excavated to a depth of around three metres and lined with clay to make them watertight. While these water sources allowed people to live in quite isolated locations during droughts, people suffered from severe water and food shortages.

During the drought in 1995 some people were forced to walk over 50km to collect water from rivers in deep valley bottoms or share water sources with animals. The provincial government meanwhile had to deliver water by tanker at great expense to desperate and remote communities.

### Collecting Water Differently

It was at this time that the Gansu Research Institute for Water Conservancy (GRIWAC), under the wise leadership of water expert, Zhu Qiang, actively started promoting greater use of rainwater harvesting. For several years GRIWAC had been running a pilot project, based on meticulous research and field trials, and the results of these were very encouraging.

The approach adopted involved the upgrading of traditional *shuijiao* water tanks by using cement instead of clay linings and incorporating a purpose-built cemented surface or tiled roof catchment. While initially sceptical, once farmers saw the greatly improved performance of the upgraded systems, they quickly embraced them.

The provincial government was

also keen to support new ways to counter the water shortages and droughts which regularly devastated the countryside. GRIWAC also trialled the use of stored rainwater from the tanks for providing supplementary drip irrigation to crops on small plots at critical periods in the growing cycle. This Low Rate Irrigation (LRI) proved very effective at boosting crop yields and allowing for a wider range of crops to be grown.



### Wide Spread Water Collection

Following the success of initial pilot projects, the Gansu Provincial Government decided to support a much larger initiative, the 1-2-1 project. Through this, participating farmers constructed 1 new upgraded catchment, 2 new rainwater tanks and 1 small field (1 *mu* – area 667m<sup>2</sup>) with micro-irrigation.

Since most farmers knew how to construct the traditional *shuijiao* tanks themselves, the local government simply provided new designs and technical advice, as well as cement.

The farmers, with the support of their families and communities, did the rest. This made the project very cost effective and within a few years hundreds of thousands of systems had been built. Around 1.3 million people in thousands of remote settlements were soon benefiting from the project.

### Water Transforming Lives

The impact of the initiative was transformative. Suddenly people found that with careful rationing they could not only store enough rainwater to provide for their domestic water needs, but even irrigate small plots

and grow a wider range of vegetables, fruits and cereals, greatly improving their family's diet.

The rainwater programme was of course also occurring at a time when many other social and developmental changes were taking place and these helped to reinforce its benefits for the community.

Among other key technical innovations that further helped improve rural livelihoods and quality of life was the promotion of low cost greenhouses. These were irrigated with rainwater harvested from their plastic sheet roofs and stored in underground tanks. In 1995 sixteen simple greenhouses were being piloted in Gansu.

Today there are over 100,000 in use. Most yield two crops a year and provide a huge range of produce including "fine vegetables and fruits" that previously could not be grown. Much of this is sold in local markets and that has improved the rural economy across the province.

### Problematic Development

As China modernises there is growing pressure to follow a more conventional western-type model of development, including the provision of treated, reticulated water supplies, even flush toilets. Unlike rainwater harvesting these are expensive and ultimately unsustainable for remote arid communities. The upgrading of the ancient practice of rainwater harvesting has provided the foundation for a rural revolution which has lifted millions of Chinese people out of poverty. With the world facing growing pressures of food and water security, sustainable models, such as those which have proven so effective in China, deserve serious attention. ■

Photo by Quiang Zhu

Map: Adapted from <http://nfgis.nsd.gov.cn>



**John Gould** has studied and researched rainwater harvesting and sustainable development in Africa and Asia for over 30 years and currently works at Lincoln University.

# FROM EASTER TO PENTECOST: Celebrating Water and the Spirit

**Helen Bergin** follows the way water is used in the Easter liturgies to remind us of the lavish outpouring of the Spirit experienced in our tradition and in our everyday living.

**F**or many in Aotearoa NZ, water is taken for granted. Many sail and play in it; workers clean with it; nurses heal with it; creatures drink it. Water is fundamental to daily living.

I recall assisting my mother to bath the younger children. Invariably, the little ones insisted that I add more hot water to prolong their bath and really delay going to bed! The precious commodity of water is healing and renewing.

Yet, we are also aware of water's destructive properties. We witnessed devastation in Fiji during Cyclone Winston. There, water proved detrimental to humans, crops, animals — and more. Sometimes, human activities cause the elements — in this instance, water — to undergo the effects of global mismanagement. Nonetheless, water is indispensable and precious to all creation.

So, how do we honour the traditional link between Spirit and water within the Christian tradition? How does the Spirit, like water, nourish us daily? We may not even

think of water as a symbol of the Spirit. I would like to explore the strong life-giving link between water and the Holy Spirit.

## Water and Life

Just as water gives life to planet Earth so water in our Christian stories often points to the Spirit's presence without whom Jesus' disciples cannot survive. One traditional name for the Spirit is "the gift" of God. Elizabeth A. Johnson says of such a Spirit: "Her loving in the world is gracious and inviting, never forcing or using violence but respectfully calling to human freedom, as is befitting a gift." God's Spirit never violates human freedom.

The lavish gift of the Spirit at Pentecost climaxes and extends the movement of the Spirit previously manifest at Easter.

## Water and Easter

Four signs, or sacramental moments at the Easter Vigil link the Holy Spirit and water.

The first occurs before the baptisms when the priest plunging the newly-lit Easter candle into water says: "We ask you, Father, with your Son to send the Holy Spirit upon the waters of this font. May all who are buried with Christ in the death of baptism rise also with him to newness of life." This moment symbolises the making holy of water which brings new life to those awaiting baptism.

The second occurs when baptismal candidates immerse themselves in the flowing water of the pool or have water poured on their heads, as they begin life within the Christian community.

The third is when everyone is lavishly sprinkled with Easter water as an encouragement to experience present and ultimate hope of resurrected life.

The fourth arises from particular biblical readings — many of which refer to water. I note two examples.

The Genesis reading at the Vigil

recalls God's initial gifting to creation of "a wind from God [which] swept over the face of the waters" (Gen 1:2). This wind is often linked with the creative Spirit bringing into existence elements fundamental to Earth — darkness and light, waters and land, trees and animals, and diverse human beings.

The reading from Exodus describes God's liberation of Israel from within Red Sea waters. Moses and his people were saved because they chose to journey into "the water forming a wall of water for them on their right and on their left" (Ex 14:22). Their risky action culminated in liberation from slavery. Our faith forebears entrusted their lives to God — with Moses as leader.

However, the Easter Vigil highlights even more profoundly Jesus' journey through suffering and death into resurrected life. Baptism, with its symbol of deep water, fonts and pools, expresses a dying within water which is followed by joyful risings from water. As disciples we recall each year that our many "deaths" during life will be climaxed in unimaginable joy. And at each stage of our daily lives, God's Spirit accompanies each of us.

## Facing Local Reality

As we reflect on the paschal journey which involves the presence of both Spirit and Water, it is salutary to recall that in Aotearoa New Zealand there is currently 26 per cent nitrate in our waterways, many rivers need attention, numerous parties have vested and conflicting interests in the use of water and many streams no longer harbour fish because of pollution. In light of such realities, how then might the scriptures read at Pentecost and our tradition help us to appreciate better both the gift of the Spirit and our wonderful resource of water?

## Water and Pentecost

While it is common to link the Spirit with images of fire and wind,

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the Pentecost liturgy links the Spirit also with water. The reading from Acts 2:1-11 describes disciples expectantly awaiting God's new deeds as being "filled with the Holy Spirit". The Solemn Blessing at the end of the Eucharistic celebration says: "This day the Father/Creator of light has enlightened the minds of the disciples by the outpouring of the Spirit. May God bless you and give you the gifts of the Spirit forever."

Words such as "filled with" and "outpouring" which the community experiences, not only symbolise the Spirit's extravagance but they also suggest water filled up and about to cascade.

Moreover, "water" is especially significant in the *Sequence* or thirteenth century chant sung on Pentecost Sunday. In *Veni Sancte Spiritus* we hear the words:

*Heal our wounds, our strength renew;  
On our dryness, pour thy dew;  
Wash the stains of guilt away!*

Water, or the Spirit, is our gift, encouraging us through spiritual and bodily weaknesses, quenching our thirst and washing away all that blocks our reception of God's Spirit.

In the fifth century, Hilary of Poitiers spoke of the Spirit as: "The river of God is brimful. We are flooded with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is poured into us." The Spirit and divine generosity are in communion.

It is sometimes easy to consider the weeks after Pentecost as taking us into a liturgical time which is plain and simply ordinary. Might it not be richer, however, to think of the Pentecost season as Easter's legacy? Thus, it is an opportunity for contemporary disciples to live out the call to mission given at baptism and to do so with an enthusiasm and responsiveness to the Spirit "poured out" at Pentecost.

It could be easy for us to forget God's invisible Spirit and also to presume that clean water will keep flowing from our taps. Local poet, James K. Baxter once wrote:

*"Before we can eat or drink – water is the  
sign of God  
Common, indispensable, easy to overlook."*

Perhaps the weeks after Pentecost this year might refresh and renew us as we intentionally journey with God's living and life-giving Spirit and as we give thanks for Earth's precious water in which we bathe, are healed, refreshed and made whole. ■





# STAR

## over troubled waters

**Mary Leahy** tells of the lives of seafarers spending their lives on the oceans bringing goods to our ports. She speaks from her experience of 24 years in *Stella Maris* Chaplaincy.

Englishman Samuel Johnson once likened being on board ship to “being in prison with the added bonus of the threat of drowning”. I started at *Stella Maris* chaplaincy in 1992 in the port of Sydney and have too often seen the reality of Johnson’s prison quip. I’ve also seen the joy and comfort that companionship can give. Going aboard brings us into the seafarers’ territory and often into their lives.

Seafaring is a complex global maritime industry. Although Sydney is a busy port, it cannot be compared to the trade and traffic of some of the European ports, like Hamburg. Singapore and Hong Kong are megaports in our region, hubs for cargo and trade. *Stella Maris* is the Catholic chaplaincy at ports around the world, ministering among seafarers.

Seafarers crisscross the oceans from port to port and rely on the sea more than any other group of workers. These workers,

predominantly men, spend weeks and months on the ocean out of sight of other people. While water provides them with opportunity, employment and money it also exposes them to danger and hardship.

### Contracts and Conditions

A crew consists of 20 to 24 seafarers including the captain and officers. Seafarers sign on again and again for contracts that can be as long as 12 months. During a contract they are always on duty, on call, or on standby. There is no day off.

The men are generally from developing countries and seafaring is their way of relieving family poverty. But they are too often just cheap labour for the shipping lines.

Over my time with *Stella Maris* I’ve seen the seafarer demographic change from mainly Filipino to Malaysian, Chinese, Burmese, Bulgarian and Romanian. Because seafarers’ work, as well as their workplace, is dangerous

they live under constant threat. And they don’t complain for fear of retribution or blacklisting.

Piracy is one threat and it is escalating in some regions. Merchant ships don’t have security or arms on board so they cannot defend themselves. *YouTube* shows some of the chilling stories of pirate attacks on seafarers who were held captive and terrorised.

Many of the ships contracting seafarers are flying “flags of convenience” eg, Panama and Liberia. While the “flag states” provide tax havens for the ship owners, they take no responsibility for the human rights or work conditions of the workers.

The suicide rate for seafarers exceeds that ashore. Isolation plays a major role, as well as undiagnosed mental health issues, bullying and intimidation.

The Maritime Unions are always working to change the situation for seafarers and as Chaplains we too



contribute by befriending, advocating for, supporting, listening and providing hospitality.

### Systemic Isolating Behaviours

The crews on every ship are multi-national and often the only common language onboard is “broken” English. This contributes to isolation, frustration and misunderstanding.

The men are rarely called by their given names, but by their crew position – Chief, Second, Sparky, Bosun. There is no value placed on community or intimacy in this maritime world.

And, because all vessels are now “dry” ships, seafarers don’t have the simple pleasures we might take for granted, of being able to open the fridge and have a beer after a hard day’s work.

They can be drug tested while they’re in port so even if they had a couple of spare hours, which is very rare due to the turnaround time, they can’t afford to relax too much.

### Families Come First

The responsibility to provide for their families keeps seafarers signing on. Although they may get one or two months’ vacation at the end of a long contract, knowing that there is a long queue for contracts means they might cut their time short to ensure that they get back on board to support their families.

While on board they dream of home but the reality can be quite stressful. They can’t talk about their experiences at sea to their families because they need the employment.

At home they have to take on the role of father and master again, even though the family has changed over the time of their absence. So it’s not uncommon for tensions to develop within family relationships. And the limited time at home means they may not get much chance to conceive longed-for babies.

### Little Control Over Their Lives

Seafarers often share with us their love and hate of the sea – the freedom and the imprisonment it brings them. I am saddened when I see them just enduring their lives aboard and the lack of dignity they

are accorded. It is as if, while they are contracted, their lives are on hold and they become robotic.

I’m always reminding them to live where they are. “Try to live now. Don’t just grit your teeth and survive.” Many seem fatalistic. While they are on the boats for their families, they forget they are persons in their own right.



*The men are generally from developing countries and seafaring is their way of relieving family poverty. But they are too often just cheap labour for the shipping lines.*

### Exploitation of Seafarers

Despite the work of Trade Unions and Churches for better human rights, and the ratification of the Maritime Labour Convention which provides legislation for better conditions on merchant ships, there is still too much suffering in international waters.

Unscrupulous ship owners and companies make the most of the out-of-sightness of international waters to squeeze work out of seafarers and particularly fishers.

Through forced migration and people trafficking poor men are lured to fishing boats by promises of jobs and wages but they end up as slaves without precious identity papers. It is not unusual for us to hear of seafarers

and fishers being held in foreign prisons without due process. And to hear regularly of ship owners abandoning their seafarers without pay in foreign ports. The men are left to find their own way home penniless. We hear of fishers beaten and worked around-the-clock seven days a week. They have no Union support at this point.

### Moments of Tenderness

I have shiploads of memories and experiences of time spent with seafaring women and men.

One night a stevedore was killed on the container wharf in a terrible accident. I went down to see the wharfies later and found that they had professional counsellors and all the help they might need concentrating on them. So I visited the seafarers on the ship nearby who had seen the accident and I spent the day with them. It was grey and the rain was relentless.

One man said that they would like to pray for the dead man and his family. I collected a cross, holy water and flowers and still in pouring rain went up the gangway where they were waiting for me.

One took the cross, another the holy water and another the flowers and we became an entrance procession – perhaps the most profound I’d experienced. They decided they had to go to the exact spot of the accident to pray so we processed around and over containers and gear to the spot where we stayed for prayer and blessing.

The little home-grown ritual worked in us all. Though the men were not involved in the accident, they were affected by seeing it and further by having the Australian police question them. Yet their thoughts were for the victim and the loss his family suffered.

It reminded me of the character of these men – resilient, courageous human beings who often sacrifice their lives for their loved ones. ■



Irish **Mary Leahy** RSJ, joined the Sisters of St Joseph in Australia. After some years nursing in Sydney Mary is now Chaplain at Sydney Ports.

**Robin Kearns** explains why in this Year of Mercy giving drink to the thirsty is not enough. Being merciful means to act in the defence of the quality of water.

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In this Year of Mercy, what is the place of water in our prayer, our relationships, our being-in-the-world? Most literally, along with air, water is a co-equally critical requirement of sustaining life. Without water all creatures suffer, then die. In short, water is a fundamental physiological need. The simple act of giving water to the thirsty is hence a basic act of mercy. These are changing times, when drought is at the door of many. When the availability and purity of water is under threat, we are surely called to be merciful to others as well as to the planet that provides.

### **Pollution Degrades Water Symbol**

The significance of water flows through our lives. Beyond sustaining our bodies, it fulfils higher order purposes. It meets our social needs, encouraging playfulness (watch families on a beach) and our sense of the aesthetic (consider fountains and waterfalls). For us on faith journeys, water is also deeply sacramental and symbolic.

At a workshop on the shores of Lake Erie, I recall Thomas Berry pointing to the murky waters saying: "If we allow waterways to become polluted, our understanding of baptism becomes degraded". Berry was saying the power of the symbol is sustained by the integrity of the elements we experience. Offering water to the thirsty is but the beginning of mercy; we are also called to act in defence of the quality of water.

### **Outcry Against Lake Pollution**

Recently, three images in the media have spoken to the precarious state of fresh water in New Zealand.

First, in January we saw a herd of cattle standing in Lake Taylor, Canterbury. That the stock were

owned by two wealthy New Zealanders added to the outrage and prompted a complaint to Environment Canterbury. Defecating farm animals and bodies of fresh water are no longer an acceptable mix and the photograph struck a raw nerve. Farming has long been our country's sacred cow and to question its practices once seemed tantamount to treason. Now public opinion is questioning the greater good. We can no longer "go with the flow" and accept farming as a priority over water quality.

### **Students March for Swimmable Water**

Second, in March students marched in Wellington presenting a petition of 13,000 signatures calling for all freshwater in our country to be swimmable. A Gisborne mother brought water from her local rivers and lakes to pour on Parliament's steps and wept as she spoke of water quality for future generations.

### **Protests Against Bottling Water**

Third, in April it was revealed that the sale of land in water-needy Ashburton came with a consent to extract 1.4 billion litres of artesian water each year. That this water would be bottled and exported added to a sense of dismay among commentators. But is the action of multinational corporations extracting and bottling water any more morally questionable than large-scale irrigation for dairying in otherwise arid parts of our country?

### **Unacceptable Bottom Lines**

Forest and Bird report that more than half of our lowland lakes and rivers are now polluted — unsafe for people and the species they support. The government is proposing "wadeable" and "boatable" as water quality "bottom-lines". Do we want rivers and lakes that are safe only to *wade* in?

# *Waters of*





# Mercy



What about to swim in, to play in, to gather watercress from? “Boatable”? What about *potable*? Let’s lift the bar and promote the contention that our waterways must have the capacity to support an acceptable standard of ecological health and meet a range of human needs.

One problem is that a regional approach to fresh water management sees large-scale slabs of our political landscape in charge of water policy. What about the local? One of Tom Berry’s enduring concerns was a bio-regional consciousness. If polluting waterways is a sin of commission, then surely failing to appreciate acutely the essential value of water is a sin of omission in these morally arid times.

## Know our Local Water

A useful environmental exercise in this Year of Mercy might therefore be to think about water within our local “catchment”. We could discuss around the dinner table: where does rainfall flow to within our neighbourhood? Where is our closest stream? Where does it ultimately exit to the sea? What life does it support? How can we support its health? We need to challenge ourselves to take a fresh approach to water; to re-appreciate the blessing that it is, to feel it and taste it anew. Perhaps we might walk out without an umbrella in the next shower of rain as if a drought had broken, as if our body and being had forgotten the blessing of being wet.

## Experience of Thirst

On the Cross, Jesus said: “I thirst”. Most literally, to thirst is to feel the body crying out to be quenched and maintain life. But at a metaphorical level, to thirst is also to yearn for something as yet unattainable. We thirst for justice, community, acceptance . . . and for God. The psalmist sings: “My soul thirsts for You . . . as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” It is time also to thirst for purer waters.

In our mostly moist and well-watered land, it’s only in summer drought that we find images that speak to the psalmist’s God who promises streams in the desert. Will this always be the case? In his soulful

song of water crisis, Dave Dobbyn sings:

*“Where you gonna be when the river don’t run no more?*

*Who you gonna run to when the desert’s at your door*

*When there isn’t any more?*

*(When the Water Runs Out. 2008).*

## What Could We Thirst For?

Given our taken-for-granted presumption of drinkable water and water on tap for daily needs, what should we thirst for?

*“If we allow waterways to become polluted, our understanding of baptism becomes degraded”.*

— Thomas Berry

Surely we want a land in which rivers flow clean and support species, so the intrinsic value of all life is upheld. To lose that thirst is to lose our passion for a just and merciful world in which, as Tom Berry said, the water of baptism is a potent symbol. If we are not confronted by water distinguished by clarity, purity and liveliness, baptism, itself, will be reduced to a token symbol dispensed from the same plastic containers that are filled and exported from our springs by corporations.

Next time we are walking in the bush, will we feel confident to descend to hands and knees and cup to our mouth handfuls of water, filtered by roots and moss? Sadly, we must seek out increasingly remote places to engage in this primal act of oneness with water. Yet, to engage in such an act is to drink in the vitality of our watery land and be in prayerful, merciful solidarity with all those for whom the desert is truly at their door. ■



**Robin Kearns** is passionate about wild places and innovative music. He lives in Mt Albert, is married to Pat Neuwelt and affiliates with non-parish Eucharistic communities.





# *The way of the* **SURFER**

For those who surf in the ocean, wind, sun and waves heighten the experience of connection and journeying writes **David Brophy.**

I'm standing in the back of an old warehouse on Auger Way in the light industrial area of Margaret River, Western Australia. The smell of resin fills my nostrils and beneath my bare feet I can feel the dust from offcuts of surfboard blanks that stand in various states of refinement in the adjoining room. A legendary old dude with a moustache and sandy coloured hair steps out and greets me in a thick Californian accent and slaps my hand. He's Tom, my shaper. We look at each other and a smile cracks across both our sun-weathered faces.

There is an unspoken bond between Tom and me. We are both artists but more importantly we are both surfers. Our surfing experience varies as wildly as our ages. Tom has pioneered and charged bigger waves than I will ever get close to but we share an affinity for the ocean.

## **Captured by Surfing**

My introduction to surfing came from my mate, Dave, in high school who gave me an old 6'6 with a busted nose. That was 19 years ago and today surfing has permeated almost every area of my life. As an artist I make work based in the surfing experience — the physical, emotional, spiritual and philosophical aspects of surfing. Almost all of my closest friends are surfers and we regularly spend time in and around the water, call one another to discuss forecasts and meet to plan upcoming surf trips.

## **Immersion in Nature**

Surfing keeps me connected. Last weekend I took an impromptu ferry ride to an island off the West Australian coast known by the local people as Wadjemup. Alighting from the ferry I wedged my board into the custom rack on the back of my bike and took off over the island to a sandy beach with an A-frame wave breaking over a reef 500 metres offshore. After throwing a handful of sand into the water — a local Aboriginal custom to introduce myself to the spirits of this place — I paddled out to the empty break and waited for the next set. Sitting on my board in the middle of the ocean with the sun slipping towards the horizon, I smiled



to myself and reflected just how incredibly alive I felt at that moment, literally immersed in nature.

### A Different Pace

Surfing slows me down. Although my experience comes mainly from surfing, I've come to believe that anyone who spends time regularly in, on or around the ocean is happier, healthier, more spiritually aware and connected to nature.

A recent book I was introduced to, *Blue Mind* by marine scientist Wallace J Nichols, summarises scientific evidence of the positive effects of water on our neurological, psychological and emotional being. As a surfer and someone who lives close to the beach, I have the privileged opportunity of spending a lot of time in the water.

Typically a surf will last around three hours and I try to get at least two surfs in per week. There is a post-surf slowness that permeates the trip home and the remaining hours of the day, that I can only describe as a meditative state.

### Pilgrimage

Surfing is a journey. As a surfer I have travelled to many wild and remote parts of the world in search of waves. I have taken trains, planes, boats, buses, taxis, hitchhiked, motor biked, scrambled down cliffs and made interminably long journeys by foot across hot sand and scratchy bush to get to an elusive surf break.

The pilgrimage to each surf spot is unique and shapes an internal impression in the memory of each of these places. It's fair to say that the harder it is to get to a spot, the wider the grin across your face when you're paddling out to catch that first wave.

### Finding a Wider Community

Surfing can bring change. A couple of years ago my partner introduced me to Alpheus, a friend of hers from West Papua. A political refugee from his own country, he shared with me the story of his people's struggle for independence and the genocide that continues to decimate the native population of West Papua.

Moved by his conviction to help free his Papuans, I began to discuss ways in which I might be able to help

him and his people. He told me of an offshoot of the *Free West Papua* movement, *Surfers 4 West Papua*.

We got some boards together, made a *Free West Papua* banner and advertised *Surfers 4 West Papua* surf days at our local beach through Facebook. We use the West Papuan morning star flag as a meeting point on the beach. (Flying this flag in West Papua will have you jailed for three years under current military rule.)

*When I picked up surfing I experienced a freedom unlike any other sport I had been involved in. In surfing I have discovered a connection between my spirit and nature at a depth that I have not found anywhere else.*

I provide free surf lessons and Alpheus educates interested participants about the history and current situation in West Papua. We have a growing following of surfers who are now actively involved in supporting the vision for a Free West Papua.

### Much More than Money

Surfing cannot be sold. On a recent trip to my partner's hometown in New Zealand I had the opportunity

to surf some epic waves on the east coast of the South Island with members of her family.

Between surfs I had an interesting discussion with one of her brothers about my fears of the increasing commodification of surfing by large surf brand corporations. He raised a valid point that this is ultimately a flawed market because the surfing experience exists within the individual and has always been free to anyone who wishes to grab a board and hit the water.

When I picked up surfing I experienced a freedom unlike any other sport I had been involved in. In surfing I have discovered a connection between my spirit and nature at a depth that I have not found anywhere else.

### Wholistic Journey

Surfing is limitless. Surfing continues to grow, feed, sustain and enrich me both mentally and spiritually. It is something I never get tired of and don't believe I ever will.

The more I surf the more I learn about myself and the more I want to share the joy it gives me with people I come into contact with on a daily basis. I feel blessed to be a surfer and will continue to allow it to permeate my being both in and out of the water. ■



**David Brophy** is a multidisciplinary artist and keen surfer who lives, surfs and works in Western Australia.



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## SEQUENCE

Spirit of God, come weave your dreams  
In marrow, joints and in between  
And sew them in our hearts.

Come, fathermother of the poor,  
Our endless, overflowing store,  
The source of all love's arts.

You are our comfort unsurpassed,  
Contentment, as when home at last,  
Refreshment when we thirst.

When we're burdened, you are rest,  
Keen to give at our request  
An energetic burst.

Share with us Christ's consciousness  
In whatever wilderness,  
Send us, aim us true.

When we're dull and unaware,  
When we miss the mark, be there,  
Guide our way anew.

In our souls' most hidden reach,  
There you breathe and there you teach,  
Dark but flaming night.

In the garb of everyday  
There you weave your gentle way:  
Jesus' mind and sight.

Bound by racing time and space  
Human mind cannot keep pace;  
In loving awe we bow.

Absolute, you are beyond us  
Yet, within, the fire that bonds us;  
Silent, you surround.

– Susan Connelly RSJ









# Clean Fresh Water for Always

a story by Joy Cowley

**N**i sa bula! My name is Keresi. My husband Maciu is the catechist on this island, and our daughter Sovaia has ten years. We want to tell you our story about water good and water bad.

Our beautiful little atoll has no shortage of rain, but collecting it used to be a problem. Only a few buildings had solid roofs and besides, tin storage tanks rusted quickly in our salt winds. So when the company from the mainland put in the underground concrete tank and a hand-pump, we had a big celebration. My Maciu blessed the new water system in God's three names. "Our Lord Jesus Christ knew what it was like to be thirsty," Maciu told us. "Listen! I will read you the gospel story, how Jesus asked a woman for water."

We wives smiled at one another. Of course we fetched water for our men. What was so different? But now we had our own well made of cement, and there'd be no more bugs, no more slime. Clean fresh water for always, we told one another.

There was a radio warning about the cyclone, but we'd had cyclones before and we weren't too worried. Maciu cut some coconut fronds for extra covering on our bure, and Sovaia and I helped him tie them down. We hauled our boat up the beach, and turned it upside down between two palms. Although the sky looked grey, there was no wind and the sea was flat as glass. Maybe the cyclone would miss us.

The wind came so fast people had to run for shelter. We saw white waves in the lagoon, rushing towards us, heard a roaring in the trees, then there was sand in our faces and we were stumbling towards our bure.

My friends, I cannot describe the noise. It was one big roar made up of wind, crashing waves, groaning trees, solid things bumping over the ground. Our bure, although well built, had its roof and walls peeled back like a husked





coconut. Maciu grabbed my hand. "The school!" he shouted in my ear. I put my arm around Sovaia who was crying, and the three of us, clinging tightly to one another, went into the storm.

The school was the closest building made of concrete blocks. I don't know how we got there. The air was full of flying rubbish, leaves, sand, branches, a dented saucepan, a mat flapping like a sail without a mast.

Without Maciu's strength, Savaia and I would have been blown away. The school door was half open, hanging on one hinge. We squeezed through a triangle shaped gap and in the gloom, saw that the room was almost full. People sat on the floor, some praying, some trying to calm frightened children, others just staring with scared eyes. It was useless trying to talk. The noise of the wind was too loud.

If that was bad, worse was to come. Darkness fell early and with that, we had high tide. Wind-driven waves washed through our village, and came into the school. Soon we were standing knee-deep in sea, aware of a new sound outside—the slapping of waves on concrete walls.

Savaia thought the sea would keep rising until we all drowned. Maciu shouted in her ear that when the tide turned, the salt water would get less. He was right. Not only did the sea drain out of the school, the wind and rain also died. As quickly as the cyclone had come, it went away. At first light we stumbled out to look at the rubbish that had been our village.

Maciu thanked God that no one had died, but there was little else to be thankful for. All the thatched bures had been destroyed and waves had washed bare the foundations of the church and the school. The coconut palms were stripped bare. There was no sign of live pigs and chickens, although on the tide line, were some dead hens and a swollen piglet with its feet in the air.

Iloilo, the schoolmaster, tried the water pump. It didn't work. This was another worry. We needed fresh water. Some of the men used whatever they could find, to scrape away the sand from the concrete tank. That's when we found that the top of the new well was not waterproof. Salt water had flooded our water supply,

and those waves had been tainted with sewage.

We realised how serious the problem was. No drinking water! The battery radio was not working. Every boat had been either damaged or destroyed and we were cut off from the mainland. The storm had left a lot of fallen coconuts, but once their liquid was gone, what would we do?

Maciu shook his head over the polluted well. "Twice Jesus asked for water," he said. "The first time he got good water. The second time he was on the cross and they gave him bad stuff."

Sometimes I get impatient with my husband's talk of scripture. "That is all very well, but what about us?" I asked.

"We will pray for a miracle," he said. "And we'll clean up the mess."

That morning we rationed the coconuts. A plane went over the island but was gone in a flash. No help there. Some of the men set to work to repair a boat, but it would be weeks before they could row to the mainland and back with water.

My husband went on praying as he cleared the wreckage of our bure. I helped him. "No clouds now," I said. "No sign of rain."

Maciu went on lacing a roof pole to a wall post. "Have you forgotten how to pray?" he asked.

That afternoon, it happened. A helicopter circled our island, wanting to land. We ran to clear a space on the beach and it came down slowly, a red and black thing like a giant dragonfly. There were two men in it, and behind them, a stack of large plastic containers.

The men wanted to know if anyone had been killed or injured. "There's a ship on its way," said the pilot. "It'll bring you more water and food. Several of these islands have been hit."

Maciu was in front of the line to help unload the large containers of fresh water. He waved his hand to indicate all our people, and he thanked the pilot for being an answer to prayers. "Jesus was thirsty," he said.

I don't think the pilot understood, but we knew what Maciu meant. Jesus had asked for water. It was truly a miracle. ■



NZ writer **Joy Cowley** is a wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and retreat facilitator. She lives in Featherston with her husband Terry Coles.



# FRESH WATER for FAMILIES and COMMUNITIES

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste. – *St Francis*



Women washing dishes in a village near Auki on Malaita Island, Solomon Islands.

In the Jubilee Year of Mercy, practice of the second corporal work of mercy reminds us that when we give drink to the thirsty – whether at home or abroad – we are giving to Christ.

The Pacific islands have suffered from drought and water shortages this past summer. It was blamed primarily on an extremely strong *El Nino* effect (a cyclical weather pattern that brings drier weather to much of the South Pacific). Some see the drought as a harbinger of worse to come under ongoing, long-term climate change.

Whether or not this is the case, the extensive drought highlights the vulnerability of poor people and subsistence households to the

vagaries of weather and the reliability of old, neglected or inadequate water lines and pumping systems.

Water is a basic necessity for health and human dignity and scarcity can lead to conflict.

“Access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right,” said Pope Francis in *Laudato Si’*, “since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity.”

## Extent of drought

Warning bells went off last spring that nearly 5 million people in 11 Pacific

countries faced a severe drought, causing shortages of water and food, ill health and even death. As of April 2016, below-normal rainfall predictions applied across much of the Pacific.

Solomon Islands, where Caritas has extensive partnerships, is among those countries still expecting below-normal rainfall through to June. However, the drought’s impact will be felt long after and in some areas compounding problems arising from earlier uncharacteristic weather – such as days of intensive rainfall in 2014, and Cyclone Racquel in mid-2015 that caused crop damage in many parts of the country.

## Impacts

Outside the Solomon Islands’ capital



of Honiara, water infrastructure and supply lines are extremely limited. In emergencies, difficult roads make it hard to truck in supplies of fresh water, while bottled water is very expensive.

Drought does not just affect drinking water. It also affects food production, health and education. Family food gardens and household plots rely on natural irrigation and rainfall to keep crops healthy, while people become unwell from inadequate or inappropriate food, or unsafe water. Some schools have sent children home because of a lack of fresh water.

Caritas sources in the Solomons say the main provincial market in Gizo has a reduced availability of vegetables and fruits, including staple food items such as sweet potatoes.

## Response

In response to the need and requests from the Church in Solomon Islands, Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand has put together a drought preparedness and response package focused on the Catholic Dioceses of Gizo and Auki. It also gained funding assistance of \$200,000 from the New Zealand Aid Programme.

Rainwater harvesting, large-scale 5,000-litre water storage tanks, and wells to provide fresh water for non-drinking purposes are being provided through community centres such as churches and schools.

Communities have been involved in how water is distributed, and for safety reasons there are periods during the day when only girls, women and children will have access to the water.

These measures provide both an immediate and a longer-lasting response to environmental conditions which may worsen or become more unpredictable.

With dry weather expected to continue until the middle of the year, concrete improvements to supply and store water promote both wellbeing and peace – the fullness of life that Jesus spoke of.

## Permanent solutions

Caritas has also been involved in permanent, durable, community-based

solutions to inadequate, unreliable or dangerous water supplies.

A few years ago, a group of coastal villages near Auki said that their 42-year-old water system needed fixing and extending to serve six communities numbering 1,500 people in total, rather than the single village it was originally installed for. Residents (mainly women) were rowing 500 metres in small canoes to collect water on a daily basis.

Before rehabilitation, Caritas Senior Programmes Coordinator, Nick Borthwick, identified only five out of 12 existing outlets were working. Those that were working had no functioning taps, allowing a continuous drip of water to escape. Although makeshift attempts at taps were made with pieces of wood and plastic, none were sufficient to really prevent the constant loss of water.

In addition, visible portions of pipe were corroded and leaking, and engineers believed underground portions were equally corroded and filled with silt.

On a practical level, these pipes were upgraded to durable PVC (plastic) – offering lower resistance to water flow and higher resistance to silt build-up. The solution is also better for human health and the environment.

However, the role of the community in managing the facility has been important too. The Water Committee comprises nine members (including four women) drawn from the communities served. They are responsible for communication, collecting money and preventing disputes over the water or the land on which the system is built. In Aotearoa New Zealand, community involvement has also been critical in the success of a water supply scheme in Hokianga, Northland, where Caritas is working with local iwi in Motuti and Panguru.

The residents of Motuti relied on rainwater tanks, but contaminants were causing illness, and more visitors and drier summers highlighted problems of supply. People were sometimes trekking over the hill to Panguru where creeks provided a more regular supply.



A child enjoys a drink of fresh water in a village near Auki on Malaita Island, Solomon Islands, where Caritas continues to work with local communities in the area to ensure a reliable supply of clean water.

The joint Panguru/Motuti water project took control of the situation, and with a grant from a community funding agency and assistance from the Ministry of Health's Drinking Water Assistance Programme, they installed a solar-powered pump and tank extension to the existing Panguru supply to reliably service Motuti as well.

"It took a lot of collaboration between the Panguru community, Motuti, landowners and trusts," says project manager Rongo Makara, "but the water lines are locally owned and managed and governed. We retain the source".

As access to clean, reliable sources of water becomes a more pressing issue for countries around the region, the importance of working with communities like those in Solomon Islands and in Hokianga to develop solutions can not be understated. ■



**Martin de Jong** is Advocacy & Research Advisor for Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand and the lead researcher/writer of the annual *Caritas State of the Environment in Oceania* report series.

# Reading Luke's Gospel with ecological eyes

In the fourth part of the series **Elaine Wainwright** writes of relationships restored by touch and healing in the lives of a woman and a girl in Luke 8:40–56 and of Earth healing in an ecological spirituality.

**T**wo stories are combined in Luke 8:40–56. The story of a woman who had suffered from haemorrhages for 12 years is inserted into the account of a young girl of 12 years old who is dying. The human body and its materiality is to the fore in these biblical stories. This alerts the ecological reader to Earth's body that also suffers and is dying.

Only recently reports of the bleaching of coral in the northern stretches of the Great Barrier Reef signify that the reef is dying. In many other places Earth haemorrhages as a result of the violent fracking of its inner core. If we paraphrase Benedict XVI we could say that “God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel” the bleaching of the reef as a “physical ailment” and the haemorrhaging of the Earth as a “painful disfigurement” (cited in *Laudato Si'* par 89).

As we read Luke 8:40–56, we will be attentive to the human and the holy. We will also attend to habitat as it is encoded in the text and as we shall encode it in our interpretation beyond just the human and the holy — which is our familiar way of reading and interpreting our biblical narrative. Doing this is entering into the call to conversion which Pope Francis holds out to us in *Laudato Si'*. It is to set out on what he calls “the long path of renewal” (LS par 202). He names this a pathway to an “ecological spirituality” informed by the “teachings of the Gospel” (LS par 216). Being attentive to habitat, human and holy intertwined in these stories is one way in which we can shape an ecological spirituality.

## Familiar Place on the Lake Shore

Hidden within the opening phrase of Luke 8:40, “when Jesus returned”, is a reference to his voyage across the lake from the Gerasene territory (Lk 8:37). The story of Jesus' ministry is continually located within a changing habitat. He is now on the western side of the lake in what must have been a familiar place as crowds are waiting for him. Both the habitat and the human provide context for the two narratives that follow.

## Jairus Touches the Ground

Jairus emerges from the crowd and the narrative captures social and cultural elements. Jairus is identified by his

position — he is leader of the synagogue. First century readers would have been shocked, therefore, at Jairus's falling to the ground at Jesus' feet. Within the social system of his day, Jairus is dishonouring himself so that he can honour Jesus and his power to heal. Today we might recognise Jairus as associating himself with the earth, the *humus*. From this place of identification, he seeks the healing, the restoration of right physical interrelationships, in the body of his daughter. Human and habitat connect in this story that yearns toward healing.

## Naming and Not Naming

We might note that while the two men in the story have names, the young girl, Jairus's daughter, is not named. Neither is the woman in the story that follows. This alerts us to the profound interconnectedness of injustices in the habitat/human nexus as we read ecologically. All require recognition and healing within an ecological spirituality.

Jesus takes up Jairus's invitation to come to his house and as his feet travel along the way, the crowds press in on him maintaining the link between habitat and human. The mission is healing, which can be extended beyond the human to habitat.

## Woman Touches Jesus' Hem

The journey is interrupted when a woman reaches out and touches the edge of Jesus' clothing. She has been introduced as having suffered bleeding for 12 years — the right ordering of processes within her body have been disrupted. Her illness, in turn, may have disturbed her relationship with her physical as well as her communal context. She would, therefore, have known the intimate interrelationship between the human and other-than-human in her world.

The woman, whose life may have been regulated by what she could touch and ought not touch, reaches out across whatever restrictions she may have incurred and courageously touches the fringe of Jesus' garment. Human flesh encounters the material and the power of touch is evoked. The power of her touch calls forth power through Jesus' garment that is touched, and healing happens immediately according to the narrator (Lk 8:44) — touching is also being touched. The next verse clarifies that it is





not just Jesus' garment that responds to the call of the woman's touch. Jesus himself knows that power was drawn forth from him by that touch (Lk 8:46).

### Earth's Touch Seeks Restoration

I suggested earlier that we might consider Earth haemorrhaging as was the unnamed woman in the gospel narrative. So too we know that Earth reaches out and touches the human community in a variety of ways. We might consider these touches the "hem of our garment". Earth's waters are being polluted and they reach out for a healing of our broken relationship with this resource. Soils are being depleted by intensive farming and they touch us for restoration. Can we allow these and other touches to draw forth healing from us and to draw it immediately and almost imperceptibly as happened for Jesus?

Earth would certainly seem to have faith in us as the woman had faith in Jesus. It is continually touching us for healing, seeking to draw on the power that is within the human community. As Jesus' healing power was able to be touched and activated by the woman of faith, so too as human community we need to develop those right relationships, attentive to the cry for healing and wholeness, that will enable healing to be drawn forth from us.

### Girl is Touched, Healed and Restored

The Lucan narrative returns the reader in Lk 8:49 to Jesus' journey with Jairus to his house where his daughter is dying. One of the householders intercepts the journey to

tell that the young girl has, in fact, died. And we learn a few verses on that mourning procedures had been set in motion. Jesus interprets the girl's condition as sleep rather than death and again touch is the vehicle of healing or restoration of life. Jesus touches the young girl inviting her to rise up. If we are right that in touching, one is touched, then Jesus' action of touching for healing means that he too is restored.

### Invitation to Commit to Ecological Spirituality

That healing is grounded in the materiality of human flesh and in the right ordering of materiality beyond the human, is made evident in the penultimate verse of this narrative when Jesus orders that the young girl be given something to eat. She is restored to her habitat with her human body healed.

While the young girl and the haemorrhaging woman are not named, their stories speak powerfully of the restoration possible when healing is a core commitment. We are all invited by Pope Francis to this commitment of an "ecological spirituality". ■

Painting: *The Daughter of Jairus (La fille de Zaïre)*  
by James Tissot (1836-1902). Brooklyn Museum.



**Elaine Wainwright** RSM is the Executive Director of Mission and Ministry for the Mercy Sisters in Australia and Papua New Guinea. She is an international biblical scholar.



# BELIEF IN JESUS CHANGED THE CHURCH

**Kathleen Rushton** shows in John 16 how a new way of telling the story of Jesus grew out of the Johannine community's experience of being Christian.



*The Last Supper. 6th Century mosaic, Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna.*

Science has demonstrated beyond all doubt that our universe is unfinished. In his 2015 book, *Resting on the Future: Catholic Theology for an Unfinished Universe*, John Haught asks “what Catholic faith might mean if we take fully into account the fact that our universe is on the move . . . What if [we] began to take more seriously the evolutionary understanding of life and the ongoing pilgrimage of the whole natural world? . . . that the cosmos, the earth, and humanity, rather than having wandered away from an original plenitude, are now and always invited toward the horizon of fuller being up ahead?” Haught recalls that especially in *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dei Verbum*, Vatican II encouraged Catholics “to become more evolutionary in their understanding of the world and more biblical in their spirituality.” Haught’s insights and questions inform my reflection and interpretation of John 16.

The context of John 16:29-33 is a conversation between Jesus and unnamed disciples and divides into three parts — Jn 16:1-15; Jn 16:24; Jn 16:25-33. Each part has a similar threefold structure: a declaration of Jesus; a reaction by the disciples; and a further declaration by Jesus in response to the disciples’ reaction.

This chapter in John is one of the farewell discourses in which there is much talk about the future, questions about moving beyond the known, confusion, notions of time and a new vision of life obtainable for all who follow Jesus. Speaking just before his arrest, trial and death, Jesus is preparing the disciples for his departure and for their life in his absence. This future which Jesus envisions in John is the reality for us today because the Church

lives without the physical presence of Jesus and is sustained by his words.

## **Written by Believers for Believers**

A gospel is an interpretative narrative of the appearance, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus and tells of the significance of that story for those who hear or read it. It was told by believers for believers in particular situations.

The social context in the Mediterranean world was more complex than Jewish/Christian tensions. In first century Palestine and in Ephesus where probably John’s gospel was written, believers were subjects of the Roman Empire. All religious, social and economic life was under imperial domination. The Book of Revelation shows this tension. The theological concern of the writer was to expose the Roman Empire for what it is—a threat to the reign of God in the world—and to encourage Christians to resist its values.

Jn 16:29-33 Seventh Sunday of Easter 9 May; Jn 16:12-15 Trinity Sunday 22 May



The Johannine gospel, written probably in the 90s, emerged from this setting and is shaped by resistance and witness. To understand the religious interactions we need to remember the background in which readers/hearers faced difficult choices. They could remain in their local synagogue as members of a religious group that had official recognition in the empire and avoid the scrutiny of its officials. They could stay with the synagogue while at the same time also worshipping secretly as Christians. They could break away from the synagogue, worship openly as Christians and risk the consequences.

John encourages the last choice. We find the expression, “put out of the synagogue” (*aposunagogos* Jn 16:2) which was used previously in Jn 9:21–22 and Jn 12:42. In the whole of Greek literature this word is found only in John. Finally after a process lasting decades, the Johannine community’s belief in Jesus led to a parting of the ways. That brave Church went out of the world they loved and began to tell the old story of Jesus in new and often unique ways as we now read in the prologue and the farewell discourses.

### Gathering of Present and Future Communities

We read in the latter stages of Jesus’ ministry that his death is connected with the gathering of present and future communities. Jesus will bring other sheep into the fold (Jn 10:15–16); gather the dispersed children of God (Jn 11:50–52); many will believe in him (Jn 12:11); Greeks come to him (Jn 12:20–23); and when he is lifted up he will draw all people to himself (Jn 12:32).

The future and the present merge in a single narrative moment in ways that contest the usual understandings of time. God and Jesus are present and interact without being confined by past, present and future. Jesus’ words concern his future which he implies is also connected with the future of the disciples and with that of the reader. The transformation and the merging of the times are conveyed by the mysterious word, “hour”, which is used in various ways with the verb “come” (Jn 16:2, 4, 21, 25, 32). “My/the hour” is an image for Jesus’ death-resurrection and draws others also into the mystery. For these times, there are words of promise and assurance (Jn 16:12–15 and Jn 16:33).

### I have said these things to you

The discourse moves between the present and future to indicate that a new age has begun. Jesus’ words containing the expression “put out of the synagogue” (Jn 16:2) are framed by his saying: “I have said these things to you” (Jn 16:1, 4) to keep disciples from stumbling and to remind them of his words when that time comes. “I have said these things/this to you” is repeated three more times (Jn 16:6, 25, 33). In Jn 16:12–15 there is a change of tense which suggests the future: “I still have many things to say to you.” Here Jesus links his departure with the coming of the Spirit of Truth. He has already told the disciples that his going is to their advantage for otherwise the Advocate will not come (Jn 16:7). Jesus then describes the twofold role of the Spirit: to expose (Jn 16: 8–11) and to guide (Jn 16:12–15).

### Speaking Plainly/Frankly

In 16:29–33 the disciples react to Jesus: “now you are speaking plainly”. Speaking “frankly” or “plainly” (*parrēsia*)

was a characteristic of the ancient ideal of friendship. The biblical figure of Wisdom *Sophia* gathered her friends. The earthly Jesus gathered his friends. Later the Risen Jesus gathers the Johannine community, and communities throughout the ages, in the Eucharist to be “friends of God and prophets” (Wisdom 7:27). Wisdom *Sophia* cries out for justice at the street corners. Likewise, Jesus lived his ministry publicly and spoke out frankly, often in Jerusalem, the centre of religious and political power (John 7:4, 13, 26; Jn 10:24; Jn 11:14, 54; Jn 16:25, 29; Jn 18:20). This led to Jesus’ death. Ancient writers, like Plato and Aristotle, wrote of another ideal of friendship as the love which leads one to lay down one’s life for friends. Jesus’ life is the incarnation of such friendship (Jn 15:12–15).

### Telling the Old story in a Bold New Way

John Haught writes of creating a “spiritual space for a fresh throb of hope” and of living a biblical spirituality of “Abrahamic adventure.” The Johannine community gave us a new gospel. So how can we tell the old story in a bold new way? How do we become more evolutionary in our understanding of the world and more biblical in our spirituality? What is the Empire in our situation? What choices do we face? About what are we called to speak “frankly”? ■



**Kathleen Rushton RSM** tends her vegetable garden, walks in the hope her feet will allow her to tramp again and delights in learning about Scripture.

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# a GEN-Y perspective

## SELF CARE *in a* NEW PLACE

**F**or the second time in my life, I recently moved by myself, to a new city in which I know very few people. While the move is exciting in many ways as I am now in a great job within the world of sexual and reproductive health – it has prompted me to think about the need for self care while going through significant life changes and events.

Whether it is moving to a new city, a relationship ending, or any other uncertainty that life throws at us, “being kind to ourselves” can make such a difference to our experience in these transitions. In the last few weeks I’ve found that acknowledging that I don’t know many people in my new home of Hamilton and that I am going to be spending a lot of time by myself, has been really positive. By acknowledging that my life isn’t going to be as social as in Auckland has helped me accept it and move into a space where I can make the most of it.

On weekends I have been exploring the Waikato and on weeknights I’ve been walking by the beautiful Waikato river and around the Hamilton Lake. It’s given me the opportunity to think about the things that I have always wanted to do but till now haven’t had time for. Now I’m enrolled in *Te Reo*–Māori language night class, something I have

been meaning to do for years. I have re-joined the sport of caving, getting in touch with the local caving club. Aside from the joy that new hobbies bring, I am appreciating becoming more comfortable with spending time by myself.

Being a bit of a subscriber to the power of positive thought, I am a big believer in celebrating the positives of a situation no matter the circumstances. I’ve developed a daily ritual when on waking up I simply list three things I am grateful for. While writing this article I’ve realised how much this practice is a staple of my life. The list may include a minor incident like a recent outdoors trip that resulted in being chased by angry wasps and stung eight times (I am grateful that I am not allergic to wasp stings), to monumental, life-changing events like my dad dying last year

(I am incredibly grateful for the 26 years that I had with him as a loving, kind and compassionate father). It is nourishing to make time regularly to appreciate the good in life and it is a simple and profound way to show kindness to myself.

Another helpful practice is spending a little time before bed listing three things that I have achieved during the day. They may be simple like getting all the washing dry, or more complex like finishing a major project. I find that acknowledging the things I achieve day-to-day does a world of good for my mental health and sense of self.

And lastly I find it incredibly helpful just to acknowledge that I will find life a bit hard for a while and then learn to sit with the discomfort. I can expect that some days will be worse than others. I realise it’s important to identify what will give me support in a challenging time. It could be the comfort of buying myself a nice lunch at my favourite café, calling my mum more often than I usually would, or having a stack of “feel good” movies on hand for a pick-me-up. It’s important to find what healthy coping mechanisms work for you.

Learning to care well for ourselves gives us the energy and experience to care for the people around us. Difficulty, change and transitions are intrinsic in human experience. By learning the art of self-care, we are also developing what we need to practise loving kindness. ■

Louise Carr-Neil, an Auckland native living in Hamilton, is passionate about gender equality and human rights. In her spare time she enjoys running and vegetarian cooking.



### MARY

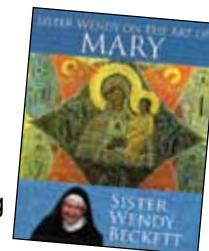
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# YOUNG MEN NEED DREAMS

In my last column I railed against the off-shore detention centres Australia is using to detain refugees. This month, I move my focus onshore and am equally critical of how New Zealand and Australia are detaining our own indigenous people at unprecedented rates. New Zealand's prison population has almost doubled in the last 20 years and we now boast one of the highest incarceration rates per capita in the developed world. And while the general prison population has been swelling since the 1980s, Māori have become wildly over-represented.

The NZ Department of Corrections figures show that in December 2015 a staggering one in two male prisoners was Māori (50.6 per cent), with Māori making up 60 per cent of all women behind bars in the nation. This is despite Māori men, women and children accounting for a mere 15 per cent of the general population.

In Australia things are sadly no different. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders account for three per cent of the national population and 28 per cent of all those imprisoned (*Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015*).

Perhaps what is more troubling is that this trend is on the rise. The number of indigenous inmates in Australia has doubled over the last 20 years. While 30 years ago, one in seven prisoners in Australia was indigenous, today it is nearing one in three.

It is not difficult to see why there is an over-representation of these populations in our judicial systems.

Society and the prison systems fail these groups. Statistics show that well over half (seven in ten) Māori prisoners released from jail are back within five years. In Australia a third of all released prisoners re-enter the prison system within just two years.

These figures speak loudly of judicial systems that do not prepare

inmates in a meaningful way to rejoin the community.

"Correctional" systems by their very names promise to "fix" those who enter them. Presumably this means to reform those who have offended so they can re-enter society confidently. But when it comes to our indigenous people there is not one statistic that suggests this might be the case, and in fact, all the data implies our correctional systems – and our communities – are failing these people miserably.

*Young people like me need our Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders and Māori contemporaries to know their own value, so that confidently we can build a future together.*

Common sense, as well as research, shows that the fewer opportunities offered to those incarcerated, the more we can expect recidivism. After release men and women need support to reintegrate responsibly into their families and communities and find opportunities for employment that suits them. They also need support to master their addictions and health issues to be productive citizens and stay away from crime.

The statistics from both New Zealand and Australia also show that around half of those in prison are young – under 35 years. With the current recidivism rate there is the danger that for too many, prison will become a "lifestyle". Their imprisonment will impact on the development and well being of the children and their families meaning future generations are made vulnerable as well.

Half of those in the Australian juvenile system are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. These young men and women are most at risk of reoffending. If we do not address the needs of this group in particular, we cannot expect anything other than a system with spiraling over-representation, damaged, isolated individuals and divided and unequal communities.

I am certainly not alone in critiquing the prison systems in Australia and New Zealand. Nor am I a lone voice advocating for and presenting alternatives for a better system. My voice is heard beside the wise, experienced and persistent voices of groups like Restorative Justice, Justice Action, Prisoner Advocacy and more.

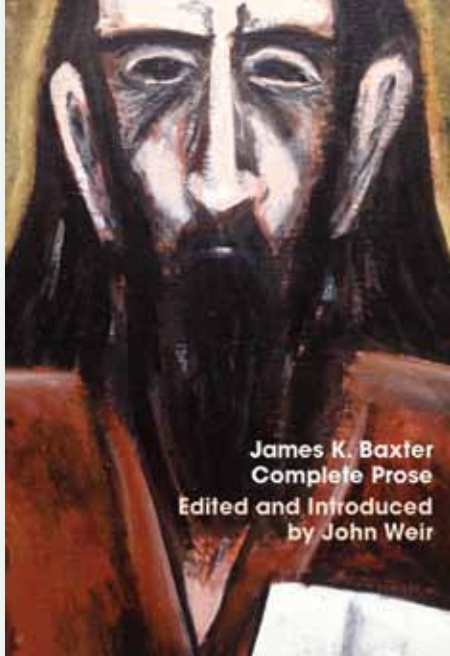
But as a young man I can see that in New Zealand and Australia we live in lucky, developed societies that for the most part recognise the need to provide opportunities for our youth to develop in a way that is conducive to both their personal, and our collective future. I certainly don't think I'm alone in wanting this generation – especially young Māori, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders – to have equal opportunities to enrich their lives, be supported in their struggles and find sufficient resources to achieve their goals whatever they may be.

In prison these young men and women usually don't acquire the new skills required for good employment, parenting, and for participating in society. Young people like me need our Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders and Māori contemporaries to know their own value, so that confidently we can build a future together.

We owe them that. ■



**Jack Derwin** is a student, writer and journalist. He looks forward to the day he isn't broke because of that status.



## James K. Baxter Complete Prose

Edited and Introduced by John Weir  
Published by Victoria University Press  
Reviewed by Cathy Harrison

has been previously published in book form. The rest is either unpublished or was printed in journals or magazines which are ephemeral by their nature. So the novelty of much of the prose will surprise readers.

Initially the young Baxter viewed himself as a poet who would increasingly write prose when he was older. As the sequencing shows, the earliest prose items are usually about literary topics, while the later ones are chiefly about his religious and social concerns.

What's most significant about it is that it is value-based. This is very apparent when Baxter contrasts the Trinity which he believed in (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and the secular trinity which he described as the dollar, respectability and school certificate.

Baxter's principles were offended by social injustices and he wrote compellingly about homelessness, poverty, unemployment, racism, militarism, capitalism and so on. The result is not just a literature of protest but a blueprint for change which advocates respect for the human person and empowerment for small communities.

In his article *In my View* [6] he claims, "the difference between Maori and pakeha is the difference between a community of neighbours and a society

of strangers." Baxter's community and personalist values seem especially important whenever people's rights are assaulted.

Through his personal and family experiences and his empathy for those on the margins he came to understand that the human condition is often wounded. But because he was a profoundly religious man he accepted the Christian belief that the Cross is really the Tree of Life and much of his late writing explores this paradox.

Like Thomas Merton, he based his social criticism on a framework of mystical and ascetical theology. This is especially apparent in his late prose which explores with enormous power the crucifixion of the oppressed.

The *Complete Prose* documents the life and times of a remarkable man with an unusual courage for self-disclosure and prolific social critique. In the final item, *Confession to the Lord Christ*, conscious that his "bones are taking him to the grave", he reflects on what he would say to the great warrior who walked on the waters of Galilee and died on a cross. "*E Ariki, taku ngakau ki a koe* — Lord, my heart belongs to you."

Baxter's *Complete Prose* will be a fascinating source of material to readers especially those who are interested in spiritual and religious matters and social justice. Of course his enormous contribution to NZ and world literature must not be overlooked because he is regarded as one of the great poets in English of the 20th Century.

John Weir as editor and Victoria University Press as publisher together have produced a valuable resource for those who want to know more about New Zealand society, human vulnerability and the ideas which Baxter hoped would enable some people to move from dark to light.

"The guest should be welcomed with signs of love, and given food and drink — even if there is very little to eat in the house — and given a place to lie down." The central image from the title of this article, *The Six Faces of Love*, is mirrored in the design of the box which contains the four volumes because Nigel Brown has symbolically depicted three faces of Baxter as prophet and truth-teller. Like the prose, the illustrations are compelling. ■

**W**hen you plunge into the depths of *James K Baxter Complete Prose* you could be forgiven for believing he is writing for New Zealand society today.

A labour of love and meticulous gathering of items, this project took John Weir about 50 years. Because of this time-span he would be surprised if any significant prose items have been omitted.

In compiling these four volumes Weir's primary intention was to include all the prose which Baxter wrote in his lifetime — with the exception of his letters, which will be published separately.

His secondary intention was to date each item and place it in chronological order of composition. This device enables the reader both to see the range of topics which engaged Baxter at a particular time and to understand how his ideas persevered or developed — in fact, they were remarkably consistent from beginning to end.

In the Introduction Weir claims that less than ten percent of the prose



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## Francisco: The Man Behind the Pope

Directed by Beda Docampo Feijóo

Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

I came to this Argentinian biopic of Pope Francis without high expectations, and they were not disappointed. In an attempt to steer away from hagiography, Feijóo loads his film with sumptuous interiors and sweeping cityscapes, mainly of Buenos Aires and Rome, as well as beautiful people. The most notable of these is Ana (Silvia Abascal), the young Spanish journalist whose pursuit of the pope-to-be around the world gives the story line its basic structure.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio — or “Father Jorge” as he preferred to be called — played here by Darío Grandinetti is portrayed as a bluff and breezy cleric, snappily dressed and as ready to engage with an elegant socialite as to console a distressed slum-dweller. But, while the film succeeds reasonably well in depicting him as a humane and contemporary man,

it fails to reveal anything significant about his inner life and struggles. The roots of Francis’s spirituality remain unexplored.

While we are shown a sociable young man from a well-to-do family becoming a fearless champion of the poor in the *barrios* and *favelas* of Buenos Aires, the transformation is never explained, despite the real-life Francis’s references to the personal “conversion” that is a key part of his story. And while the incident of the two Jesuit priests kidnapped by the military regime in 1976, when Bergoglio was Provincial Superior of the Argentine Jesuits, is treated in some detail, its purpose seems to be to highlight his part in their release rather than to explore the murky waters surrounding this dark chapter in the country’s history.

While this lively film is full of incident, this can often be confusing.

Characters and events are introduced, and then not mentioned again. And the film’s frequent switches of time and place can produce a sense of disorientation. On the plus side, Bergoglio’s character is filled out through his constant encounters with other people, who are often tellingly opposed. Similarly with the film’s various settings; his visits to the slums of Buenos Aires are set against his participation in two papal elections (in 2005 and 2013), where he all but vanishes amid the pomp and splendour of the Sistine Chapel and ranks of crimsoned cardinals.

For me, the best part of this film was the documentary footage of the real Francis that is shown at the end. As an admirer of a pontiff who surprises, delights and challenges us at every turn, I was left wanting a good deal more. ■



## On Prophets

A prophet, by word and action, calls attention to an important matter not generally accepted in society. Denial begets scorn, condemnation and hostility in varying degrees. To quote ancient Chinese sage, Gao Lee Ji: "When you learn to kill the messenger, all the news turns good."

## Laetare Rejoice

The University of Notre Dame annually presents the *Laetare Award* – the most prestigious to be bestowed upon US Catholics. In announcing this year's award Notre Dame's President said: "We live in a toxic political environment where poisonous invective and partisan gamesmanship pass for political leadership. Public confidence in government is at historic lows and cynicism is high. It is a good time to remind ourselves what lives dedicated to genuine public service in politics look like. We find it in the lives of Vice President Biden and Speaker Boehner."

The US Catholic bishops became strongly divided some years ago. A majority adopted a policy of anti-abortion to the exclusion of everything else. In many ways they have become allied increasingly to the Republican Party.

Some bishops decreed that no one endorsing a "pro choice" candidate could receive Communion. One farcical consequence was that one activist both for the Republican Party and anti-abortion, was refused Communion when he declared his support for Obama in 2008.

Notre Dame's action is an important step towards a process of dismantling the architecture of the "culture warrior" model of Church.

## Conscience and Culture

Faith is caught, not taught. It is often assumed that instruction alone

suffices to effect understanding in adults and children. To some extent this mentality, inculcated through authoritarian pastoral practice, explains why Pope Francis is meeting such opposition from a large section of bishops, clergy and laity.

Francis has emphasised consistently the importance of people's culture when preaching the Gospel. In that context "culture" can be described as the system of images and meanings which shapes people's perception of experience and which provides them with their behavioural norms.

In 1971 James Downs described an Aboriginal society which possessed a stone axe made with great difficulty. To use it required permission from a tribal elder. This gave him a means of controlling behaviour and observance of tribal custom. Hence the axe's function was not only to cut, but to maintain social values.

How does one bring Christ's message to those people? By leading them step by step, respecting their culture and exercising the corporal works of mercy. True help starts with

the needs of the recipient. Formation in faith is a lifelong journey. We can be led but not coerced. This principle is fundamental.

Downes explains that a well-meaning missionary gave several modern axes to younger tribesmen. Within a few months the whole tribal structure had disintegrated.

For many people the Church's doctrinal formulations have become unintelligible or irrelevant. Francis has tackled that problem by highlighting the need to give priority to preaching the Gospel by example. He consistently stresses the need for universal synodality – dialogue – leading by example.

So the new Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia The Joy of Love*, uses pastoral principles in addressing the myriad practical problems facing contemporary families. It is short on doctrinal modification but long on pastoral implications, often the seedbed of previous doctrinal development. "We have been called to form consciences, not replace them" (AL par 37). ■



**TUI MOTU InterIslands**  
*The Independent Catholic Magazine Limited*

*Tui Motu - InterIslands* is an independent, Catholic, monthly magazine. It invites its readers to question, challenge, and contribute to its discussion of spiritual, social, and ecological issues in the light of gospel values, and in the interests of a more just and peaceful society. Inter-church and inter-faith dialogue is welcomed.

The name *Tui Motu* was given by Pa Henare Tate. It literally means "stitching the islands together...", bringing the different races and peoples and faiths together to create one Pacific people of God. Divergence of opinion is expected and will normally be published, although that does not necessarily imply editorial commitment to the viewpoint expressed.

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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.

We do not publish anonymous letters except in exceptional circumstances.

## DEATH AND TRANSFORMATION

I was fascinated by the chrysalis photos in *TM* April 2016. To use the chrysalis to capture the mystery of life and death is so apt and reflects the thread common in each of the accounts published – that life after what we call “death” is an expectation. Whatever form emerges after that final gasp is a mystery, but that something does happen is a core acceptance in the articles.

Recently David Attenborough held up a monarch chrysalis and exclaimed at the mystery of how it would change into a butterfly. And a science programme about research in Mexico examined the nature of events at each phase in the butterfly lifecycle. Briefly, a caterpillar, (presumably dead and frozen) was sliced into 200 slides for microscopic study. There was absolutely no visible evidence in the remains of the caterpillar of anything of the chrysalis and even less of the caterpillar in the butterfly.

Death, the giving way of one form to another, is a transformation, perhaps a transubstantiation. What do we need to make the change, before and during that time of transformation? Some will say it is age or sickness but once the change has commenced, something else, as with the caterpillar, drives the change.

The energy required to bring change is love. Love, freely available and powerful, is the source that drives us and all life.

**David Beirne, Hamilton.**  
(Abridged)

## ARE RELATIONSHIPS WITH PRIESTS GOOD FOR WOMEN?

I honour Daniel O’Leary for his honest assessment of special friendships between priests and women (*TM* April 2106). From my professional experience I am disturbed to read of Pope John Paul II’s relationship with married Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka and that it is a life-giving and humanising experience for priests to have such friendships. I have concerns for the women’s well-being. If the priest is to live celibacy and fidelity to his calling, an outcome for the woman can be prolonged inner conflict, the burden of secrecy, and more. Women generally do not compartmentalise areas of their lives as it seems many men do. Even if the relationship is not physically sexual, damage to the woman can be profound. Tymieniecka is quoted as writing to the Pope: “I belong to you” and “this is tearing me apart”. What effect did this relationship have on her marriage? I am not confident that boundaries, power imbalance and ethics are discussed – or the “first, do no harm” ethos of other helping professions. The question is: “How life-giving are these relationships for the women?” The fundamental problem is mandatory celibacy. But now let women’s voices be heard and their well-being safeguarded.

**Trish McBride, Wellington.**  
(Abridged)

## DEATH HAS LOST ITS STING

I was not enthralled to find *Burying The Dead* was the theme for *TM* April 2016, but the illustrations are exceptional and these enthralled me. I return to them time and again. Take the cover photograph. I have pondered this image in depth. The shape, form and colour; the suspension lantern-like; the angle of light so satisfying to the eye and then one sees – *Burying the Dead*. This is not about the dead. The symbolism here is all new life, amazing beauty, freshness, wonder. I decided I had better read the articles.

I began with Elaine Wainwright. My eye inevitably slid across to the illustration. What rich nourishment is here. One can feel the strong, gentle, loving support for the cold limbs, the passionate maternal holding of the beloved, the yearning to give what is needed, to honour, to repair.

The drawing speaks of a womanly need to nurture, to heal, to bestow blessing. Then the pre-empting of the next need, preparing the oils and the cloths, and always the haste so that all will be accomplished in due time.

It is what Francis wants us to do to all creation and when we do, the Kin-dom is here.

When I read the rest of this issue I read the articles in the context of this reflection and all this loving can be felt in every culture. Truly death has lost its sting.

**Mary Engelbrecht RSJ, Perth, WA.**  
(Abridged)

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## Looking OUT and IN

**A**radhana moved to our town many years ago from Nepal, with her husband and their four young children. Their life seems to have been quite precarious right through. With neither parent able to read or write the options for an income were and are narrow. But Aradhana had managed to get all four children through primary school and they were now all in secondary schooling.

When we first met, Aradhana had hit a down patch. She had high levels of sadness, many worries and little hope for the future. She struggled to get up in the mornings and instead of getting on with all the busy tasks of running a home without electricity or appliances, her kids said that she was just sitting around all day. Her husband returned from his current job working as labourer on a construction site and said he would find Aradhana crouched on the concrete steps catching the last warmth of the evening sun. The breakfast dishes were still unwashed and yesterday's laundry was still soaking in buckets.

Rani, who works in Burans, our community mental health project, met Aradhana's eldest daughter at a community corner meeting. Rani, who is also Nepali as chance would have it, was requested to come and meet her Mum. So Rani started going to sit with Aradhana and listen to her stories,

thoughts and feelings once or twice a week. It doesn't sound like much. Maybe it even sounds a little lame as a response, given the poverty and misery Aradhana was living in.

*“बैठते है और सुनने Baithne hai aur sunane”* or “Just sit and listen!” is one of the most simple and most useful concepts I have found for working in community mental health. Recently I've been wondering if it's perhaps more universally applicable. It could be a good mantra for all of us, most days. With my children. With my husband. With my work colleagues. With God.

Unfortunately though, sitting and listening is something that I find particularly difficult. I'm not good at either sitting or listening and I seem to be particularly poor at doing the two of them together. I prefer walking and listening, and even better is walking and talking. Worst of all is the listening bit. When someone talks about a difficult life problem, I can hardly stop myself offering grand solutions and steps to betterment.

Solutions however are scarce for the life situation of Aradhana, who has few formal skills or material resources. In our community mental health work most of our clients live daily with poverty and unemployment as well as their mental distress. We've realised we don't have the resources or capacity to make things right. Some days it is

overwhelming. However, showing up and sitting with someone on a regular basis surprisingly is enough to help that person feel like getting up and onto their feet again.

After three weeks of Rani swinging by to listen and sit, Aradhana slowly seemed to feel more energy and hope. Her long black hair was plaited by 9am in the morning. Before lunch there were clothes on the line and chillies drying in the sun. Aradhana explained to me: “It seems no point to just worry. If we don't have food to eat one or two meals a week, we are still fine the next morning. I think of things I can be thankful for and I try not to spend time thinking about things I cannot change. And even without going to a doctor and medicines, I got myself better!”

The benefits of stoicism are another topic for another day. But when we see how well Aradhana and many others have become with just regular, gentle listening, increasingly I reflect that we don't need to rush to doctors and antidepressants. Meantime, for myself, I guess there's nothing for it but just to get myself going and sit. And listen. ■



**Kaaren Mathias** lives in north India and works in community mental health in Uttarakhand state and for the NGO, Emmanuel Hospital Association.



May the Spirit  
rise like a geyser  
of living joy  
in us.

*From the Tui Motu team*