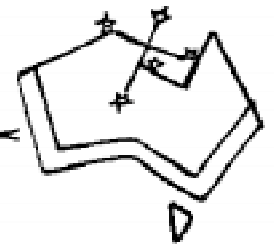


WATAAC NEWS



JUNE 2006

VOL: 17 NO: 3

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SOME OF THE VALIANT WOMEN WHO COMMENCED WATAAC

In the early 1980's these four women came together to talk about the role of women in the Australian Catholic Church and how the voice of women could be enabled in the Church and Society.

PAULINE SMITH - Parramatta Sister of Mercy then working for CLRI.

PAT BARTLEY - Sister of St. Joseph, Sydney

CAMILLE PAUL - Was teaching Theology at St. Patrick's Seminary, Manly, married with a family

MARY RONAYNE - Sister of Good Samaritan in Sydney working for ACLRI now in Melbourne.

They all sent greetings to the WATAAC Twenty Years Celebration at NSW Parliament House.



Greetings to all as you gather to celebrate 20 years of WATAAC!
In reflecting on this occasion I found myself recalling words of Archbishop Polding about our congregation just 13 years after he initiated it:

"The little plant has become a noble tree...this, as ever, there is a loud, loud call for thankfulness...the Lord has done great things for us: we are made very joyful."

The current celebratory occasion gives us cause to rejoice and give thanks for the courage and fidelity of so many women who have nurtured the little WATAAC plant over these 20 years.

Their efforts have, I am sure, nurtured God's gifts of faith, hope and love in the hearts and minds of countless people, and have contributed to a change in the understanding of the role of women in their participation in the Australian Church and society.

With loving thoughts and wishes and many blessings as WATAAC continues to bear fruit.

Mary Ronayne sgs.

I guess more than the actual matter we were dealing with at our meetings, I recall everybody's enthusiasm and good relationships. We were full of hope of good things to come and didn't mind what hard work was entailed. I kept a file of those days for many years but finally had a "tidy up" and out went the file.

Pat Bartley rsj





First of all, apologies for my absence at today's special luncheon at Parliament House, but I am at Kalbarri National Park in WA for the next couple of days. However I will be thinking of you and remembering all that has happened over the past 20+ years.

I feel extremely privileged to have been involved with the setting up of WATAC and watching its ongoing development and growth.

Most of all I feel just so blessed to have come in contact with so many wonderful, enthusiastic, creative and just beautiful women over those years. There are too many such women to name each and everyone, but I can't not give special praise to Bernice who is

the embodiment of all those characteristics I have just mentioned.

Again – have a wonderful day and I will raise a glass to all of you at lunchtime on the other side of the Continent. So love to all

Camille Paul.



I am grateful for the many marvelous opportunities afforded me over the years, including my involvement in establishing WATAC. Studies in canon law and theology, as well as attendance at the Second Women's Ordination Conference in Baltimore and the U.N. assembly in Nairobi in 1987, left me in no doubt that women's situation could be improved. In the beginning, we tried; to educate and persuade the grass roots within the Church; to push for women taking up positions already available to the laity; to persist and persevere in our efforts. May this movement continue to flourish!

Pauline Smith rsm

Celebrating Twenty Years of WATAC

On Tuesday, 16th May we gathered at NSW Parliament House for a joyful celebration of WATAC's birthday. Historically WATAC was born a little more than twenty years ago but one of our very first small groups held their first meeting in 1986, so this seemed to be a significant anniversary worthy of celebration.

There were over 160 guests at the Luncheon, including some Yr 11 and 12 students. These young women contributed much to the joy of the gathering and many of them have written enthusiastically of this their first encounter with WATAC.

Marie Andrews, member for Peats, is our Parliamentary host and, though she wasn't able to be present on the day, she arranged for Kayee Griffin to attend. WATAC is very grateful to them both. As usual, Maureen Watterson and Margaret Keyes, were very efficiently organizing behind the scenes, while Anne Lane chaired the event and kept the luncheon programme on track. We were sorry that Elsie Heiss was ill and unable to be present to formally welcome us to land. Pam Williamson prayed a very meaningful blessing over our meal which was as usual most enjoyable. There is nothing quite so lovely as having a meal in the Parliament House Dining Room, overlooking the Domain on a beautiful sunny day in May.

Because it was such a special event we had decided to invite three WATAC women to present a combined WATAC voice on Women's Experience of Church: Maree Kennedy, Therese Vassarotti and Judy Berlak. Sadly, Judy was unable to be present on the day but happily, Therese had brought along with her, one of the young women who had just completed the Inter-faith Course at Australian Catholic University, Chantelle Ogilvie, and she was

delighted to speak to us of her recent experience of Church.

Each speaker presented a different aspect of "being Church" in today's society. They

spoke with truth, passion and sincerity, and together they shared a vision of possibility and challenge for the future of our Church. Their commitment to their family, to ministry, to justice and to the Gospel was inspiring and energizing. Each has been enabled by the presence of WATAC in their life and by the development of CACW in our Church and WATAC has been

enabled by their presence in its membership and by that of the many women who came to the Luncheon to celebrate women and to support each other to continue the journey with hope and enthusiasm.

As usual, the Luncheon fun included raffle prizes and lucky door gifts.

The beautiful hand worked quilt which was first prize was donated and created by Christine Hingerty and WATAC is deeply grateful to her for that priceless gift. Our young women guests, who helped with the organization of tickets, also managed to win several of the prizes this year, which added to the fun of the occasion.



THANK YOU, WATAC –

One teacher said: *Thank you for giving us the opportunity to attend the luncheon. The girls and I had a lovely time. The food was excellent and the venue was lovely. We particularly enjoyed the talks. The girls were very inspired by Chantelle and we talked extensively about her. I think they related to her because she is young and her course involved inter-faith dialogue which is something they have learnt about in the Studies of Religion Course.*



I think our girls would be interested as long as there are other young people involved. They appreciated all the work that was done in WATAC's history by those extraordinary women, but I think we need to convince young people that WATAC will only continue if the chain of women is continued. I would appreciate you keeping me informed of events etc. as I personally was very moved by the comradeship and strength of the members of WATAC.



Once again, thank you for the opportunity to begin what I hope will be a lovely and rewarding relationship with WATAC.

A student wrote: I found the WATAC lunch a really interesting day. It is great to hear something different and new perspectives on topics that, I personally haven't been able to discuss with many other people. I would definitely be interested in attending other WATAC events, I found the experience refreshing and very thought-provoking. Thank you for the opportunity to attend the lunch.

Other students said: I had a great time at the WATAC lunch. It was an extremely eye opening experience. I'd never seriously considered the role women play in our church before, and it definitely got me thinking. Being a lector myself, the thought of not being allowed to read for using inclusive language really struck me – I'd never really thought about it before, but am now considering asking our parish priest what he thinks about maybe using "the new revised standard edition" versions of the readings, which do have inclusive language.

It was also nice to be surrounded by so many women, clearly united in friendship and faith – it was very affirming and reassuring!

I do think that senior students would be interested in learning more about what role women do play in the church, because I think a lot of us tend to assume that it's fairly equal and leave it at that.



I thought that the lunch was very good as an introduction into WATAC. It served as an informal yet informative luncheon which I thoroughly enjoyed. The best part of the lunch was definitely the guest speakers as they provoked thought. I also enjoyed the amusing jokes about the Irish priests as they served for some comic relief after some very serious speeches! I would definitely be interested in attending another similar luncheon.



Thanks for the great, inspirational day out at Parliament House. Whilst attending the wonderful lunch I was able to think in ways that I would not normally have thought about. I now see the ways in which women can change the world which I once saw as normal, to a world which I realize is "man dominated". I now ask myself, why can't God be female? Why should everything revolve around the idea that men are more important or powerful than women?

I have discussed the issues that the speakers told me to my friends, and they now have different opinions and are able to see the world in different views. My friends are now interested in what WATAC women have to say.



WATAC is very grateful to Patricia Horsley for her financial support through her original gift of Miriam, the cow, whose offspring keep generating on-going funds for WATAC. Thank you Patricia! And thank you Miriam!

A Near Perfect Meeting at Broken Bay

Since our last report there has been such a lot happening: the Ecumenical Dinner; Lunch at Parliament House (a great atmosphere as always and chance to meet up with so many friends); the Annual General Meeting and inspiring talk by Gemma Cruz; a theatre outing to see *Doubt*; and then our own group meeting on Sunday 10 June. Not everyone attended all events but there is no excuse for any WATAC member to say that life is boring!!

Our meeting on 10 June is best summed up by a card from Maree Lyndon:

I think we could call yesterday's meeting near-perfect! It was such a good environment for disclosures, sharing and support and we covered the business end of things very well, concluding with increased awareness and knowledge. What could have been better?



I think Maree sums up so well what WATAC groups have achieved over many years in terms of friendship and trust between women who might otherwise never have met. And these are priceless gifts.



Those of us who had seen *Doubt* the day before had a lot to share and discuss, although of course the play left us with no answers, and plenty of doubt – but isn't that life! We were curious as to why the Mother Superior disclosed that she had once been married and her husband died. It seemed irrelevant and certainly hadn't made her a more humane person!

Mindful of Bernice's rare absence from our meeting, we did attend to WATAC business, starting with a ritual based on the Creed which the Pope said on his visit to Alice Springs in 1986 (just after WATAC groups commenced). Then we looked at the chapter on "Vision" from Joan Chittister's book *The Heart of the Temple*. We used a summary of this chapter which I had prepared for *ARCVoice* – the newsletter of Australian Reforming Catholics for which I am the editor. If any other groups would like to have a copy of this summary, please let me know. knowlden1@bigpond.com We continuously marvelled at

Joan's ability to express our shared concerns so well.

Our next meeting is on Sunday 23 July. Visitors are most welcome.

Margaret Knowlden



Thank You Maureen!

Maureen Short has for many years been a WATAC member. Whenever we have an occasion to celebrate, be it a Luncheon, a Conference or whatever event, WATAC organizes Maureen can be counted upon to be there with her trusty camera. All the photos in this Newsletter are the result of Maureen's expertise. WATAC can only say a very sincere Thank You.

Contact No: 02.9416.7058

WATAC Annual General Meeting

The A.G.M. commenced at 2.15 p.m. on Saturday, 3rd June at St. Scholastica's, Glebe. There were about thirty members present. We started our gathering with a reflection from Joan Chittister on "Vision" which talked of the task of holding onto our Roots while finding our Wings. Following this we took time out to celebrate Anna Flynn who was essential to the beginning of WATAC small group meetings in NSW, some twenty years ago. There was a cake with candles to mark the occasion.

Marian McClelland, Leader of Blessed Sacrament Sisters, was also present and WATAC presented her with a beautiful pot plant in remembrance of the life of Maureen Flood who has given so much to all of us in WATAC over the years.

Pam Williamson led us in the next session of the A.G.M. where we looked at a summary of your responses to the WATAC Survey. (You can read this summary on the pages following). This information generated much discussion and Pam invited us to break into small groups to look at it in light of the tasks of WATAC as nominated on our brochure. We then came together to share our responses.

These are some of the key issues emerging from the WATAC Survey which we all need to think on and eventually make decisions about.

To summarize some of these:

- The large majority of WATAC membership is older, in the 60-80 yrs bracket, which has real implications for our future
- There is a gap between the vision of WATAC membership and the energy needed to sustain that vision
- Some thirty-five members indicated they do have energy to carry WATAC forward, to vitalize its activities and its future. How to identify and enable that energy is the immediate question
- A number of WATAC-ers feel the institutional Church indicates no intention of becoming more inclusive in spite of whatever WATAC does, they ask is it worth it?
- Has WATAC done what is possible in the last twenty years and is it now time to celebrate that achievement and let go?
- Many WATAC-ers want what is happening to continue to happen because "WATAC is Church" - How does WATAC keep this happening?

The task is big because of the implications of the Survey information and the diverse possibilities in terms of response. The limit of time available at the A.G.M. determined that we move on and name the new WATAC Inc. Committee and hand them the on-going task of analysing what actions should grow from the Survey data. However, WATAC is all of us, so it will be very important for your insights to be shared with the Committee over the next few months.

The most significant and lasting achievement of the WATAC Annual General Meeting was the naming of the new Working Committee who will carry forward the WATAC tasks this year. The people who courageously put up their hands to do the job are: Jan Barnett sjs, Janet Cain, Kaye Hodge, Maree Kennedy, Margaret Keyes, Margaret Knowlden, Joan Pavitt and Pam Williamson.

It was decided that the Committee will set-up an Extraordinary General Meeting in September or October and submit to the WATAC membership their reflections and analysis of where WATAC is at this stage of its life and what action could/should be taken.



Dr. Gemme Cruz - Guest Speaker at A.G.M.

It was a great gift to have Dr Gemma Cruz to speak at the WATAC Annual General Meeting. Gemma, whose home is in the Phillipines has recently obtained her doctorate in Feminist Theology in the Netherlands, and she was in Australia for a very short time before taking up a teaching position in U.S.A.

Gemma named herself a citizen of the world because of her global experiences in these last few years. The focus of Gemma's inspiring talk was the implications of living in a world without borders or boundaries, in which every one belongs equally. Her presentation was both inspiring and challenging, she spoke convincingly of a God of Strangers, and we are all strangers who belong to this God.

A very quotable quote Gemma used was: Q.: How do you spell ignorance? A.: Prejudice

WATAC and Ecumenism

It was a wonderful night, the food was great, the company wonderful and at 10 pm there was a feeling that it had all ended too soon. I'm writing about the Dinner at Canterbury Convention Centre organized by the NSW Ecumenical Council on Thursday night, 27th April, 2006. As has been the reality over the last four years, WATAC was part of this ecumenical celebration that night. The 2006 dinner was a very significant one because its 5 guest speakers had all been participants in the World Council of Churches Conference in February 2006 in Porto Alegre, in Brazil.

Five speakers at a dinner sounds like too many, and I must admit to thinking exactly that. However, I was definitely wrong! The speakers contributed their insights from quite distinct perspectives which helped me build up an overall picture of world ecumenism as it had happened in Porto Alegre at the World Council of Churches Conference.

I share these quotes from the evening presented hoping you and your groups will reflect on them and so that together we will grow in our support of the change needed to give ecumenism on-going life:

- *“The best ecumenism happens around a table when we share food, laughter, friendship and our care for each other. Don't give up on ecumenism.”*
- *“It's not careful words written on a page or high-level meetings that have made the ecumenical movement bring about change, it's what happens at the grass-roots that matters.”*
- *“Strangely, we don't find it difficult to pray together, even though we come from very different traditions, but we still can't worship together – what does that say about worship? And what is it saying about ecumenism today?”*
- *“The local indigenous people were not present or part of the World Council of Churches meeting. We had to go out to the market place to engage with them. We were there from our Churches but they weren't.”*
- *“The young women were hardly part of this gathering of the World Council of Churches. I was there but they weren't.”*

While we keep getting more and more involved ecumenically: NSW Ecumenical Council WISE women; NCCA Gender Commission; WATAC – can we make a difference? What does the Gospel call us to in 2006? If tomorrow depends on today, what does today ask of us ecumenically?

Bernice Moore

Women of Hope and Courage in Ballarat

The energy, enthusiasm and commitment of the women of Ballarat had to be experienced to be believed. What a great day we had on Saturday, 27th May! It was cold outside, but the fire of hope and passion was well alive and contagious inside, when those thirty women and men came together to pray, reflect and discuss.

Dr Gemma Cruz (from the Phillipines) and Bernice Moore were welcomed to Ballarat by Kath Morton who shared her home and welcome with us on Friday night. On Saturday morning we gathered to explore why we would “Dare to Hope as Women in the Church Today.”

What a fantastic day it was. We explored the challenges of the documents of Vatican II, and the tensions those challenges presented and we, “the Church”, are living with. We named our concerns, our hopes, our commitment to action both individual and group and our vision of a future Church. At the end of the day, we ran out of time but, amazingly, we had a sense of “possibility” and “hope”. It was as gift of grace to be part of this day – there is no doubt that “WE ARE THE CHURCH” as Vatican II proclaimed and the future is ours, and we will be energized by the “passion of possibility”.

Adelaide Women: Hoping Together



On Saturday, 10th June there was a wonderful gathering of 28 women and two men at the Effective Living Centre at Wavell, in Adelaide to consider the ecumenical dimensions of hoping about a future inclusive church where difference doesn't matter. These are words easier to write on paper than to discuss or to live with. However, on this Saturday, we planned to explore then reflect on them and make decisions about how they would influence a future Church that included all of us.

Geraldine Hawkes, Chair of the CACW, and her S.A. ecumenical committee organized this day amazingly well. Bernice and Alicia Sempendorfer, of the Lutheran Church, and Chair of the Gender Commission, presented the programme; “*The Audacity to Hope – Women Dreaming Together of a Future Church.*” The venue was excellent and there was a sense of possibility and hope in the group. It was a truly ecumenical group made up of Quakers, Uniting Church members, Anglican, Catholic

and Lutheran. There was a Canadian woman, ordained in the Uniting Church, who has chosen to minister in Australia and she had brought with her to the Seminar six members of her vibrant community.

What a great day it was! At the conclusion, after we had named our hopes and concerns, there was a general sense that this experience should be repeated in other centers in South Australia. This is, indeed, our hope and commitment.

Joan Chittister in Australia in 2007

It's really true! Joan Chittister is coming to Sydney in July 2007 and she will speak at the WATAC Conference on Friday evening 20th July and on Saturday 21st July. So put that weekend in your diary now. Further details will be available in the next WATAC Newsletter.

God is Love and What is Sin?

The June WATAC Day for Milton-Ulladulla was a most wonderful thought-provoking gathering. Monica Watts had put in much preparation on the topic entitled “What Is Sin?”

A daunting subject to cover on a sunny Sunday morning! Monica spoke about our earliest understanding of sin being when we were children beginning preparation for our first confession. Our first concept of sin was simply breaking the rules set by church, parents, society.

Monica quoted Louis Monden, a Belgian Jesuit, who speaks about three levels of human guilt; Instinct, offence against self, and saying No to God’s call for us to witness to God’s loving presence in our lives and the world. We then explored John Shea’s account of post Vatican II understanding of sin.

Finally we read through some quotes from Diarmuid O’Murchu’s “Quantum Theology - Sins of Our Time”. Diarmuid reinforces another concept of sin. He states:

“morality is systemic in nature and can never be reduced to personal behaviour or interpersonal relationships. In many cases people behave sinfully because of cultural influences, institutional oppression and systemic exploitations.”



There was much discussion and sharing by all those who attended and I have to say that what I thought would be a dry and heavy subject ended up being a morning of much deep thinking!

We broke for lunch, a choice of two beautiful soups and all the trimmings, followed by hot apple pie and bread & butter pudding (one never starves on a WATAC Day) after which Bernice delighted us with the subject: *God is Love*. Bernice illustrated the subject by bringing along her favourite impressionist

paintings as well as a china plate painted by her mother, Nell, as an example of the beauty of God’s Creation through human endeavour. She included other examples of nature such as shells, autumn leaves and flowers.

We read through three extracts from John Shelby Spong’s “The Sins of Scripture.” Spong writes:

“In the kingdom of God for which our world years, every person will have a better opportunity to live fully and thus to worship the God who is the Source of Life; every person will be freed to love wastefully and thus to worship the God who is the Source of Love; and every person will have a better chance to be all that each person can be in the infinite variety of our humanity - every race, ethnic group, gender, sexual orientation - for that is what it means to worship the God who is the Ground of All Being.”

We then listened to Anthony Warlow singing “Love Changes Everything” and then shared some of our personal experiences of love in every day life. We then substituted “God Changes Everything” and reflected on the new meaning of the words.

Bernice’s subject was a fitting end to the day. I felt like I’d been to reconciliation and Eucharist all in one. We finished with the beautiful Reflection used at the AGM which came from Joan Chittister’s *In The Heart of the Temple*.

Our thanks go to Kath Prendergast for her hospitality and good food, Monica Watts for a great subject and of course to Bernice for her input and again making the pilgrimage down the south coast to be with us all. Our next meeting will be on Saturday 5th August when Margaret Day and Kath Prendergast will talk on the subject of Eucharist.

Anna Flynn

Celtic Spirituality – Connectedness and Relatedness— WATAC WOLLONGONG

At our April gathering we discussed Celtic Spirituality. Elizabeth had prepared some information for us on this topic. We learnt that in the Celtic way, time, space and the earth and life itself were intrinsically sacred. The Celts had a holistic world view which implies no division between flesh and spirit, no inferiority between the sexes and no feeling that because



they own the world they can use it as they like. After some discussion and questions on how as WATAC women we could reflect this spirituality in our own lives we concluded the afternoon with a cup of tea and a liturgy with some Celtic music and prayer.

Four members of our group attended the annual lunch at Parliament House on 16 May. As always it was a joyful occasion, enjoying the company of the wider group of WATAC women and listening to the inspiring talks by Maree Kennedy, Therese Vassarotti and Chantelle Ogilvie.

At our May gathering the focus of the day was Hildegard of Bingen. Our central table was set with a mandala picture, sheet music, fresh herbs and a vase of greenery, in honour of her wide range of achievements.

We listened to her music, read about her life, and looked at some of her mandalas and writings and prayers. We were all in awe of her wisdom and the beauty of her work, which covered the areas of theology and philosophy, cosmology, natural science and medicine, music and art.

She believed that all people should accept co-creative responsibility with God for the care of the earth.

Hildegard wrote: *‘God has arranged all things in the world in consideration of everything else’... ‘O Holy Spirit, you are the mighty way in which everything that is in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, is penetrated with connectedness, penetrated with relatedness’*

After a cup of tea we concluded the afternoon with a liturgy using Hildegard’s music and prayers.

Jan Ryan

The Dance Goes On at Wagga

Our Wagga Group continues to meet every 1st Monday of the month. We continue to use *And The Dance Goes On...* At one of our recent meetings people were asked to bring along a favourite poem to share and say why it was important. The listening and sharing created lots of wonderful energy as did the story chosen from “*And the Dance Goes On.*”

Mary Crimmins and Pat Sheridan are two of our women who have been on the Women’s Commission and tell us what is happening for women in our diocese which gives us heart. I often think of our group as a little oasis in the midst of what at times is dry and arid as far as Church goes. We have lots of laughter and fun and encourage one another in each of our journeys. **Ros Bennett**

Creating a song and dance: the prophetic role of women religious in the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand today

Elizabeth Julian

RSM

The following article is a small extract from a fairly lengthy, very well-researched and excellent paper written by Elizabeth Julian, a Mercy Sister. She presented it to the New Zealand Catholic Bishops at their recent Conference. If it interests you, and you would like to read the whole paper

just contact me 02.9534.8527

Exploring the institutional problem.

I believe that the situation of Catholic women in Aotearoa New Zealand has a particular urgency about it. This urgency is caused by the stark contrast between our social reality and our ecclesial experience. Nowhere else in the world is the difference so great and so painful. Nowhere else in the world do women like me require such courage to remain within the Church. I remain, however, because through my baptism I have been called into the Church, not out of it. My prophetic vocation as a religious locates me firmly within the Church - this Church in which at my baptism I was anointed to be priest, prophet and king in the same way as everyone else in this room, female and male. I became a new creation, baptised into Christ. It is from this Church that I will one day be buried in a liturgy that like the baptismal one will affirm that I am as equally in Christ as Benedict XVI.

I believe that as women religious in this country we are in a unique situation. We have had the right to vote longer than women religious anywhere else in the world. We therefore have a serious responsibility to help transform our experience of political equality into an experience of ecclesial equality. Our historical and passionate conviction that as women we can have a voice, that we can make a difference and that we can bring about radical change should give us the courage to call for structural change within the Church. Our foremothers paved the way politically; we can do no less than walk in their footsteps ecclesially. For the sake of the reign of God, for the sake of the Gospel, for the sake of the Church we love but which is becoming increasingly irrelevant, we must and we can bring about a shift in the institutional imagination. The problem that the Church has with women who demand justice and expect their baptism to be taken seriously, will never go away. It won't be 'gone by lunchtime'!

I think it is highly significant that the bishops here today are the ones with the most experience, among all the bishops of the world, of living in a political, social, and economic environment where women feature so prominently. You as bishops regularly experience what would be extremely rare for the majority of your brother. bishops. You have opportunities to relate to women in ways you never have in regard to women in the Church, who are always second-class citizens, who are always out of the loop, who can never sit in equal partnership at the table. Because you have this rich lived experience of what the equality of women means in practice, and moreover, because you have been able to survive in this environment, I suggest that you have an enormously valuable contribution to make to the dismantling of the sinful, discriminatory structures and practices which prevent women's full participation in the Church. You demonstrated at last year's Synod that you are prepared to take uncomfortable positions in support of the oppressed, i.e., the divorced and remarried. I am urging you to do so again in support of the full recognition of women's baptism. As I understand it, the Church teaches today what it hasn't always taught, namely that women are fully and equally made in the image of God. It still has problems with whether or not women can image Christ (Johnson, 2002 p.,57).., As I see it, this is where the shift in the institutional imagination has to come. When it does I will no longer have cause to be scandalised. At the moment, however, I am deeply scandalised. These are the reasons why:

1. While the Church has addressed and continues to address the first two areas of division named by Paul (Gal: 3:28), i.e., that between slave and free person and between Jew and Gentile, it still refuses to address the issue of sexism in the Church.
2. While the Church is called to preach a Gospel of divinely-willed equality, liberation and justice ."Ice in society, it maintains structures which guarantee women's inequality.
3. While the Church is unable to find any mandate in Scripture for its claim that God willed that women be denied full access to the sacraments, it claims it has not yet received from God any power to change this, man-made teaching!
4. While the Church rightly insists that because women are human, women have full and equal human rights and responsibilities - politically, economically, socially, culturally, and ecclesially - it always insists upon 'a proper or special nature' which prevents women from realising these rights.
5. While women's rights are always circumscribed by their 'special nature', men's rights are never circumscribed by their nature.
6. While our local bishops do ensure that their own documents are inclusive, they continue to allow into the country Vatican documents in exclusive language.
7. While the Church can be loud in its call to other institutions to treat women as full human beings, it refuses to do this internally.
8. While the Church teaches authoritatively that baptism is more fundamental than holy orders, and that the mission of the Church belongs to all of us, years of clericalism marginalise and exclude women.
9. While God is neither male nor female, we are forced to pray in public to a God imaged overwhelmingly and almost idolatrously as male.
10. While women have access to six sacraments in an essentially sacramental Church they are necessary for only one - marriage!
11. While God's merciful forgiveness is freely available sacramentally, it can be mediated only through a male cleric.
12. While the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity, many women experience it as sacramental exclusion.
13. While Jesus' table fellowship was essentially and utterly inclusive, institutional arrogance sees access to the Eucharist as a reward for 'good' behaviour rather than as food for the hungry.
14. While the importance of Eucharist as source and summit of our lives is stressed, the Church's one-dimensional imagination allows people to be starved of Eucharist, rather than admit that God's eucharistic presence and grace cannot be so confined. 15. While women, precisely as women and not in spite of being women, are able to do what Christ did: bleed, feed, and give life to others, male clerics have to institutionalise ways to do this.
16. While God freely chose to take up a home in the body of a woman and Jesus put his earthly existence into women's hands and allowed a woman to anoint him, the body of the resurrected Christ has somehow ended up exclusively in the hands of men.

17. While Mary is the only human being who could really say of Jesus, 'This is my body, this is my blood', the Church decrees that only males can do this.

18. While real women who really menstruate are mocked and abused by the Church, the Bishops recently complained about a TV cartoon programme depicting a statue of Mary menstruating. Experiencing some of the powerlessness women can readily identify with, the Bishops noted that many people are tired of complaints through official channels being ignored!

19. While women and men can equally image Christ through martyrdom, and women and men can re-present Christ's own love in Christian marriage, half of humanity is deemed incapable of imaging Christ in the Eucharist.

20. While the Church can affirm that a humble piece of bread represents Christ and actually becomes the Body of Christ, it cannot imagine how a woman priest could be a valid re-presentation of Christ.

21. While the Gospel teaches that the image of Christ resides most clearly in the poor and the suffering, both women and men (most clearly in today's Gospel Matt 25:31-46), the Church continues to be fixated on sexual similarity to the human male Jesus when it comes to imaging Christ as presider at Eucharist.

Theologian Elizabeth Johnson expresses this paradox particularly well (2002, p. 57):

The ambiguity of recent vintage regarding women's capacity to be images of Christ is truly unfortunate, for it has no basis in doctrine and in fact contradicts the central teaching of the church. Created women, baptised women, martyred women, sinful and redeemed women, holy women of all varieties: all are genuinely *imago Dei*, *imago Christi*. Anything less distorts God's good creation and short changes the theological truth of women's identity in Christ.

So having named some of the abusive **structures and practices what can we do about them?** What resources do we have to help us as women religious in our prophetic role of changing the institutional imagination? I turn now to Scripture, to the story of the prophet Miriam, the woman who created a song and dance. Following that I will look to the landscape for inspiration.

Resources for the journey

1. Scripture

It was the biblical prophets who engaged in extravagant, wild imaginings: the lion and lamb would lie down together, swords would be beaten into ploughshares, dry bones would come to life. They dared to imagine the impossible. They dared to see more than one right answer. In speaking of the relevance of prophetic texts today, Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann (2001, p. xii) states: They are to be seen as materials that might fund the would-be prophetic voice, to give wisdom and courage, but which then invite immense imagination to know how to move from such texts to actual circumstance ... Thus my accent on imagination has turned out to be exactly correct, for what is now required is that a relatively powerless prophetic voice must find imaginative ways that are rooted in the text but that freely and daringly move from the text toward concrete circumstance.

While there are several women prophets named in the Old Testament: Miriam, Deborah, the wife of Isaiah, Huldah and Noadiah, we rarely hear their voices. For the purposes of this address I will consider the prophet Miriam - who speaks only once to explore Brueggemann's suggestion of finding 'imaginative ways that are rooted in the text but that freely and daringly move from the text toward concrete circumstance'.

He speaks of prophets being naturally in sub-communities that stand in tension with the dominant community. Perhaps women religious in this country could be identified here as sub-communities. Brueggemann claims that such a sub-community is likely to be one in which:

- there is a long and available memory that sinks the present generation deep into an identifiable past that is available in song and story;. .
- there is an available, expressed sense of pain that is owned and recited as a real social fact, that is visibly acknowledged in a public way, and that is understood as unbearable for the long term; -
- there is an active practice of hope, a community that knows about promises yet to be kept promises that stand in judgment on the present, .
- there is an effective mode of discourse that is cherished across the generations, that is taken as distinctive, and that is richly coded in ways that only insiders can know.

In addition this sub-community has committed itself for the long haul to be in tension with the dominant community. The latter responds to the sub-community 'at best as an inconvenience, at worst as an unbearable interruption'. Are we viewed by the institutional Church as, 'at best an inconvenience, at worst an unbearable interruption'? If so what hope can Miriam offer us?

Miriam

Who is this woman? How can she help us to change the institutional imagination? While there are many imaginative possibilities that leap from the text I would like to focus on Miriam as the prophet who:

Took the initiative to bring life when death seemed the only option

Created a song and dance beyond clerical control

Asked the hard question despite the cost.

When we first meet Miriam (Exod 2:1-10) don't know her name
Moses' sister who stood by to watch as her mother put him in a papyrus basket and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the Nile. Miriam's existence comes as a surprise as the account of his birth (Exod 2.1) leads us to assume that he is the first in his family. We learn her name later on (Exod 6:20; Num 26: 59; 1 Chron 5:29), and that she, Moses and Aaron are the children of Amram and Jochebed. Despite being initially nameless in the text, despite her standing 'at a distance', despite no announcement of her birth, she is nevertheless a key player in the deliverance of Moses. Thus, while Miriam's standing on the banks of the river to watch may seem passive, it was anything but! As Old Testament scholar Irene Nowell (1997, p.51) points out, Miriam liaised between Pharaoh's daughter and her own mother, thereby connecting two women - one Israelite, one Egyptian, one a commoner, the other royal, one a slave, the other free, one poor, the other rich, one silent, the other speaking, one letting go, the other finding. By initiating this connection Miriam, restored Moses to his mother. Thus Miriam - able to imagine an alternative answer took the initiative to bring life when death seemed the only option.....

The following is a summary of your answers to the WATAC Survey and a very brief Overview. There will be a complete document available about mid-July on our website: www.watac.net but until then you will have this summary of the statistical information to ponder on. Thank you for taking the time to answer the Survey and now to think about the outcomes.

WATAC's past and future

Surveys and responses

Members' survey

456 surveys were sent out. 344 were returned (75%). The collated responses here represent the 344 who returned surveys. Some people returned surveys when they received them, others returned completed surveys after one or two reminders.

The collated responses are show in **percentages**.

106 members had not completed surveys after the second reminder and were sent third reminders and a survey with 2 questions on it. Of the 106, 44 replied.

Overview

Many members say that WATAC has been very important in their lives. Many also note they are at a different point in their lives with different needs than when they joined WATAC.

Most members think that WATAC should be re-focussed and re-vitalised (64%) or go through generational change (21%)

There are significantly different views and levels of energy within WATAC for example, for those who returned surveys:

- 122 members (35 %) get the newsletter and say its *useful* (but don't say *very useful*) and they are not in groups nor are they wanting to go to future-conferences.

- 157 members (46%) find the newsletter very useful and/or participate in groups and want to continue and/or participate in and find conferences useful and will come to the next conference.

- Within the two groups above 35 people (out of 279) have some or lots of energy to put into the future – primarily for re-focussing and re-vitalisation (not generational change). Most of these 35 members find the groups, conferences and newsletter useful as they are.

The remaining 240 people in the two groups above have little or no energy for change.

65 members (19%) do not find the newsletter useful or very useful and do not want to attend groups and do not want to go to future conferences. This 19% offers more critical feedback than the group above and 37% of them see the current challenge as one of **letting go** of WATAC not re-vitalising it.

WATAC NEWS

If Undeliverable return to
Women and the Australian Church (WATAC)
9 Casey Close, Kurri Kurri 2327



WATAC MEMBERSHIP FORM 2006

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____ SUBURB: _____ P/CODE _____

PHONE[H]: _____ [W]: _____ FAX: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

BASIC MEMBERSHIP \$50 GROUP MEMBERSHIP \$150

Please debit my credit card for \$..... at the beginning of January each year.

SELF RELIANCE MEMBERSHIP \$75 \$100 \$150

Please make cheques payable to WATAC Inc. If using Credit Card please complete the following details.

Bankcard Mastercard Visa AMOUNT: \$

Card Number: ____/____/____/____ **EXPIRY DATE:** ____/____

Cardholder's Name: _____ Cardholder's Signature: _____

[Please print]

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM WITH PAYMENT TO : The Secretary WATAC Inc 9 Casey Close, Kurri Kurri 2327

Ph: 02.4937.2019 Fax: 02.4936.1109 Email: watac@watac.net

I would like to continue to receive WATAC News but am not able to contribute at present.