

WATAC NEWS



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Welcome to the second WATAC Newsletter for 2007.

Already many groups have gathered, some a few times and therefore WATAC journey continues.

On 14th March at Sydney Parliament House, WATAC again chaired the Women's interfaith forum for Year 11 & 12 students doing the Studies of Religion subject. Another full house heard women from the Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Baha'i and Christian traditions share their personal story of what it is like to be a woman of their particular faith tradition.

Jan Barnett very ably chaired the gathering, posing questions to students between speakers. The students then were given time to raise questions or make comments in an open forum. The thought and depth in the students' questions and comments gave us all much hope. A Religious Education Coordinator from one of the schools expressed her thanks to WATAC publicly for organising and providing this opportunity for both students and teachers. She said she would take with her many insights that she had gained from the forum. Thank you to Bernice, Jenny, Jan and all who were involved in the organisation of this event.

We are all very much looking forward to the WATAC Conference on 21st and 22nd July at Canterbury Racecourse. The Conference Committee is very pleased with the number of bookings so far and are looking forward to more in the coming weeks. Sincere gratitude to the wonderful volunteers on the Conference Committee who have spent, and continue to spend, many hours discerning, discussing, meeting, booking, finalizing, collecting,

printing, phoning, checking etc.....!! We all thank them for their generosity and expertise. To make their jobs that little bit easier, please finalise your booking for the conference as soon as you can.

Special thank-you also to all those who quietly give valuable time and energy to the everyday running of WATAC in a variety of ways, big and small.

Later in the newsletter you will see a gentle reminder to those who may have overlooked their WATAC Subscription payment. Our subscriptions are very important to the survival of WATAC. Thank you for your support in this area.

I have asked Margaret Knowlden to share a little about her involvement with Australian Reforming Catholics (ARC) in this newsletter. As I see it, ARC have very much in common with WATAC in their mission. Their website is well worth a look for those who may be interested.

A number of interesting articles from a variety of sources involving the role of women in the church and in society have arisen since our last newsletter. In this edition of WATAC News, we look at a few of these and invite your response to any of the issues raised. I would also like to invite members to contribute to the Newsletter. This may take the form of a short personal experience, a poem, an article, a question for us all to ponder.....Please email any responses to **my new email address:**

mareekballet@bigpond.com.au.

I look forward to publishing some responses/contributions in our next issue with your permission.

Maree Kennedy

Women At Cross-Purposes With Church

Sydney Morning Herald March 24, 2007

'Men Only' As Acolytes, Says Liturgy Director

The Catholic Weekly 1 April, 2007

On Sunday 25th March I attended the 9am Mass at St. Declans parish at Penshurst in Sydney. The reason for this pilgrimage was to witness the commissioning of a female acolyte, Lynne Taylor by Father John Crothers, Parish Priest of Penshurst and Peakhurst.

An article '**Women At Cross-Purposes With Church**' by Linda Morris, the Religious Affairs Writer – had appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald* the day before outlining Father John Crothers' intention to commission Mrs. Taylor as acolyte and to forward any application of a current acolyte, male or female, with his recommendation to the Sydney Archdiocese. Apparently all parishes have recently been asked to forward the names of new candidates to the ministry of acolyte to the Sydney Liturgy Office and women are not to apply. In the article and in a letter to parishioners, Father John expressed his conviction that, "In life there are times when you simply have to stand up for what you know is right".

The commissioning of Lynne Taylor was a very special moment to witness. It was obvious that Lynne is a humble woman who does not deliberately seek notoriety but who, like many others, willingly accepted her baptismal call to lay liturgical ministry.

Lynne processed into the church dressed in the white alb carrying the cross at the beginning of Mass. Father John made no special mention of Lynne except to welcome all ministers of the liturgy and the gathered assembly. It was touching to note Lynne's children as altar servers and another son as organist. Lynne and her family have been members of the St. Declan's parish for 15 years.

When it came time for Lynne's commissioning, she was simply asked to stand and accept the call from the assembly to carry out the ministry of acolyte. The assembly joined Father John in prayer that Lynne would carry out her duties to the best of her ability.

There was no mention of Lynne's gender at any time and, as with the commissioning of any lay ministry at St. Declan's, the assembly responded with applause to offer their support. I was lucky enough to meet both Lynne and Father John after Mass, as well as a number of parishioners who came and offered support to Father John on his stance.

The hospitality and warmth of the people at St Declan's parish is very evident to me as a visitor. I was even invited to attend the parish social justice committee meeting (which I did) after Mass, where I witnessed an amazing group of people working hard to promote many varying social justice indicatives.

After attending this Mass and witnessing Lynne's commissioning, I emailed the Liturgy Office to question why the lay ministry of acolyte is reserved to men only.

Dear Father Deeter,

I was interested to read your reasons for denying women the role of acolyte in last Saturday's Herald newspaper. As a woman, Catholic and post grad theology student at a Catholic university, I feel it necessary to challenge these reasons.

Firstly, "we see the ministry of the altar being close to the ministry of priesthood; and so there is hesitation, so as to not give hope to people who might be advocating the ordination of women".

Paul VI stated that both reader and acolyte are lay ministries rather than minor orders, and can be entrusted to lay people. Is it just for the Sydney archdiocese to exclude on the chance that people might think that this will lead to hope of women's ordination? I'm not aware of any secular body that would be able to get away with this, especially one which claims to promote justice.

Both baptized women and men constitute the laity, and at baptism, all are called to "participation in the one priesthood of Christ" (*Lumen Gentium* 10).

By excluding women from the lay ministry of acolyte, are you suggesting that female baptism is inferior to male baptism, and therefore that women are not full members of the laity?

Six months ago Pope Benedict said that, leaving aside the ordained priesthood, women need to "make their own space" in the church and that the hierarchy shouldn't stand in their way. (*Cath News* 5/3/07)

Secondly, you stated, "I don't think there should be any concerns of the ministry of the church being top-heavy with men. There are women functioning in many ministries in the church today, including readers, ministers of communion, altar servers and other ministries."

With due respect Father, yes, there are women in many roles... the church could not function without them, it also would not function without their attendance because as you are aware, more women attend than men. But again, is this a valid reason for exclusion of women from a specific lay ministry on the basis of their gender?

Thirdly, you assert "The bottom line is it is the job of Cardinal Pell to be faithful to the liturgy of the universal church and to uphold these liturgical laws". Is this just if upholding these "liturgical laws" fails to scrutinize "the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the gospel" (*Gaudium Et Spes* 4) as Vatican II urged us to do?

Last Sunday I traveled to St Declan's at Penshurst to witness the commissioning of Lynne as an acolyte by the parish. There was no emphasis placed on her gender.

She was simply called and commissioned to do all that male acolytes are called and commissioned to do.

Therefore, I am asking you also to specifically outline what it is exactly, about a baptized person's femaleness, that would exclude them from the lay ministry of an acolyte.

Please be aware that this is a significant issue to many women and men within the church. It is not a gender issue but rather a justice issue.

I look forward to your answers to my questions.

Maree Kennedy
WATAC Inc Committee NSW

I received a very long response from Father Tim Deeter – Director of the Sydney Liturgy Office. I include part of it below.

Dear Maree,

Thank you for your thought-provoking message.

It pains me to see that you think that Cardinal Pell and/or I are misinterpreting the legislation and spirit of Vatican II, and that he and/or I are creating our own special rules for Sydney that are not in synch with the practice of the universal Church.

You rightly refer to Pope Paul VI's abolition of the minor orders and the restoration of the lectorate and acolythate as lay ministries. However, you are mistaken in asserting that he opened both of these ministries to women. Neither has been opened to women. In fact, not only is the instituted acolythate restricted to men; so also is the instituted lectorate. However, many (but not all) duties of the permanent lectorate can be delegated to lay men or women as readers, and many (but not all) duties of the permanent acolythate can be delegated to lay men or women as altar servers.

You selectively quote *Lumen Gentium* regarding the priesthood of the laity, but conveniently omit all references in that document and in other Vatican II documents (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, etc.) to the ordained priesthood as a special ministry that is not on a par with lay ministries. Further, by using the argument of the priesthood of the laity to support the notion of female acolytes, you seem to be implying that the ordination of women is a given. Since Pope John Paul II firmly stated that the priesthood is, and will never be, open to women, and since Pope Benedict stated (when he was Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) that Pope John Paul's statement was not his own opinion nor a 'transitional' statement, but an exercise of papal infallibility, any support for the notion of the ordination of women is outside the legitimate expression of Catholic faith.

You may have attended a commissioning ceremony at St Declan's last Sunday, but all that occurred was that the woman became an altar server. Only a bishop can institute an acolyte. And not even a bishop can institute a female acolyte, since it is against the universal law of the Church (not the law of Sydney). Further, since it was Fr Crothers' intention to commission the woman as an acolyte and not an altar server, technically the woman is neither: not an acolyte, since she cannot be one and Fr Crothers is not capable of instituting her as one; and not an altar server, since she didn't intend to become one and Fr Crothers didn't intend to commission her as such.

You are a woman, Catholic, and post-grad theology student at a Catholic university. I am a man, Catholic, and holder of a three post-grad degrees: bachelor of

philosophy, master of theology and doctor of liturgy. Cardinal Pell and Pope Benedict trump you further.

I mention the philosophy degree, because you and many others like yourself would benefit immensely from a thorough study of philosophy before attempting to apply the theology you are learning to the serious matter of ontology in ordination. Yes, we are equal in Baptism; as St Paul says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female". However, more than gender is involved, as St Paul himself knew. He acknowledged and praised various women for their involvement in the life of the early Church, but he himself prescribed what women would do or not do in his communities. Were people free to ignore him then?

Justice is an important virtue, but it is not the only virtue for the Christian to pursue. "Christ became obedient unto death" – that is what we are celebrating in Holy Week, not justice. It was not just that Christ died, and He even offered His Father an alternative solution. But His Father said, "Nope – this is how it's going to be". And Jesus did it. No, it was not just that the Romans killed Jesus. No, it was not just that the Jews betrayed one of their own. No, it was not even just that an innocent Jesus should die for our sins. But apparently God valued obedience over justice.

Justice does not mean equality. They are two different philosophical concepts, and two different realities. Men and women are equal, but they are not the same – they are different, in several ways – and this is what the Church is saying in assigning certain liturgical roles to men only. And this difference exists on other planes as well: I cannot bear a child, and that makes me different from a woman, but I do not in any way consider myself less a person because there is something I cannot do that a woman can do. Of course, there is probably some medical scientist working on that "problem" right now – but just because men may someday be fitted with an artificial womb or whatever (and just because some people have their gender altered surgically and chemically), does not alter the ontological fact that a person is male or female.

I include here the pertinent numbers from Pope Paul VI's 1972 *Ministeria Quaedam* stating that only men can be acolytes or readers, only bishops can accept candidates for these ministries, and only bishops can confer these ministries. If you don't believe that these are true citations, then look up the document yourself:

7. In accordance with the ancient tradition of the Church, institution to the ministries of reader and acolyte is reserved to men.
8. The following are requirements for admission to the ministries:
 - a. the presentation of a petition that has been freely made out and signed by the aspirant to the Ordinary (the bishop and, in clerical institutes, the major superior) who has the right to accept the petition;
 - b. a suitable age and special qualities to be determined by the conference of bishops;
 - c. a firm will to give faithful service to God and the Christian people.
9. The ministries are conferred by the Ordinary (the bishop and, in clerical institutes, the major superior) through the liturgical rite *De institutione lectoris* and *De institutione acolythi* as revised by the Apostolic See.

Frankly, I reaffirm my position: women can do everything in the Church that the Church allows, and men can do everything in the Church that the Church allows.

Obedience is not agreement; it is obedience, and obedience is only virtuous when it requires some dying to self. If this issue of "justice" is really just an issue of "power" and "equality", then it is misguided and hardly virtuous. If it is an issue of service, then the servant doesn't tell the master what he/she will/won't do. He says, as the Gospel reminds us, "We are only servants, and we shouldn't be rewarded just for doing what we're supposed to do.

Thank you for your interest in this topic. I hope your future theological education moves beyond the realm of speculative theology and embraces sound doctrinal theology as taught by the Catholic Church. I also hope that you understand that we are not the Uniting Church, nor any other Christian group that is based on a congregational polity where each parish and each parish priest can "do their own thing", but that we are the Catholic Church, and our unity and hierarchical nature are envied by other churches that are presently falling apart. Many of them have created "ministerial equality", ordaining women and such, and it hasn't filled their churches or solved their problems. So I can't see going down that path and repeating their mistakes.

God bless you.

*Rev Fr Timothy E Deeter
Liturgy Office Director
Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney*

Father Deeter then wrote an article in *The Catholic Weekly* the following week (**'Men Only' As Acolytes, Says Liturgy Director** (1 April, 2007).

As I see it important to keep this issue on the agenda, I wrote a letter to the editor of *The Catholic Weekly* which was published the week after.

Lay ministry

It is interesting to note Fr Deeter's assertion that the ministry of instituted acolyte is restricted to men ('Men only' as acolytes, says liturgy director, CW April 1). This may be so, but as Pope Paul VI abolished the minor orders and restored the ministries of the lectorate and acolythate to lay ministries, then surely this restriction must now be lifted.

Both males and females make up the laity of the Church, which is the people of God.

To restrict this lay ministry to males only, surely asserts that the female baptism is somehow inferior to that of a male?

What other reason could there be for this restriction, given that the ministry is no longer a minor order?

*Maree Kennedy
Engadine*

For me personally, at this point in my life, becoming an acolyte is not something I want to do. I do however believe that restricting women from this lay ministry on the grounds of gender by the Church who proclaims that "Both baptized women and men constitute the laity, and at baptism, all are called to 'participation in the one priesthood of Christ'" (*Lumen Gentium 10*), is unjust.

Finally, I include below, with John Crothers' permission, the letter he distributed to his parishioners concerning the above issue.

Dear Acolytes and Readers,

I am writing to explain a development that has occurred regarding your ministries. First a little background.

As you are aware in both the parishes of Peakhurst and Penshurst many of our readers and acolytes are women. It may not be so well known that according to the Church's rules women are not allowed to be formally instituted into either of these ministries. The relevant Church decree states that "in accordance with the venerable tradition of the Church, institution in the ministries of reader and acolyte is reserved to men".

In recent years the Church has tried to deal with this tricky situation in a number of ways. Bishops have refused to institute any readers at all, rather than instituting only the male readers. The formal institution of male acolytes has been quietly dropped. Parishes have introduced informal welcoming ceremonies for the ministries of reader and acolyte to allow for the inclusion of women. Women have been allowed to exercise the ministry of reader on a temporary basis, but not permanently. Some parishes have changed the name of the ministry when it is exercised by women eg "senior server" instead of "acolyte".

The situation has now changed. In a recent notice from the Archdiocesan Liturgy Office we have been informed that the formal institution of acolytes is to be brought back. (There has been no mention at this stage of the institution of readers.) Parish Priests have been asked to send in a list of those they recommend to be instituted as acolytes. The list of course must include only men.

One might ask why in 2007 the Catholic Church still excludes women from lay ministry. (Remember we are not speaking here about the ordained ministries of deacon, priest and bishop.) Part of the answer lies in the fact that prior to Vatican II the ministries of reader and acolyte were seen as stages to priesthood and were known as "minor orders." This was in fact a misnomer and Pope Paul VI clarified the situation when he said that the ministries of reader and acolyte "are no longer to be reserved to candidates for the sacrament of orders and may be committed to lay Christians".

There is no theological argument to suggest that women should be excluded from the ministries of reader or acolyte, or indeed from any lay ministry in the Church. To defend such a position theologically one would have to assert either that the baptism of a woman is somehow inferior to that of a man (and so women are not full members of the laity), or that the ministries of reader and acolyte are not lay ministries, but constitute the sacrament of Holy Orders (and so acolytes and readers are really clerics.) Each of these propositions contradicts basic sacramental theology.

This is precisely why the Church's statement excluding women from these ministries relies solely on the argument from tradition, which by itself can be a shaky basis for argument. I remember the late Bishop John Heaps saying once at a conference I attended - "Just because the Church has been doing something in the past, it is not necessarily a good reason to continue doing it in the future". If we held blindly to every Church tradition we would still be saying Mass in Latin and forbidding Catholics to attend weddings of their Anglican friends in an Anglican church.

At the local level Cardinal Pell's decision to bring back the formal institution of acolytes has brought out into the open the whole question of women's exclusion from

lay ministry in the Church. Ironically it may be good that the question will now be debated more publicly. The bishops will have great difficulty defending their position. Women are not associate members of the laity – they are full members in every sense.

Here in our parishes of Peakhurst and Penshurst we pride ourselves on our fairness and inclusiveness. That will continue. We will not have two classes of laity in our parishes and no one will be excluded from any lay ministry on gender grounds. Our women acolytes will be invited to continue exercising their ministry. Our women readers will also be welcome to continue reading even if the formal institution of readers is brought in.

Consequently any current acolyte, male or female, who wishes to apply for formal institution please let me know and your name will be forwarded to the Liturgy Office with my recommendation. I would also be happy to speak with those who feel they might like to become an acolyte.

In life there are times when you simply have to stand up for what you know is right. This is one of those times. I am confident that the vast majority of Sydney Catholics

believe that women should not be excluded from lay ministry in the Church. Let's hope that we can bring about a change to this out-dated rule and help ensure that women in the Catholic Church get the recognition and respect they deserve.

*Fr John Crothers
Parish Priest – Peakhurst and Penshurst*

I have great admiration for Father John Crothers who has, on a number of occasions, spoken out about what he sees as injustice within the church in which we all belong. This takes much courage of conviction, especially in the position of Parish priest in Sydney Archdiocese.

I feel it is important for those of us who support those like John Crothers who are brave enough to speak out, to share our support with them so they do not feel they are standing alone. I also believe in respectfully challenging what I see as injustice in the Church and encourage others to continue to do the same, as I know many do.

Maree Kennedy

Women chip at Vatican glass ceiling

An article from CathNews (5/3/07) looked at the number of women working at the higher levels of the Vatican and states "the percentage of women working in Vatican offices has nearly doubled from 11 to 21 per cent since the beginning of John Paul II's pontificate". But while the presence of women at the Vatican has increased dramatically over the last 30 years, with rare exceptions, women have not broken through to the upper levels. It was noted that "most women are in support staff positions and have little decision-making input".

In 2006 Pope Benedict said that, leaving aside the ordained priesthood, women need to "make their own space" in the church and that the hierarchy shouldn't stand in their way.

However, women make up only about 10 per cent - in the ranks of consultants to Vatican agencies. These are specialists who advise the congregations or councils on matters under study, and who usually meet at the Vatican once or twice a year for meetings.

Most congregations have between 30 and 40 consultants. The congregations dealing with doctrine, liturgy, clergy, saints' causes and Eastern churches have no women consultants at all.

Pope Benedict expressed satisfaction that women today were "very present in the departments of the Holy See." But he noted one problem: The power to make legally binding decisions in the Roman Curia is linked to holy orders.

Big problem!

Full article available from *CathNews*
<http://www.cathnews.com/news/703/23.php>

Women bear brunt of exploitation: Vatican

The Holy See's permanent observer, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, told the United Nations in March that women "bear the brunt of the world's child prostitution, sexual exploitation, abuse, domestic violence, child labour and human trafficking".

Vatican Information Service reports that Archbishop Migliore was speaking at the 51st session of the Commission on the Status of Women which is considering the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women.

"Every day," the Archbishop pointed out in his English-language talk, "violations of the rights of women, adolescents, and young girls are committed and even tolerated in many fields."

He says women "bear the brunt" of violence, abuse and exploitation.

"The mistreatment of women is a longstanding reality in many places and a disregard for the age and vulnerability of young girls in particular is especially repugnant."

The Archbishop says that abuse of women "appears to be due to the inferior status" bestowed upon them in certain cultures.

"The promotion of women will be achieved not only by the legitimate vindication of women's rights. With that, there must also be established a fresh appreciation of authentically feminine values in the heart of our societies," Archbishop Migliore concluded.

While the Archbishop rightly condemned the exploitation of women in many areas of life, there was no mention of the role of women in the church.

Full article available from *CathNews*
<http://www.cathnews.com/news/703/28.php>

The Evolution of Woman (according to Man)

WATAC Conference News Update

The latest news on the WATAC Conference is that we have well over 100 people booked in; this is a very healthy number considering the Conference is still a couple of months away. Having said that, I'd encourage you to book sooner rather than later because we are faced with the possibility of limited space – hence limited numbers, miracles notwithstanding!

The Conference Committee is working hard to make sure everything comes together well – “best ever Conference” is our aim. Anna Warlow and her trusty team are in the midst of organizing the music, reflective prayers and liturgies.

If you want to share in the evening meal at the Canterbury Hurlstone Park RSL on Saturday evening it is really important that you indicate this on your Registration Form as we need to give them numbers. It is then a matter of paying at the Club that evening when you order your meal and happily it is not overly expensive. Joan Pavitt is the behind-the-scenes-person looking after this.

Helen Coles has been liaising with Canterbury Convention Centre consequently all is literally on track there! Plenty of parking, good access for all and a very pleasant atmosphere in which to enjoy our speakers and WATAC companions. The name, Joan Chittister, brings a light to the eyes and words to the lips, is my observation.

In case you have not heard, Joan Chittister is also going to speak at Mt. St. Benedict's School, Pennant Hills Rd., Pennant Hills on Thursday evening, 19th July at 7pm.

The closing date for WATAC Conference Bookings is 8th July – don't miss out!

Conference Committee

1793:

Extract from a report at the time of the French Revolution on the role that women should play in society:

The private functions to which women are destined by nature itself are related to the general order of society; this social order results from the difference between man and woman.

Each sex is called to the kind of occupation which is proper for it ... Man is strong, robust, born with great energy, audacity and courage...

In general, women are not capable of elevated thoughts and serious meditations, and if, among ancient peoples, their natural timidity and modesty did not allow them to appear outside their families, then in the French Republic do you want them to be seen coming to the bar, to the tribune, and to political assemblies as men do?

NOTE: The deputies replied in the negative – so they outlawed women's club!

2007:

Extract from an article by Lillian Daniel on the saworship.com website (San Antonio Texas), called 'Missing Men; Is the Church Low on Testosterone?'

David Murrow argues that “women rule the pews within a dull but safe feminised church”.

Murrow is director of Church for Men, an organisation aimed at “restoring a healthy masculine spirit in Christian congregations”.

Murrow is concerned “that a female-dominated church has turned Jesus into that wonderful man who appeals only to the ladies”.

In Murrow's world, he sees life as rosy for women in the church: “Her brain comprehends and appreciates everything that is happening. She easily processes information as it is dispensed from the pulpit. Her hormones help her to react in every situation. She flutters through the church like a butterfly – he crawls around like a slug.”

He sees the church as the place where women thrive but men wilt!

Hmmm.....

Full article (take a deep breath) available from <http://www.saworship.com/article-page.php?ID=3542&Page=men.php>



WATAC Members - have your say!

Bishops launch consultation on "Disconnected Catholics"

The Australian bishops' Pastoral Projects Office has released the full report of a research project into "Disconnected Catholics".

"We also welcome feedback from others who read the report. The purpose of the consultation process is to assist us to prepare recommendations that will help the Church enhance its pastoral practices at national, diocesan and parish level."

Mr Dixon said that he hopes the report will stimulate discussion and action in the Church.

CathNews 17/4/07

ACBC Media Release 3/4/07

Catholic dioceses, organisations and other interested people will have the opportunity to respond to a research project which explored why some Catholics have stopped going to Mass.

The findings of the Disconnected Catholics research project were presented in summary form to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference at its November 2006 meeting. The full report has now been published.

Forty-one people aged from 29 to 74 were interviewed for the qualitative research project. The reasons they gave for ceasing to attend Mass covered a range of church-related issues as well as inter-personal, cultural and societal factors. However, half the participants said they still attend Mass occasionally and almost one third said they might return to weekly Mass attendance in the future.

The Bishops commissioned the research, which was carried out by the Pastoral Projects Office of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. At the time of its preliminary release, they said the findings would be a valuable tool in forming pastoral strategies to help people return to the practice of their faith.

The full report, released this week, provides many personal accounts from those interviewed in the research.

Director of the ACBC Pastoral Projects Office, Mr Bob Dixon, said that, in asking for this research to be carried out, the Bishops have shown a desire to understand the views and experiences of Catholics who have stopped going to Mass.

With the release of the full report, the project will now enter its second phase, of consultation.

"We have designed a process of consultation to seek responses from leadership and consultative bodies in dioceses and other Catholic organisations," Mr Dixon said. "We also welcome feedback from others who read the report. The purpose of the consultation process is to assist us to prepare recommendations that will help the Church enhance its pastoral practices at national, diocesan and parish level. The report will act as a stimulus to discussion and action in the Church right around Australia."

The consultation phase will close on

Friday, 31 August 31, 2007

Hard copies of the report, which cost \$22 including GST, can be ordered by emailing admin@ppo.catholic.org.au or copies can be downloaded free of charge from www.ppo.catholic.org.au

For more information, contact Bob Dixon on 03 9953 3457.

Isn't it amazing that "theories" are OK for some things but not for others!!!

In his article in *The National Catholic Reporter* this week, John L Allan Jnr looks at part of Pope Benedict's new book "Jesus of Nazareth". In one section of his report he looks at how Pope Benedict tackles the question of calling God "mother."

Allen Jnr. says: "In a nutshell, he affirms that God is beyond gender, and that Scripture often uses the image of a mother's womb to express the intimacy of God's love for humanity. Yet, he says, "mother" is not a title of God in the Bible, and hence the church is disqualified from using it."

Benedict notes that there were a number of mother-gods in the religious traditions of the cultures surrounding the Israelites, and speculates that perhaps it was only by excluding that sort of language in the Bible that the sovereignty and the "otherness" of God could become clear. While the pope acknowledges that **theory may not be completely satisfactory**, he says we're nevertheless obliged to follow the Bible's lead".

Allen Jnr. then quotes Pope Benedict:

"Even if we can't give absolutely cogent reasons, the language of the prayer of the entire Bible remains normative for us, in which, the great metaphors of maternal love notwithstanding, 'mother' is not a title of God, and is not an appellation with which one may address God. We must pray as Jesus, on the basis of the Holy Scripture, has taught us to pray, not as it might strike us or please us. Only thus do we pray in the right way."

Do any of us really know exactly what Jesus said? Why can't 'mother' be a title of God? Couldn't "Father" also be seen as metaphor?

I'm not sure there is a one size fits all "right way" to pray. Addressing God only as "Father" is not something I can do. Does that mean my prayers are "wrong"?

Wasn't Limbo a theory???????

Maree

What Else Is In 'Limbo'???

Limbo, (meaning "hem" or "border") was a construct of the Middle Ages, an alternative destination for the souls of the unbaptised who were previously thought, because of original sin, to go to hell. The question surrounding the fate of these souls was first addressed in the fifth century by St. Augustine, who concluded that they did in fact wind up in hell. He concluded that since original sin was seen as being indelibly tied to the act of sex, and since babies were the natural result of that act, he then reasoned that they must carry sin.

The first significant Christian teacher to break with Augustinian tradition on the subject was St. Thomas Aquinas, the 13th-century Italian theologian who suggested that perhaps there's a special place for the unbaptised where their perpetual state is natural happiness. Some also concluded that limbo was the holding place for the merciful who died before Jesus 'opened the gates of heaven'.

However, the concept of Limbo was never considered official church dogma. In fact, limbo was merely considered a "theological opinion", although it was often not taught as such.

What about those for whom this concept caused much suffering and turmoil?

So if limbo was merely a "theological option" which lasted for centuries, couldn't the same also be said for the concept of 'original sin'?

And will there be a reversal on other traditional beliefs? Does hell – a place for permanent punishment – exist? Does Purgatory – a place of temporary punishment for those not deemed good or bad enough to enter heaven or hell – exist? When would women enjoy the right to officiate at Masses? When will the gays earn respect from the Church? And is the Pope infallible?

Oh well ... At least we have one place less to worry about. We either go to heaven, to hell or to purgatory. Simple!

Maree Kennedy

A Gentle Reminder

Subscriptions fall due in January each year and I thank all those who have sent theirs in so promptly. If, however, this has skipped your memory, could you please fill out the form on the back of this Newsletter and post it off to me a.s.a.p.

Many thanks.

Maureen Watterson

Another way – to The Cross

Having endured yet another 'traditional' Good Friday dirge in our parish church, I hark back nostalgically to the early 90s when a few times Bernice invited us to assemble in the City for a WATAC-style procession, tracing the real-life 'Stations of the Cross' experienced by so many in our society today.

With scripture and contemporary readings, songs and music, we paused for reflection on the agony of the homeless in Belmore Park and the senselessness of war at the Cenotaph in Hyde Park. The Law Courts were a reminder of Aboriginals dying in custody and the many injustices done in the name of the law – and how little has changed since Pontius Pilate washed his hands. St Mary's Cathedral spires with their mega-dollar price tag were a contentious issue at the time when funding was unavailable for other pressing needs. Finally, we wound our way, appropriately, to The Cross – the scene of so many social problems and personal crucifixions through drugs, alcohol, the sex trade, mental illness, unemployment, loneliness. Our final simple liturgy and singing near the famous fountain attracted some attention – hopefully a few were touched.

And so to Easter Sunday and some wondrous WATAC Dawn Services near Lady Macquarie's Chair in Hyde Park. Here, against a backdrop of the rising sun, readings and singing captured the true spirit of Easter. One year, following a disastrous bushfire season, enlarged pictures of charred trees and vegetation coming back to life were a poignant symbol of rebirth and renewal.

Such events take a lot of organising and we were indeed blessed to have such inspirational and creative leadership from Bernice Moore, Margaret Hinchey and Anne-Marie Thompson. They have left me with memories and gratitude for what they did to bring us together in this special way to help make sense of our crazy world.

For me, church has never been the same again. Why do parishes continue to churn out the same old rituals, with their focus on the ghastliness of The Crucifixion, and the ever-repeated theme that 'Christ died to save us from our sins'? This makes no sense in today's more enlightened world when we have to acknowledge that there are no answers or certainties about an after-life or who has been 'saved' – from what? We can only ponder whether the annual parish re-enactment is what Jesus would have wanted from us today.

Margaret Knowlden

Sanctuary Inverell

Groups

As you know, we do not have a current WATAC group here in Inverell. However, some Inverell snippets. Sanctuary Inverell is welcoming another Sudanese refugee family from the Kakuma camp in Kenya, arriving on May 3rd. The family consists of a young woman, aged about 26 and her five children. We have been busy getting the house prepared for their arrival.

One of the young Sudanese women who came last year has been in the Royal North Shore Hospital undergoing operations for extensive keloid scarring over her body. The surgeon is the head of the Burns Unit and has done a magnificent job but Rebecca still faces some time in hospital. She does not have many visitors so if anyone who lives near could visit her, it would be a great help. She is on Level 6 of the Douglas building in RNSH. It might be a good idea to phone first as we have no idea how long she will be there.

We are also preparing to welcome Gemma Sisia, who was a student at our local Catholic school until Year 10 and who has started a school in Tanzania which now has 850 children. Her work is flourishing and she has been on Australian Story – some of you might have seen it. So on May 7th, we are having a fund-raising evening for her school, St Jude's, and Sanctuary Inverell. Gemma's book "St Jude's" has just been published.

Yesterday was a particularly moving event for me – a past student asked me if I would prepare a service as he and his wife had been married ten years and wanted to renew their vows. It was a beautiful day and we had the ceremony in their bush garden under an arch which their small daughter had decorated with flowers. They had invited a number of family and friends, most of whom were not church-goers but who joined in with enthusiasm. The couple wrote their vows for each other and then the parents wanted to renew their vows too, the son and daughter did some readings, there were songs, the birds sang in chorus and it was one of the most moving moments I have experienced in a long time. It reminded me how easy it is to make a LIVING liturgy (oops, para-liturgy, sorry!) which really touches on the reality of where people are in their lives. And God was truly present in the great open cathedral of the gum trees and the huge rocks behind. At the finish, the young children came up and blew bubbles all around while Jose Carreras voice reminded us that "Love Changes Everything".

I'm coming down to Sydney for a wedding of a Vietnamese girl who came as a tiny refugee in the 1980s. It is a great privilege to see how multiculturalism can work well and enrich Australian society.

Rosemary Breen

BROKEN BAY DIOCESE (Upper North Shore): Group meets on a Sunday about every two months starting at 12.30 pm with lunch. Venue: 32 Awatea Road, St Ives Chase. Contact: Margaret Knowlden, 02 9449 7275. Email: knowlden1@bigpond.com

EASTERN SUBURBS GROUP This is a new group and a regular schedule has not yet been worked out. We plan to schedule meetings for rest of 2007 at intervals of between 6 and 8 weeks. Contact: Carmel Maguire, phone 93981004. Email c.maguire@unsw.edu.au

ENGADINE Group meets on the third Monday of the month in a member's home at 7.30pm. Contact: Margaret Keyes Ph: (home) 02 9520 4240 or (work) 9642 4507 95209719 Email: keyes888@ozemail.com.au

INNER CITY Group meets at 62 Boyce St, Glebe 2037 at 7pm on the third Monday of each month. Contact: Margaret Cody 02 9692 9384 Email: margaretcody@mountainretreats.org We apologise for including incorrect details in the last issue

LANE COVE Group. Contact: Jann Ohlsson 02 94276208 Email: JannO@idx.com.au

LISMORE HEIGHTS Group meets irregularly. Contact: Mary Bruggy 02 6624 6530 Email: marytbruggy@optusnet.com.au

MANLY Group usually meet on the second Saturday of the month at 2pm at 2/36 Upper Fairfax Road, Mosman. Contact: Camille Paul 02 9969 2125 Email: camken@bigpond.com

MILTON/ULLADULLA Group usually have meetings on Saturday from 10 - 4. The dates for 2007 are as follows: Saturday Feb 3, April 21, June 2, September 15, November 24 (Christmas gathering to which partners are invited for BBQ tea) Contact: Anna Flynn 02 4455 3279 Email: bobans@bigpond.com

MOUNT CLAREMONT (W.A.) Contact: Margaret Finlay (08) 9384 9114 Email: finlaymarg@hotmail.com

PARRAMATTA Group meets on the last Monday of the month from Feb to November at the Convent Parramatta from 7.30 – 9.30. Contact: Margaret Hinchey 9890 7903 Email mhinchey@lifequestoz.net

PENSHURST Group meets at 7.30 on the fourth Monday of every month at 5/30-32 Grove Avenue, Narwee 2209. Contact: Bernice Moore 02 9579 2650 Email: bernice@watac.net

WAGGA WAGGA Group meet at 14 Tarakan Ave Wagga Wagga on the first Monday of the month. Contact: Rosslyn Bennett 69312110. Email rosbennett@ozemail.com.au

WOLLONGONG Group meets on the 4th Saturday of every month at 34a Pass Avenue Thirroul NSW 2515 from 2pm - 4.30pm. Contact: Mary Medley 02 4228 8024 or Jan Ryan (02) 4268 5965 Email: jjryan@iprimus.com.au

Group Reports

Milton Ulladulla

On a perfect Autumn day in paradise on the South Coast, nine ladies including Mary, a new guest from Nowra, met at Judi Powe's home in Little Forrest. The theme for the day was Forgiveness, and the presentations were interactive. After all reading a Peace Prayer together, Fran distributed seven definitions of forgiveness which she invited members to spend 30 minutes reflecting on for possible meanings and appropriateness in each person's life. On return we held a lively, at times personal, discussion on our reflections.

The definitions used were:

1. Forgiveness is giving up all hope of a better past. (Quoted, Petrea King)
2. Forgiveness does not mean condoning the offensive behaviour that initiated the negativity in our lives (Stephanie Dowrick, *Forgiveness and other Acts of Love*)
3. Forgiveness means we allow ourselves to learn from the past in order to move forward in love and peace. (Ditto)
4. Forgiveness means leaving the past to the Almighty. (Ditto)
5. Forgiveness allows us to choose to avoid reactivation of the neural pathways activated by offence against us. (Ditto)
6. Forgiveness enables compassion to grow within us. (Ditto)
7. Forgive us our trespassers as we forgive those who trespass against us (The Lord's Prayer) In other words, O Spirit of divine creativity, be as generous to us in your forgiveness as we are to those who have hurt us.

After another generous lunch, Kath led us in a beautiful reflection and liturgy on the same theme, using water signifying cleansing and forgiving ourselves, and as blessing of each other. Following this we took a page and envelope into a quiet place to write whatever was appropriate, which was then burnt in a fire representing removal and cleansing. To conclude we shared bread and wine.

Our next meeting is Saturday 2nd June, at Fran's home. The topic is Spiritual Abuse, to be facilitated by Monica. A chapter will be distributed prior to the meeting, which Monica would like us to read, and make notes. She also requested that we consider prayers for the faithful who have suffered from Spiritual Abuse.

Fran Topp

Eastern Suburbs

The Eastern Suburbs Group has met twice since our last report for *WATAC News*. The meeting originally scheduled for 21 January was soon submerged in the relentless January round of all involved, so the re-scheduled meeting took place on 18 February. At that meeting and that on 15 April, we found plenty of food for continuing thought and discussion in Joan Chittister's *In the Heart of the Temple*. Simplicity, Work and Sabbath were the topics for February which proved almost too much food for discussion so for the April meeting just one chapter was studied – this was Wholeness. Joan's views on the need to reconcile theology, ecology and feminism set off lively discussion; some thought her view of the state of hierarchy, superiority and domination was 'a worst-case scenario' and the 'Vision' chapter has been set as a contrast if not an antidote for our next meeting scheduled for Sunday 17 June at 2pm at my place, 9 Dudley Street, Randwick, 2031. Tel: 93981004.

Bernice as usual brought good things for us. One was news of Diarmuid O'Murchu's book, *Evolutionary Faith: rediscovering God in our Great Story*, with its advice that 'it is time to embrace the awakening consciousness of our time, inviting us to reclaim the ancient mystical wisdom of the one earth and the one universe'. Another good thing Bernice brought to the April meeting was the report of the meeting of the CCJP (Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace) which she had just attended, and the account of the brave women and men who, after their long prayer vigil, wire-cut their way into the US facility at Pine Gap, on what used to be Australian territory! Their trial is scheduled for Darwin on 29 May so maybe an inquiry of local members (State and Federal in both houses of each legislature) may be timely on whether they or any other elected representative of the Australian people has ever crossed the Pine Gap threshold.

A one-page description of WATAC was published in *OLSH & MM Homepage.Com Magazine* no.14 (February 2007). There was a pleasing response. Extra copies are available in hard copy or by email. If you would like one, please get in touch at the above address or telephone or at c.maguire@unsw.edu.au

Carmel Maguire

Wagga Wagga

Wagga WATAC continues to meet on the 1st Monday of the month at 7.30pm. This year we are focusing on articles written by Joan Chittister from the internet. At our March meeting we read of Joan's visit to Iraq to visit women there. Her aim was to let these women know that not all Americans thought as their President did. It was a very moving article which led to much sharing and discussion. Our meeting for April was cancelled. We meet again on Monday the 7th May.

We were also delighted to welcome another new member to the group.

Ros Bennett

When one door closes, another opens!

The year 2000 was a watershed one for me. After over 16 years working for Mercy Family Centre in Waitara, my job was made 'redundant'. Having been in full-time employment for nearly thirty years, I badly needed a new focus for my energies and a use for my computer skills.

By a strange chance, on a very wet, windy International Women's Day march, I offered to assist with the carrying of a banner for The Ordination of Catholic Women (OCW) and first met Barbara Campbell. A few weeks later I found myself sitting next to her at Terrey Hills church and learned that she was trying to form a group to reform the Catholic Church – this, she explained, was a follow-on from the earlier *Australian Catholics For Reform* group which Roberta Heckendorf had so energetically promoted through WATAC. Barbara's aims intrigued me. So, when she said that she was doing this mainly on her own with only a manual typewriter and virtually no computer skills, I knew that here was the new focus I was looking for and gladly offered my assistance. Initially this involved preparation of the manifesto and brochure, but gradually I learned that the person responsible for ARC's newsletter, *arcvoice*, was resigning and it seemed a natural progression for me to take on the role of editor – which I have been doing ever


since Issue No. 3. We are now up to No. 24. (My job at Waitara also involved newsletters so I have had many years' experience – as well as a good grounding in the subject matter, thanks to WATAC.)

Four Conferences have created a lot of interest and shown that there are many disaffected Catholics supporting for the need for change in the Church. We have even got the hierarchy worried as shown by Cardinal George Pell's refusal to permit one conference to be held at the chosen venue of the Mary McKillop Centre!

For most members, *arcvoice* is a good source of the kind of information which would not get into *The Catholic Weekly!* as well as providing an opportunity for members to share their hopes and dreams for a better world. It comes out four times a year and gives me great satisfaction as I source the website for relevant articles and encourage others to write their own. Along with my involvement with *Women-Church Journal* and now *WATAC News*, doors have opened wide and "retirement" is somewhat of a mis-nomer. To think that only 25 years ago I was begging my eye specialist to give me a letter to say that computers would be bad for my eyes!

Margaret Knowlden

ARC welcomes new subscribers and, if you feel like airing your views about the present state of the Church, the Editor of *arcvoice* will always welcome your articles. (Regrettably, we are unable to pay contributors!)

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