

WATAC NEWS



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“The Time Is Now And We Are Here”

Joan Chittister wrote these words in her usual prophetic and challenging poetic style – and I believe they sum up, ever so well, much of what this WATAC News is all about.

The Conference is of course our major ‘NOW’ topic and why would it not be? It is our NOW moment and our on-going FUTURE challenge. The wonderful presentation of Sister Elizabeth Julian is included in this issue – it is already on the ‘Resources’ page on our website in its entirety, and is published here minus its footnotes and bibliography (for the sake of brevity) Please be sure to refer to the website for the additional information it provides – useful and inspiring! (Elizabeth has said that the footnotes are essential for academic integrity and credibility, and for avoiding charges of plagiarism. For the sake of her reputation please refer friends to the website not only to your newsletter copy.)

The overwhelmingly positive responses provided by evaluations of those who attended indicate that the WATAC energy has been stimulated and the passions have been fired up yet again. It would be

hard to have listened to Bishop Robinson and not felt Joan’s challenge “the time is NOW and WE are HERE’ with all the consequences that demands of us – “We the people ARE the Church” as Vatican II said clearly and Bishop Geoff emphasised.

Happily, Larissa Behrendt has also given us her paper to include in this issue – let it both inform you and urge you on to actively support the issues she speaks to. This is a very NOW moment for our indigenous sisters and brothers and we need to be involved.

We are hoping to be able to publish some of Phil Glendenning’s wisdom in the next Newsletter. The refugee issue is not going away and the more people who raise their voices on behalf of our ‘last people’ (as Phil named them) the more likely it is that the political system will be on-goingly modified to treat them with justice and compassion. The DVD of Phil Glendenning’s film ‘A Well-Founded Fear’ is still available to borrow from WATAC. Contact Alma Madden Ph: (02) 9520 8684



Sister Elizabeth Julian RSM and Bishop Geoffrey Robinson



Phil Glendenning and Larissa Behrendt

IMPORTANT DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

WATAC AGM

The Annual General Meeting of WATAC is on the near horizon, it will be held on Saturday 27th June, 2pm to 4pm in the Mahoney Room at the Mary Mackillop Place, 7-11 Mount Street, North Sydney. Afternoon Tea will be provided and Rosemary Breen OAM will be our guest speaker.

Rosemary has long been a member of WATAC and, as many of you will know, is an amazing woman involved in 'hands-on' work in her rural community in Inverell with refugees, the disabled and the women's refuge. She also works tirelessly on indigenous issues. This should be a great WATAC moment - don't miss it. To help us with catering please fill in and return the form on the back page.

WATAC Luncheon

Another important date for your diary is **Thursday 10th September** when we will hold our Annual WATAC Luncheon at NSW Parliament House. This is always a great and joyful celebration, so make sure you are part of it this year - recapture the Conference Moment!!!

Looking Back, Looking Forward: 'Futuring Now' Conference

- 1st & 2nd May 2009

Looking back on the 'Futuring Now' Conference brings to mind lots of joy, moments of catching up with friends (old and new), conversations over coffee, laughter, new ideas and challenging concepts proclaimed by wonderful speakers, enjoyable food, reflective moments leading to prayer and hope, and so much more.

Some comments participants wrote included:

- 'I go home inspired' - 'I was confronted but am hopeful'
- 'My batteries are now ready to continue the journey'
- 'It was energising and challenging' - 'I was encouraged and reassured'
- It gave me hope' - 'I am one very, very satisfied person'
- 'This was a sharing of what the Church could be like'
- 'It was excellent - exceeded my expectations'
- 'I was strengthened by a community of like-minded people'
- 'I enjoyed this Conference the most of all the WATAC Conferences I have attended'
- 'It was a grace-filled moment' - 'This was a shot in the arm'
- 'WOW!!!'

Also the Conference was described as: Thought provoking - Exciting - Exhilarating - Energising - Challenging - Uplifting - Inspiring.

All of the above and so much, much more is what those who were there wrote.

The Canterbury venue is so very suitable and the staff is so helpful, it makes the organisation of the Conference much easier than it would otherwise be, and enables all the wonderful interaction that happened at the WATAC Conference.

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Jan & other diners with the three young people who shared their dream of Church with us

What a gift to us all were the wonderful speakers who agreed to be part of our WATAC Conference on Saturday:

- Bishop Geoffrey Robinson
- Sister Elizabeth Julian
- Larissa Behrendt
- Phil Glendenning

The Friday evening meal rated very highly on the overwhelming majority of participants' evaluation sheets. Anne-Marie Eldick, Ayman Badr and Susan Flynn were the three young people who addressed us and spoke inspiringly of the Church they dream of. Sr Maureen Burke, a Loreto Sister spoke briefly and challengingly of the dreams and passion of Mary Ward, the founder of the Loreto Sisters.

Jan Barnett, a sister of St Joseph and member of the WATAC Inc working committee, facilitated this Conference with great enthusiasm and expertise. Mary Mackillop's spirit was certainly alive and well as we 'Futured' together.

Reflection and prayer is always a key element of a WATAC Conference and this year Sharon Brien and her team led us gently and creatively into beautiful moments of sharing.

No such event as this can ever happen without the 'hands on' work of many people behind the scenes. We all owe them an unpayable debt of gratitude:

- They met people at the airport
- They billeted inter-state and country visitors
- They provided a welcoming committee
- They prepared the bags of information for Conference participants
- and decorated the tables
- Thanked speakers
- Made sure that people with special needs were looked after

Add to the above the members of the WATAC Working and Conference Committees and in particular Helen Coles, Maureen Watterson, Margaret Keyes, Beth Riolo and Margaret Day and we can but say a million, million THANKS to each individual wonderful person.

While the people outcomes of the Conference were all marvellous, financially we ran at a loss of several thousand dollars - the raffle amount of \$700 helped to defray this somewhat, so we are very grateful to all those who donated prizes and we are busy celebrating the joy of 'Futuring Now' and cherishing the moment.



Maureen Burke IBVM



Jan Barnett



Elsie Heiss
Acknowledgment of Land

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson - 'Futuring Now'



What an amazing gift Bishop Geoff was to the WATAC Conference and how open, honest, courageous and challenging he is for us all at this moment in our history.

He presumed when addressing us that we had read his book and I know many WATAC-ers have done that, and groups have discussed it in detail BUT, if you haven't, NOW is the time to pick it up. '*Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church - Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus*' and just 'jump in'! A useful way of getting involved is to start with the 'Meditations' at the end of each Chapter beginning on page 45 then page 61 and so on. Once you are into it, there is no doubt its hard to walk away from the questions and thinking that book inspires. It is life-giving and life-changing.

It is true that being able to discuss the issues and questions in a group is very enriching, so if you have that opportunity grasp it with both hands, but don't let the absence of that opportunity stop you from the wondrous and enlivening experience of undertaking the journey. There is no doubt that this is a special moment of life, and this talk of Bishop Robinson created a context for future action.

Those of us who heard Bishop Geoff speak on Saturday morning were almost 100% deeply touched and energised. Your evaluations overwhelmingly gave him 9s and 10s enhanced by such words as 'Excellent', 'Great', 'Courageous', 'Prophetic', 'Hope-giving', 'Humble', 'Stimulating', 'Well-grounded', 'Powerful' and so on. Of course, not everyone experienced it that way, some felt 'it

will take a miracle to get change' and 'change will never take place from the top down', but all of us were moved to some degree and enriched by hearing Bishop Geoff speak about our Church and the wider society.

Another interesting aspect of this talk was that for the most part he did not simply speak to his book but rather took as his focus '*Futuring Now*'. This was, I thought, a particularly great start to our day together, as it captured the energy and mood of the WATAC Conference.

Early in his talk Bishop Geoff referred to the beautiful opening liturgy we had celebrated together, saying it was totally participatory and had achieved symbolic inclusivity, and was not overly dependant on words, all of which gave it relevance and deep meaning.

Some Issues and Questions Bishop Robinson raised in his talk:

- If we are to explore '*Futuring Now*' then we will need to consider CHANGE in terms of our Society and Church - that is "What has been and what will be"?
- Before looking forward we need to look back and consider the changes many of us have lived through in the last fifty years 1959 to 2009 then translate that experience into the almost unimaginable changes that will inevitably happen in the next fifty years, 2009 to 2059.

Some of the CHANGES that have taken place 1959 - 2009:

- Technology: Television, Communication, Internet, Phone
- Growth in the number of people who own cars
- The fall of Communism and Apartheid
- Vatican II - Signs of the Times, Liturgical Change
- Attitudes in Society to Homosexuality
- Growth of Feminism

Some present Church issues:

- Increasing centralisation of Church power in Rome
- Process of selecting Cardinals - the system is incestuous and the election of the next Popes hinges on it

- Bishops are not consulted in this process nor on many/most other Church issues
- If Bishops are not consulted there is no present nor future possibility that priests and laity will be.
- We are witnessing 'creeping infallibility'

Some Big Questions:

- Truth – what is essential to the identity of the Church and what is non-essential?
- Sin – what is and is not sin?
- Women's Ordination – what is essential about it?
- Does all power come from ordination OR does power come from God? Or from the people?
- Did Jesus ordain priests at the Last Supper?
- Did Jesus have Divine Knowledge? Did Jesus speak Chinese?

Issues in urgent need of exploration:

- Male attitudes to women both in societal context and in terms of the Church
- The Church's history is profound and ingrained over many thousands of years in terms of its attitude to women
- Power is power to serve, all must be empowered – women and men
- Church must be about maximum possible activity, not passivity
- Goal for human beings is growth, not obedience
- Growth requires doing the right thing and taking responsibility
- Responsibility appropriate to adults must not be reduced to obedience appropriate to children
- Leadership – enabling / accepting

All of the above is but an indication of what Bishop Geoff spoke about. It was profound, disturbing, challenging and life-giving material which generated a million questions and stirred the passions within. We concluded the session with the reading of the 'Song of Jesus' which is the final Meditation in Geoff's book (p304 – 306) and which, in a way gathers up all our questions and concerns, puts them into context and leaves us 'without a leg to stand on' if we just want to blame someone else and walk away.

Do take time to read this Meditation, and be aware as you do that those words capture the mind and heart of a great lover of Jesus – a prophet for our time – Bishop Geoffrey Robinson. WATAC could not thank him enough for his passionate and challenging words to us.

Bernice Moore



Cathy McGowan thanks Bishop Robinson



Gleanings from the Conference

A month has raced past since this year's WATAC conference *Futuring Now* and so it is with the distance of time and the assistance of no notes to either jolt or correct my memory that I write this reflection about the Saturday of the conference.

As always our four speakers provided much food for thought and spirit which has now become entangled with readings and viewings both prior to and subsequent to the conference, so I apologise in advance if this does not accurately reflect what was said on the day.

Both our keynote speakers brought to their task scholarship, deep faith and a passionate commitment to their church. Without in any way detracting from Dr Elizabeth Julian's contribution to the conference, I was particularly moved by Bishop Geoffrey Robinson's address. What a rare occasion it is to see a cleric, let alone a Bishop, critique his Church with love, an incisive mind and deep scholarship. Why is it that our institutional church has created an atmosphere in which such an event is not only actively discouraged but is regarded as anathema? Bishop Geoff and Dr Elizabeth's critiques challenged both the institutional church and we ourselves, the Church, to growth.

Bishop Geoff grounded us by reminding us how impossible it would have been for us, fifty years ago, to imagine the world we now live in. How can we possibly imagine the future fifty years hence? It was good to be reminded of the momentous and "unimaginable" events that we have witnessed.

Bishop Geoff labels two camps within our church as *the proclaimers of certainties and the seekers after truth*. He feels that:

the major differences between these two groups are not religious or theological, but psychological. For reasons in their background and upbringing or within their personality, many people need certainties. In a world in which, as Alvin Toffler still teaches us, change is the only constant, this need can be profound. I may argue with a person's theology, but I cannot argue with their psychological needs. (Geoffrey Robinson, October 25, 2007, Confront sexual abuse, don't manage it. Found at eurekastreet.com.au, on 5 June 2009)

The challenge is how to deal with this in charity and yet build a healthy future for ourselves and our church. It is not healthy for any criticism to be interpreted as disloyalty; any questioning as heretical.

The gift of our two key note speakers was the sharing of their scholarship which underpins their

insights into current challenges facing the church today. Bishop Geoff sees collegiality as the key issue to much-needed reform. In recent history power and decision making has increasingly moved from the bishops to the pope. Today too much papal energy is being expended on control. Dr Elizabeth, in this year of Paul, based her challenge on Paul's message to the Galatians:

For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (3:27 -28).

Dr Elizabeth challenged us and the Church to take our baptism seriously and she cited scriptural evidence to prove that women participated more fully in the Pauline Church than we do today. That this fact is not familiar to many Catholics can be ascribed to these accounts being absent from the Sunday lectionary.

Bishop Geoff reminded us that it is not only women who are disenfranchised by the current clerical model of church but also all the non-ordained male members of our Church. When only the ordained are allowed to exercise power, when only the ordained are allowed their full baptismal rights, then we undermine Jesus understanding of power: *all power is to serve*. Somehow, I took away from both these people that there was a failure of leadership, a failure to serve the people of God, each other and the world. How poignantly was this failure depicted in the scene from the new award-winning Australian film *Samson and Delilah* when Delilah entered the Catholic Church in Alice Springs?

Dr Elizabeth Julian cited as one of the three requirements for a prophet *the ability to lament publicly i.e. to declare to both the oppressor and the oppressed that all is not right with the present situation*. Both Professor Larissa Behrendt and Phil Glendenning lamented publicly what is wrong with our dealings with two most vulnerable groups - our indigenous people and asylum seekers - the first and the last to reach our shores. It is very confronting to face what is being done in "our name".

The prayerful and reflective opening liturgy prompted Bishop Geoff to ponder the possibility and efficacy of a major change to our Sunday liturgy from passivity into activity. Why oh why are the rubrics of the Mass seen as being set in concrete? After all Jesus' command was a call to activity: *Take and eat*

The perennial problem of inclusive language and the Vatican's insistence on exclusive language was visited by both speakers. Bishop Geoff explained that many of the words for both God and men in the original languages were not gendered. These languages had words for both male, female and a neutral word representing both. This nuance has been lost in translation and of course we need someone of Geoff's scholarship to share this knowledge with us. Bishop Geoff challenged WATAC to create the inclusive language – we need the English words, I would say chiefly pronouns, that are gender neutral. The awkwardness of the *he/she* and the fact that the language in the bible and lectionary is translation of gender neutral words calls for these new words and Bishop Geoff argues that new words are being created in other fields everyday. Dr Elizabeth pointed out that in both New Zealand and Australia all government departments and tertiary institutions have published policies of inclusive language. Why is it not possible for the institutional church to also have such a policy?

Listening to these two reflective, faith filled people, passionate with love for their church *pound against the proverbial brick wall* of institutional intransigence can cause one to wonder: *Why bother? What hope is there for the Church?* But writing this piece has helped me see the wisdom of Bishop Geoff's words – there is no way we can possibly imagine the world, let alone the church of fifty years hence. But the way I live today contributes no matter how minutely, to the Future. All I can do is sing "Jesus' song" (Robinson, 2007, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus* P304 -305) to the best of my ability and be alert to the signs of the Spirit, who will lead us all into truth. (John 3:8). As Dr Elizabeth reminded us *The Spirit blows where it wills*" (John 16:13). After all the Catholic Church of 2009 bears very little resemblance to the Pauline Church. What will it matter if it bears as little resemblance to the church of 2059 so long as it has *Reclaim(ed) the Spirit of Jesus?*

Margaret Day



The IT Team: Beth Riolo, Margaret & John Day

WATAC Conference WOW moments

Geoffrey Robinson's awareness of what's going on in the human condition and in the Church – 'all power has to be the power to serve' – amen to that! Let's join him in his search for a gender-free pronoun – [A.G. Stephens suggested a hundred years ago 'se, sis, sim' for he/she, his/her, him/her – WATAC could do better!]

The depth and brilliance of Elizabeth Julian's scholarship and the verve with which she delivers the results. Thank you Elizabeth for waking us up to the lacunae in the the readings from St Paul chosen for the official liturgy.

The wonderful gift of our first people in making us aware of their much longer experience in this land with Elsie Heiss's welcome to country and of the progress represented by Professor Behrendt in working to make the legal playing field rather more equal for Aboriginal people.

The whole WATAC Conference WOW factor is summed up for me in the delight of spending time with people who hunger and thirst for justice's sake.

Carmel Maguire

The spirit was at work right from the start

Friday evening started amazingly, as I found when we all sat down, that I was sitting directly opposite the lady whom I had not met before but who I was to billet for the night - Cathy McGowan. Then I discovered that she belongs to the Sandhurst Diocese and knows my brother, Father Morley, very well. The spirit was at work right from the start.

To pick out one thing that has stayed with me since the weekend is difficult. As I am very interested in social justice issues I found Phil Glendenning's DVD and address very informative, confronting and sad. If I did not believe in the power of prayer I would feel powerless and hopeless.

Sister Elizabeth Julian reminded me of the fact, that through Baptism, I am really called to be Church in the fullest of ways. We tend to say this often, but do we really believe it?

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson let us see the pain that many bishops are experiencing in their inability to live and share collegially and he pointed out that the pope needs to listen to his bishops before he will listen to the people. His book is wonderful and illustrates so clearly that power and sex are so destructive in the hierarchical church.

So we women are suffering, but so are the bishops and priests. We mothers suffer because our children no longer find the church relevant. We are really being made aware that it is in the dying that we, the Church, will find new life. We are a resurrection people, and through WATAC we women can work together on the journey.

Aileen Kelly

The Glebe-Inner City Group would like to congratulate the committee and all who organised such a great Conference. We know it takes months of hard work and commend you for the choice of speakers. They were inspirational and re-motivated us. Sometimes it becomes despairing to 'maintain the rage' of being 'a difficult woman' against such obstacles in the hierarchy. That is why it was so refreshing to hear Sr Elizabeth Julian's words about the mandate that baptism bestows upon us. Phil Glendenning and Larissa Behrendt gave us hope for the future, especially in the areas of social justice.

Helen O'Brien



... and the people who made it happen!!





A
Sacred
Moment



Futuring together now!



Check out the website

Many thanks to Maureen Short for the fabulous photographs taken at the Conference – you can check out those included in the Newsletter & more in full colour on the WATAC website –<http://www.watac.net/photogalleries.php>

While you are there check the **Resources** page for Dr Elizabeth Julian's paper & Larissa Behrendt's presentation from the Conference. We hope to add the facts & figures from Phil Glendenning's presentation soon.



Sheila Quonoe

With Gratitude to Our Supportive Artists

Could there be a WATAC event without a Raffle? Answer NO! Our deepest thanks are due to the wonderful creative people who donated beautiful art works to us to touch your generous hearts at the Conference.

- Sheila Quonoe gave us her beautiful hand-quilted work of art with its Australian theme.
- Paul Ryan's magnificent oil landscape painting was donated by his mother, Jan Ryan
- Judy Bourke donated a thought-provoking etching.
- Sue Kane provided many tickets for entrance to the NSW Art Gallery which resulted in much joy among the lucky winners. "Blessed are those who delight in creation, art and creativity ..."

Thank You.



Sheila Quonoe's beautiful quilting donated for the raffle



Jan Ryan and Judy Burke

The First People – Long-Term Solutions are Essential

Professor Larissa Behrendt

The Indigenous affairs portfolio is one in which the challenges are great. It concerns the poorest socio-economic group in Australia with a distinct cultural identity who have been dispossessed and historically marginalised and who assert a unique cultural and political identity.

I like to rephrase this challenge into a question that most Australians ask, when puzzled or perplexed by Indigenous affairs: “Why is it that we spend so much money on Indigenous affairs but make such little impact?”

There are some structural reasons that explain why and they are the same barriers that occur in other areas of social policy but they are pronounced in Aboriginal affairs.

The first is classic cost-shifting between federal and state/territory governments. Since the 1967 referendum delivered to the federal government the power to make laws in relation to Aboriginal people – but left the states and territories with residual powers – there has been an increase of areas where responsibility is shared between those two tiers of government, including across key areas such as health, housing, education and heritage protection. But instead of working in a co-operative spirit to ensure targeted policies, programs and resources we see either the unnecessary duplication of services or the under-investment in key areas as these two levels of government seek to shift the blame for policy failure and the responsibility for resourcing to each other. The end result is we see an under-funding on basic Aboriginal health, housing and education.

And while these key areas remain under-resourced we see a targeting of funding at other programs that are not proven to solve underlying issues that lead to poor socio-economic status. Take these two examples of the previous governments attempt to deal with key issues within the Indigenous affairs portfolio that make this case:

- The first year that shared responsibility agreements were used by governments – in a thinly veiled attempt to swap basic services or much needed infrastructure for behavioural changes such as face washing and tidy yards, only 25% of the ear-marked \$100 million dollars made its way into actual Aboriginal communities – with \$75 million going to administration; and

- When the previous government decided that private home ownership was the panacea to Indigenous poverty they allocated hundreds of millions of dollars for the scheme and there was only one person – one lucky Aboriginal person – who took the scheme up.

There is a theme amongst these examples of top heavy and cumbersome bureaucracy. There is also a more subtle but related theme about the inadequate and non-functioning relationship between Aboriginal people and their communities and the government and their service providers.

But I argue that one of the clear reasons why we see under-funding on Indigenous health, housing, education and employment but money spent on shared responsibility agreements, home ownership schemes and, of course, the failing aspects of the Northern Territory intervention – which I will talk about in more detail in a moment – is because too often in Indigenous affairs the solutions are driven by ideologies, not by what the research shows works and what it shows doesn't work.

Indigenous affairs is full of ideologies. They permeate the shaping of its policies and programs, many of them recycled from previous eras where they were equally unsuccessful. These include:

- the ideologies of assimilation and mainstreaming,
- the newer ideologies of mutual obligation and shared responsibility,
- the ideology that all the “real” Aborigines and problems are in the Northern Territory, Cape York or the Kimberley so resources should be redirected there from other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and
- the ideology that communally held land is bad – if it is held by Aboriginal people – and should be unlocked so that non-Aboriginal people can access it.

Each of these ideologies influenced in some way the Northern Territory Emergency Response or, “the intervention” and its key mechanisms:

- widespread alcohol restrictions,
- quarantining welfare payments and linking them to school attendance,
- compulsory health checks to identify health problems and signs of abuse,



- forced acquisition of townships through compulsory leases with just compensation,
- increased policing,
- introduction of market based rents and normal tenancy arrangements,
- banning of pornography and auditing publicly funded computers,
- scrapping the permit system, and
- appointing managers to all prescribed communities.

The complex set of strategies designed to deal with, supposedly, systemic child abuse was designed in two days (and perhaps there is a lesson in there about the dangers of designing complicated policy approaches in a forty-eight hour period because an election is looming...)

In many ways, the intervention in the Northern Territory is a textbook example of why government policies continue to fail Aboriginal people:

- the policy approach was ideologically led rather than making any reference to the research or understandings about what actually works on the ground;
- in fact, the policy approach contained in the intervention actually lies in direct contradiction of what the research shows us works and what experts recommend as appropriate action;
- the rhetoric of doing what is in the best interests of Aboriginal people, or children, masked a list of other policy agendas – private ownership of land and welfare reform in particular – that were unrelated to effective approaches to dealing with systemic problems of violence and abuse and instead sought to undermine community control over their land and resources; and
- the approach is paternalistic and top-down rather than a collaborative approach that seeks to include Aboriginal people in the outcomes.

The most powerful example of this is the quarantining of welfare payments and its spurious links to improving school attendance. I want to use it as the example because not only does it illustrate why key policy approaches in the intervention were flawed, it is a policy that, despite the evidence that it is problematic, is increasingly being rolled out across the country.

The quarantining of welfare payments included as part of the intervention with the seductive rhetoric that it would be linked to school attendance. This played well with an electorate who probably assumed that poor attendance rates and poor educational outcomes for Aboriginal children were caused by the poor parenting of Aboriginal parents.

However, the only evaluated trial of a scheme linking welfare payments to school attendance – the Halls Creek *Engaging Families* trial undertaken from February to July 2008 – found that the attitudes of parents of Aboriginal children were only one of the factors that affected school attendance. The evidence pointed to the pivotal role that teachers and the school culture itself plays in a community where children decide their own time use patterns at a very early age.

The evaluation also showed that poor or good attendance did not necessarily run in families. In one family of five children, attendance ranged from 14% to 88%. It was also found that the housing situation in Halls Creek – where overcrowding is a critical problem – is unlikely to provide an environment where families can be “school ready”.

There is no evidence that shows that linking welfare to behaviour reforms is effective. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that the imposition of such punitive measures in an already dysfunctional situation will exacerbate the stress in a household.

And what the evidence does show works in getting Aboriginal children into schools are the following:

- breakfast and lunch programs;
- programs that bring the Aboriginal community, especially Elders, into the schools;
- Aboriginal teachers aides and Aboriginal teachers;
- Curriculum that engages Aboriginal children; and
- Programs such as that developed by Aboriginal educationalist Chris Sarra that marry programs that promote self-esteem and confidence through engaging with culture with programs that focus on academic excellence.

These effective programs and strategies show the importance of building a relationship between Aboriginal families and the school in order to target issues like school attendance. It also shows that there is much that the schools can also do to engage children with schooling. It suggests that, rather than simply punishing parents for their children’s non-attendance, the government should be providing schools and teachers that meet the needs of the Aboriginal community.

It should be noted that it cost the taxpayer \$88 million to make the initial administrative changes in Centrelink to facilitate the welfare quarantining but not one dollar was spent in the intervention on any of the types of programs that have been proven to engage Aboriginal children in schools. (Did I hear someone ask why it is that we spend all of this money on Aboriginal issues but do not see much for the money?)

All this in communities where only 47c is spent to the \$1 spent on non-Aboriginal students; in communities where there are not enough teachers and classrooms. A punitive measure placed on families to ensure their children come to school is hypocritical from any government that neglects the same children by failing to provide adequate funding for a teacher and a classroom. Even if it did work to physically bring more children into a classroom, what is the quality of the education they will receive when there has been under-investment in teachers and educational infrastructure?

So here we have a clear example of a policy that has been rolled out that lies completely in contradiction to what the evidence shows works in getting children to school.

And of course, the dismal aspects of this policy do not stop there. The policy wasn’t applied simply to parent’s whose children did not attend school. It applied to anyone who lived in a prescribed area who was on a welfare

payment – whether their children went to school or not, whether they even had children or not. There were people who had fought in wars and managed their money their whole lives who suddenly found their veteran’s pensions quarantined.

When this policy was rolled out, the legislation suspended the Racial Discrimination Act from applying (meaning that complaints could not be made to the Australian Human Rights Commission), suspended protections and rights of appeal under the Northern Territory anti-discrimination legislation and suspended the rights to appeal to the social security appeals tribunal. It took away the rights of the most marginalised within our community to complain about unfair treatment or unfair impact to just about anyone.

It has become fashionable in the pro-intervention, pro-welfare reform quarters to use slogans such as “you can’t eat rights” to justify this kind of trampling on human rights in order to achieve a particular outcome. A kind of “the ends justify the means” reasoning, a modern “this is for your own good” morality tale. But this insipid resort to slogans trivialises (intentionally) the importance of human rights frameworks as a basis for good policy making.

And surely a good policy maker could come up with policies that are both designed to protect women and children and don’t infringe on basic human rights like due process. Surely our policy making capacity isn’t so impoverished that we have to cling to a false dichotomy and assert that it is an either/or when it comes to protection against violence and protection of human rights.

While I am unashamedly advocating for the need to shift from ideologically driven policy to research or evidence based policy, I do acknowledge that there is evidence – and there is evidence.

For example, the government claimed it had evidence that the intervention was increasing the consumption of fresh food because more was being sold through community stores. When questions were asked in senate estimates about how these claims were arrived at it was revealed that the basis of the “evidence” were a series of ten phone-calls to community stores asking whether there was an increase in fresh food sales. Six said “yes”, three said “no” and one said they didn’t know. Now, I don’t want to denigrate the usefulness of phone surveys but one needs to ask more complex questions. For example, who was buying the food? Those whose income was quarantined or the people – the army and an army of public servants – coming in to roll the intervention out.

Despite the claims of Minister Macklin that there is more fresh food being consumed, she has supplied no hard evidence of this, especially since there was no survey done of fresh food consumption before the intervention to compare current consumption rates with.

Let me give you an example now of what I do call evidence. The Sunrise Health Service has been at the frontline in dealing with the health components of the intervention. It operates in the region east of Katherine and covers an area of some 112 000 square kilometres and all

but one community in that area are “prescribed areas” and so subject to the intervention including welfare quarantining. Sunrise has been collecting data since before the intervention and has been able to compare that with data collected now.

For obvious reasons, anaemia is a key measure in monitoring child health. Anaemia in children may be the direct result of poor nutrition. If the diet does not contain foods that contain iron, the child will become anaemic. This suggests that if the family is not able to afford good foods, or if good foods are not available, then the child will become anaemic and growth and development will be affected.

The data indicates anaemia rates in children under the age of five in the Sunrise Health Service region have jumped significantly since the Intervention. From a low in the six months to December 2006 of 20 per cent – an unacceptably high level, but one which had been reducing from levels of 33 per cent in October 2003 – the figure had gone up to 36 per cent by December 2007. By June 2008 this level had reached 55 per cent, a level that was maintained in the six months to December 2008. In two years, 18 months of which has been under the Intervention, the anaemia rate has nearly trebled in our region. It is nearly double the level it was before the Sunrise Health Service was established, and more than twice the rate measured across the rest of the Northern Territory.

According to the World Health Organisation, levels of anaemia above 40 per cent represent a severe public health problem. At 55 per cent, the Sunrise Health Service results can be equated to early childhood anaemia levels in Brazil, Burundi, Iraq and Zambia; and are worse than Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Pakistan, Peru, Jamaica, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Algeria.

The Sunrise Health Service has also seen a worrying rise in low birth weight amongst babies, from 9 per cent in the six months leading up to the Intervention; to 12 per cent in December 2007. In the next six months it rose again to 18 per cent, and the figure stood at 19 per cent by December 2008 – more than double the pre-Intervention rate. The national figure for Indigenous babies is 14.3 per cent; so from doing better than the national average, they are now 20 per cent worse off. Low birth rate has a variety of causes – including poor nutrition amongst mothers and is, associated with anaemia.

Government sources may dispute or seek to discredit these figures, Sunrise Health Service has been doing medical checks on 96 per cent of children in their area; the intervention health checks only screened 74 per cent.

While there is no conclusive proof that the rise in anaemia rates can be causally linked to the Intervention and its effect, it is clear that the Intervention has failed to address a severe health problem that appears to be further deteriorating. It also shows the critical need to investigate claims of improved diet as a result of welfare quarantining.

Other health concerns have been raised by the Sunrise Health Service about the compulsory quarantining of welfare payments. They have documented instances in

which the roll out affected people's capacity to purchase food. This included diabetics, with no local store access, unable to access food for weeks at a time. Their response to this situation was to sleep until food became available.

They also believe that the regime of income management has not reduced alcohol or drug consumption, indeed alcohol restrictions on prescribed communities has merely shifted the problems to larger towns or bush camps. And it has not stopped "humbug" or the conversion of Basic Card purchases into cash for grog. There is also no evidence that it has increased the consumption of fresh food amongst Aboriginal families, which is vital to fighting anaemia.

Underlying all of this is a key mistake that policy makers continue to make about the Indigenous affairs. They continue to overlook and dismiss the knowledge that Aboriginal people have about solving their own problems. This isn't just crazy, leftist, touchy-feely stuff.

We need to move away from only concentrating on the communities that are in crisis to looking at where the successes are. In the face of government neglect and failed policy, many Indigenous communities continue to flourish, creating successful and viable institutions and continuing to keep their cultural values strong and their children safe. We could learn much from what it is that successful organisations and communities do to ensure their effectiveness and viability in this climate and use that information as a basis for developing similar conditions in the communities that fail.

The research in Australia and in Indigenous communities in North America shows consistently that the best way to lessen the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is to include Indigenous people in the development of policy and the design and delivery of programs into their communities. Apart from sounding like common sense, the research shows that this engagement assists with ensuring the appropriateness and effectiveness of those policies and programs and ensures community engagement with them therefore better ensuring their success.

This actually requires a commitment to something that policy makers often overlook: the need to invest in human capital. If participation by Indigenous people is a central factor in creating better policy, program and service delivery outcomes, there needs to be more to build up the capacity for that kind of engagement. This would include:

- rebuilding of an interface between the government and the Aboriginal community through representative structures so that governments can more effectively consult with and work with Aboriginal people.
- focusing on the provision of training and education in ways that improve the capacity of Aboriginal communities. This means moving away from simple solutions of simply removing children into boarding schools but looks at a range of strategies that build the skill sets and capacities of adults as well as

younger people who need to retain contact with their families if they do leave for better schooling opportunities;

- increasing the number of Aboriginal people in the public service and who are engaged with developing and delivering Aboriginal policies and programs; and
- looking at flexible employment arrangements such as work-for-the-dole schemes that understand that in many Indigenous communities there is no viable workforce or there are barriers to entering the workforce. Such schemes can assist with the provision of services and infrastructure in the community at the same time as they build capacity and skills within the community itself.

And here is one of my key points: Indigenous policy is always targeted at intervention, at emergency. It rarely seeks to look at the underlying issues. Addressing disadvantage requires long term solutions, not just interventions. Rather than always reacting to a crisis, a long-term sustained approach requires addressing the underlying causes of disadvantage. This means resourcing adequate standards of essential services, adequate provision of infrastructure and investment in human capital so that communities are developing the capacity to deal with their own issues and problems and have the skill sets necessary to ensure their own well-being. There are no short-cuts, quick fixes or panaceas here.

Whatever the perceptions of the electorate, the fact is that there is not enough money spent on Aboriginal housing, education and health. The pot is too small and no government will fix the problems while all they do is engage in trying to redirect the scarce resources to one pressing need at the expense of others.

I want to conclude with one very important point – another issue that policy makers have not grappled with and a by-product from the focus on the Northern Territory and Cape York in Indigenous affairs. Much of Indigenous policy is targeted at remote communities – resources too. Look at where the previous government and the current government are directing resources for social housing and you will see it is primarily focused on remote communities.

Yet the largest Aboriginal communities do not live in remote areas. They live in cities. The largest is here in Sydney – in Mount Druitt and Blacktown. Over 14 000 Aboriginal people live in the Mount Druitt area alone. And on the recent Australian Bureau of Statistics figures it is one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged communities in the country. More disadvantaged than many of the Aboriginal communities being targeted by the federal government.

The cultivation through neglect of urban Aboriginal slums should surely be a policy impact of the past that we definitely do not want to reproduce now or in the future. □



‘Baptised into Christ’ *From Paul to WATAC*¹

Dr Elizabeth Julian RSM

¹ This address is an adaptation of the one given to the Catholic Bishops and Congregational Leaders of Aotearoa New Zealand, at Waikanae, 6 March 2006. I was invited to give the original address at the 2007 WATAC Conference. However, events overtook me, namely a cardiac arrest. My experience then of the God who can bring life in the most hopeless situations gives me added reason to hope for the change I seek. A reflection on my experience, ‘Easter: Always and Everywhere’ is available at <http://www.welcom.org.nz/?sid=426>. A later reflection ‘Nearly a Holy Soul’ is available at <http://www.welcom.org.nz/?sid=709>

Introduction

Approximately 2000 years ago the apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians:

For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (3:27-28)¹

This is the Year of Paul.² Our prophetic task is clear. It is more urgent than ever. As Catholic women we must persist in calling for ecclesial reform so that we can participate as fully in the Church as in the Pauline churches.³ This task means, above all, changing the imagination of those in the Church who have the power to stop the continuing exclusion and oppression of women caused by what I see as sinful, discriminatory structures and practices. I am arguing, in other words, that our baptism must be taken seriously,⁴ as seriously as Paul took it.

Let me make it clear at the outset that what I offer comes from my perspective as a Pakeha woman religious in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2009. I do not claim to speak on behalf of all women everywhere nor on behalf of women religious at this conference, let alone the rest of the world. I am not speaking on behalf of the Sisters of Mercy, nor am I speaking on behalf of the Wellington Catholic Education Centre. I am quite certain, however, that many Catholic women wherever they may be will identify with my position. Let me also make it clear that I am not arguing for women’s ordination in the current understanding of priesthood. I am arguing that our baptism be taken seriously.⁵

While there are many ways⁶ to explore the conference theme *Futuring Now*, I have taken up Pope Benedict’s challenge (28 June 2008) to find out what ‘Paul wants to speak to us – today.’ The Paul who demonstrated over and over again with utter conviction, ‘I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal 2: 20), challenges us to live out of that same conviction today. I will spend the next hour suggesting some of the implications of this.

Brief outline

After noting my social location, I will:

1. remind us of the Spirit’s presence,
2. identify Church documents giving us a mandate to seek reform,
3. examine the meaning of ‘prophetic’,
4. set out my present concerns,
5. list some signs of hope,
6. explore Galatians 3:27-28,
7. remember some of the women.

Social location

I have been a Sister of Mercy since 1978 and involved throughout that time in the teaching ministry. Apart from study periods at Boston College and at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, I have lived my religious life in Wellington. It is from there that I view the world through a feminist Catholic lens. I live in a country where women have featured prominently in many leadership roles (Prime Minister, Governor General, Chief Justice, Speaker of the House, CEO of the largest company, mayor of Wellington, the capital city, etc). I work in a building in Wellington which houses many Catholic diocesan offices as well as several national offices. It is located across the street from Parliament, next door to the Catholic Cathedral and the Archbishop’s residence, two doors from the Anglican Cathedral and Archbishop’s residence and a two-minute walk from the Reserve Bank, the Prime Minister’s residence, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and many other Government Ministries. My office looks out at Parliament Buildings. Thus I am in the middle of an area in which important social, economic, political and religious decisions are made every day.

Women are able to make decisions at the highest level in all places except the Catholic Church. Why? In a nutshell, because decision-making in the Church is linked to ordination rather than to baptism and at this point in our history the institutional imagination is unable to conceive of women as images of Christ when it comes to presiding

at Eucharist. So I will be arguing throughout this presentation that our baptism be taken seriously and, in this Year of Paul, as seriously as Paul himself took baptism.

A challenge indeed! But as our former Prime Minister Helen Clark said in a radio interview (8/04/09) about taking up her new position as head of the United Nations Development Programme, 'What's life without a challenge?' So let us begin!

The Presence of the Spirit

We need to remind ourselves of the Spirit's presence among us at this gathering⁷. And we can be sure that this Spirit is poured out on all of us, not just some, for we have that wonderful passage from Acts (2:14-21) where Peter quotes from the prophet Joel (2:28):

'It will come to pass in the last days,' God says, 'that I will pour out a portion of my spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. Indeed, upon my servants and my handmaids I will pour out a portion of my spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy.'

We know that we cannot control the Spirit. The Gospel of John tells us: 'The Spirit blows where it wills' (3:8). And it is this very Spirit who will lead us into all the truth (16:13).

So we need to be alert to the signs of the Spirit, bringing newness, bringing hope, bringing a new vision here among us at this conference. Theologically, of course, the only way the Spirit can act to bring about newness is through human agency, and that means through you and me, through all of us here today.

Paul⁸ reminds us today, as he reminded the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:2), that we are holy because God dwells in us through the spirit bestowed on us in our baptism. He asks rhetorically, 'Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?' (1 Cor 3:16).

Paul also reminds us: 'Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances' (1 Thess 5: 19-24). The Spirit can effect more that we can ever hope or imagine. As theologian Richard Lennan (2009a) observes:

Although the Spirit will never invalidate what have been life-giving and authentic 'channels of grace' in the past – God is not arbitrary – not every such channel is efficacious in all ages of the church; *the Spirit can open new paths for the church's faithful discipleship in the present and future: the continuity of tradition, therefore, can express itself in discontinuity.* [italics added]

Our mandate for reform

That we have a mandate to seek reform is found in various Church documents, especially those from Vatican II. A key piece here, of course, is the prophetic statement from *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), which continues to give many of us such hope.

Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on *sex*, race, colour, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as *contrary to God's intent.* (# 29) [italics added].

As theologian Elizabeth Johnson (2002, p. 51) reminds us, the theological term today for 'contrary to God's intent' is sin. What the Council taught is that discrimination against women on account of their sex is sinful.

Another important statement in which we can locate a mandate for seeking reform comes from the 1971 Synod document *Justice in the World*:

While the Church is bound to give witness to justice, she recognises that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes. Hence we must undertake an examination of the modes of acting and of the possessions and life style found within the Church herself. (# 40)

But prior to this, there is a very strong reminder about the need for reform in *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Decree on Ecumenism (1964):

Christ summons the Church to continual reformation as she sojourns here on earth. The Church is always in need of this, in so far as she is an institution of men here on earth. Thus if, in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies in moral conduct or in church discipline, or even in the way that church teaching has been formulated – to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself – these can and should be set right at the opportune moment. (# 6)

The safety net here, of course, for those wishing to maintain business as usual, is the 'deposit of faith', commonly understood as the 'teaching of Jesus Christ as found in Scripture and in the apostolic tradition' (Dallavalle, 1995, p. 409). However, this 'deposit' is not an uninterpreted, objective body of knowledge which fell from on high. It came originally through the minds and pens of men out of their experience upon which they had reflected.⁹ The process of inspiration did not neutralise the human tendency to impose a particular view. Since then this 'deposit of faith' has been and continues to be officially interpreted solely by men, some of whom, according to their lights at the time, sanctioned slavery, the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the death penalty, among other atrocities, and wrote, preached and taught the most horrendous lies about women.¹⁰ Among some of the more well-known statements are the following:

'You are the she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, which is man. On account of your sin, even the Son of God had to die.' (Tertullian)

'The woman with her husband is the image of God in such a way that the whole of that substance is one image, but when she is assigned her function of being a helper, which is her concern alone, she is not the image of God; whereas in what concerns man alone he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman is joined to him in one whole.' (St Augustine)

'a defective male,' 'a misbegotten male' (St Thomas Aquinas)

'Among all savage beasts, none is found to be so harmful as woman.' (St John Chrysostom)

These men sincerely believed that they were being faithful to the Tradition.¹¹ We now know, of course, that they lacked the institutional imagination to see that other truths were indeed possible.

Theologian Nancy Dallavalle (1995, p. 409) calls the 'deposit of faith' 'an inexhaustible treasure of which the Church is the trustee'. Often it seems as if the treasure has been exhausted with nothing more to explore. Thus, the Church has spoken on the ordination of women and the matter is closed. However, the 'deposit of faith' or the 'storehouse of revelation' (*Lumen Gentium* #10) is not the property of the magisterium but rather it is entrusted to the Church as a whole under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (*Dei Verbum* #10). Furthermore:

With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word, *so that revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage.* (GS #44) [italics added]

The Church guards the heritage of God's word and draws from it moral and religious principles *without always having at hand the solution to particular problems.* (GS #33) [italics added]

Promulgated in 1964, *Lumen Gentium* states:

The laity have the right, as do all Christians, to receive in abundance from their spiritual shepherds the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the assistance of the word of God and of the sacraments. They should openly reveal to them their needs and desires with that freedom and confidence which is fitting for children of God and brothers in Christ. They are, by reason of the knowledge, competence or outstanding ability which they may enjoy, permitted and *sometimes even obliged to express their opinion on those things which concern the good of the Church.* (#37). [italics added]

So we have a mandate to seek reform, which is found in Church documents.

Canon Law also supports our call for change:

The Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires. (Can. 212.2)

According to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons. (Can. 212.3)

What we have then in these documents and in Canon Law is, I believe, an invitation, at the very least, to raise questions concerning the full participation of women in the Church today by virtue of our baptism.

It seems to me that we must be allowed to talk about the issue and that the talk must not be an institutional monologue. We need to have a genuine conversation in which the *question* is in control, not the conversation partners, neither of whom can predetermine the outcome (Himes, 2005, p. 29). Both partners need to keep the Gospel in view, to listen with humility, not with the conviction of the rightness of their positions.¹² Both partners really need to ask how the structures and processes of the institutional Church can best serve the truth of the Gospel.

And as theologian Michael Himes (2005, p. 29) points out, we have in our tradition good models of the Church learning from the world¹³ rather than teaching the world, first, in terms of slavery¹⁴ and, second, in the adoption of the language of human rights in Catholic social teaching. In both of these cases the Church did not teach the world, rather it had to learn from the world.¹⁵ These examples should encourage us to hope that the Church will eventually learn something from the 'world' regarding the rights of women. But for this to happen we need to be prophetic.

Sharing in the prophetic task

We all share in Christ's prophetic role as outlined in *Lumen Gentium*:

The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips which give praise to His name. (#12)

Christ, the great Prophet, who proclaimed the Kingdom of His Father both by the testimony of His life and the power of His words, continually fulfils His prophetic office until the complete manifestation of glory. He does this not only through the hierarchy who teach in His name and with His authority, but also through the laity. (#35)

The *prophetic, priestly and royal* condition is common to all the People of God (cf. LG #9, 10, 34, 35, 36).

In *Religious and Human Promotion* (1978) we were reminded that to accomplish the mission of evangelisation

...the Church must search out the *signs of the times* and interpret them in the light of the gospel, thus responding to persistent human questions. (Introduction)

One of the signs of the times that John XXIII identified in 1963 concerned women. In *Pacem in Terris* we read:

[I]t is obvious to everyone that women are now taking a part in public life. This is happening more rapidly perhaps in nations with a Christian tradition, and more slowly, but broadly, among people who have inherited other traditions or cultures. Since women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as inanimate objects or mere instruments, but claim both in domestic and public life, the rights and duties that befit a human person. (#41)

Note, however, that it is **women** who are identified as becoming more aware of their own human dignity. It's not that **men** are becoming more aware of women's dignity, let alone institutions.

We can all 'search out the signs of the times' and we can all read them. To my way of thinking many of them are writ large and clear, but the question is, whose interpretation counts?¹⁶ At this point in our history, my interpretation and that of numerous women like me throughout the world counts for very little. If it did there would be no need to argue that our baptism be fully acknowledged. We would have a Church operating, not just in theory but in practice, as 'women and men equally created in God's image, equally redeemed by Christ, equally called to be disciples, equally entrusted with Christ's

mission, and equally endowed with Spirit' (Reid, 1996, p.10).¹⁷ New Testament scholar Jerome Murphy-O'Connor (1996, p. 290) points out that it is in 1 Corinthians 11:11-12 that we find the first and only explicit defence of the complete equality of women in the New Testament:

In *Redemptionis Donum* (1983), we were again reminded by Pope John Paul that all the baptised share in Christ's prophetic role:

The universal mission of the People of God is rooted in the messianic mission of Christ Himself – Prophet, Priest and King – a mission in which all share in different ways. (#7)

However, a document which refers specifically to women religious and the prophetic nature of religious life is *Vita Consecrata*, the (1996) Synod document. It is the sections below which give me the authority as a religious to claim what I am claiming, i.e., that we need a change in the institutional imagination:

Certainly, the validity of many assertions relating to the position of women in different sectors of society and of the Church cannot be denied. It is equally important to point out that women's new self-awareness also helps men to reconsider their way of looking at things, the way they understand themselves, where they place themselves in history and how they interpret it, and the way they organise social, political, economic, religious and ecclesial life. (#57)

As we saw in *Pacem in Terris*, here once again it is 'women's new self-awareness' that is bringing about changes in how **men** understand **themselves**, **their** place in history, **their** interpretation of it, and the way **they** organise social, political, economic, religious and ecclesial life. The male is still the norm. There is no hint here of the God-given equality of women and men. At the same time, however, the document does urge women religious to use their experience as women in the Church to proclaim prophetically the gospel message of equality:

Having received from Christ a message of liberation, the Church has the mission to proclaim this message prophetically, promoting ways of thinking and acting which correspond to the mind of the Lord. In this context the consecrated woman, on the basis of her experience of the Church and as a woman in the Church, can help eliminate certain one-sided perspectives which do not fully recognise her dignity and her specific contribution to the Church's life and pastoral and missionary activity. Consecrated women therefore rightly aspire to have their identity, ability, mission and responsibility more clearly recognised, both in the awareness of the Church and in everyday life. (#57)¹⁸

All of these documents call us to be prophetic. As Barbara Reid (2009, p. 10) points out, prophets need the support of one another, hence our gathering today. What then is the task of the prophet?¹

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. That is our task today.

New Testament scholar Sandra Schneiders (2000 (2000, p. 138) argues that prophecy is not about telling the future. Rather 'it is about telling what time it is, what it is time for, in the present'. She uses the work of Rabbi Abraham

Heschel (1962) and Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann (1978) to explain that there are three requirements for the prophet:

1. The ability to see and hear the human experience from God's point of view.
2. The ability to:
 - a. lament²⁰ publicly, i.e., to declare to both the oppressor and the oppressed that all is not right with the present situation.
 - b. recall God's promises and thereby give hope for an alternative future.²¹
3. The willingness to suffer and even die²² for the sake of the newness one is called to proclaim.

With this understanding of the prophet's task as background, and in the light of various Church documents calling us all to be prophetic, what then does it mean for us here and now?²³ As I said at the beginning, this ultimately means changing the imagination of those in the Church who have the power to stop the exclusion and oppression of women caused by what I see as sinful, discriminatory structures and practices.²⁴ Timothy Radcliffe OP (2009, p.4) calls for 'institutional creativity so that lay people, especially women, acquire a voice.'

So what are some of these structures and practices? I turn now to the institutional problem as I see it.

My present concerns

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). At my baptism (which called me into the Church²⁵, not out of it) I was anointed to be priest, prophet and king in the same way as everyone else in this room. 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. This is where the real shift in the institutional imagination has to come. At the moment we have cause for despair.

These are the reasons why:²⁶

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 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, an inexcusable practice since it is no longer normative in western society.²⁷
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 God's merciful forgiveness is freely available sacramentally, it can be mediated only through a male cleric.
11. While the Eucharist is **the** sacrament of unity, many women experience it as sacramental exclusion.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. 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.²⁸
15. 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.
16. While women and men can equally image Christ through martyrdom,²⁹ and women and men can re-present Christ's own love in Christian marriage, and the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (#7) makes it clear that Christ is present in the gathered community of both women and men and that when anyone baptises (woman and man) it is Christ who baptises, half of humanity is deemed incapable of imaging Christ in the Eucharist.
17. 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 representation of Christ.
18. While the **Gospel** teaches that the image of Christ resides most clearly in the poor and the suffering, both women and men, e.g., 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.³⁰ Cardinal Levada the Head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, is reported to have explained in a homily why a homosexual priest makes it difficult for people to see the priest as representing Christ, as follows: "I think we must ask, 'Does such a priest recognise how this act places an obstacle to his ability to represent Christ the bridegroom to his bride, the people of God? Does he not see how his declaration places him at odds with the spousal character of love as revealed by God and imaged

in humanity?'" It would seem that Levada is confusing the **symbolic** with the **real**. Christ is not a **real** bridegroom, nor is the Church a **real** bride. If Levada were to follow his logic through, he would have to ask, how is it that men can be images of the Church as bride, while women cannot be images of Christ as bridegroom? (CathNews 28/02/06).

In another example, spiritual writer and priest Daniel O'Leary (2009, p. 10) uses the image of a midwife to describe his priestly ministry. Again the question is raised, if a priest can image a midwife, can a woman image Christ as presider at Eucharist? Paul tells the Corinthians (women and men) to imitate him as he imitates Christ (1 Cor 11:1). He also reminds us that the Spirit confers on us all (women and men) the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16; see Phil 2:5). Clearly, for the Vatican at present the mind is not sufficient.

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

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 shortchanges the theological truth of women's identity in Christ.

So having named some of the abusive structures and practices, is there any cause for optimism?

Glimmers of hope

There are some positive signs. And as the author of 1 Peter advises, 'Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you' (3:15).

Here then are four hopeful signs:

1. When asked about the place of women in the Church, Pope Benedict said that women:

'...will know how to make their own space. And we will have to try and listen to God so as not to stand in their way but, on the contrary, to rejoice when the female element achieves the fully effective place in the Church best suited to her...' (19 August 2006, *The Tablet*)

2. At last October's Synod in Rome on 'The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church', for the first time ever, there were more women than men among the official 'observers'.³¹ At the end of the Synod the 253 members (all bishops and leaders of men's religious orders) submitted 55 overwhelmingly approved proposals for the Pope to base his follow-up document on. The most controversial proposal was #17. Here the bishops suggested that 'the **ministry** [emphasis added] of lector be opened also to women so that their role as announcers of the Word may be recognised in the Christian community'. Why is this so significant? Don't women already read at Mass? Yes, we do and have done since Vatican II. That is, we are allowed to perform the 'function' of reader at Mass, but officially this is only a 'temporary' measure; we cannot be **ministers** of the Word in the same way that men can.³²

Whether or not the Pope grants the bishops' request doesn't really matter. What is important is to recognise the

monumental shift in the institutional (i.e., male) imagination and the overwhelming willingness by the present bishops to heed (deliberately or not) the prophetic statement from Vatican II quoted earlier (*Gaudium et Spes*, # 29).

3. In his homily during the Mass in Dublin in May 2006 to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the founding of the Sisters of Mercy by Catherine McAuley, the Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin, said:

You are called to re-imagine her vision in our time, to re-evaluate structures and to reconfigure yourselves in light of changing realities. Through being authentic towards her charisma, you are called to *change and purify the Church* in our time. [Italics added]

4. That the Pope set in motion a whole year honouring Paul is evidence, I believe, of the Spirit at work. Bishops throughout the world have been urged to get to know the Paul in whose churches women played such very prominent roles and who proclaimed so boldly that we all have equal dignity before God through our baptism in Christ. As New Testament scholar Ronald Witherup (2008, p. 13) observes, the real challenge is to apply the remarkable vision set forth in Galatians 3:27-28 to the Church today:

For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

So what then does this extraordinary text mean? What might it say to us today?

Examining the text

New Testament scholar Carolyn Osiek (2003, p. 192) points out that there are at least five different ways of interpreting these exceedingly difficult verses. One way is to understand the passage as a baptismal formula for new Christians. Because I am trying to argue for our baptism³³ to be taken seriously, this is the interpretation I shall explore.

We need to begin with the Greek text of the first creation account in Genesis: 'So God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God they were created; male and female God created them' (Gen 1:27). The 'male **and** female' that Paul uses probably reflects the Genesis verse. (Note **and** instead of **nor** as in the other two pairs.)³⁴ Now in Paul's time the creation narrative was understood to be a metaphor for the makeup of the human person. In that metaphor, the dividing of human being into two genders signalled the start of the internal separation of the person into rationality (symbolised by the male principle) and sensation (symbolised by the female principle). As a result conflict would soon follow, which is what happens in the Genesis account. So, when Paul uses the phrase 'male and female', it is in the light of this understanding of the human condition. The baptismal formula he quotes suggests that division and conflict in human nature can be overcome through baptism.

So where does that leave us? Does this mean then that sexism and all forms of discrimination are therefore ended? Osiek (2003, p. 192) states, 'If we believe that biblical texts can be prophetic beyond the vision of author, time, and place, there is some validity to this approach.' However, some would argue that other passages in Paul suggest that he does indeed sanction inequalities among Christians.

For example, passages that say that women should keep silent in the churches and be subordinate (1Cor 11:2-16, 14:34-36¹) indicate that Paul did not intend to abolish gender roles between men and women. Nor did he intend to abolish slavery – those who were slaves when they were called to Christ should stay that way (1Cor 7: 21); and the Gentiles would always be a wild olive branch grafted onto the tree of Israel (Rom 11:24). But as Raymond Brown (1996, p. 480) points out, Paul is working out of an apocalyptic mindset. For Paul the death and resurrection of Jesus meant that all were now living in the endtime. There was little time to change present social structures. So Galatians 3:28 is not primarily a statement about social and political equality – legally and socially Jews and Greek, slaves and free remain what they are. Rather the statement is about equality through Christ in God's plan of salvation – they all have equal standing in the Christian community.

Paul says that the Galatians have entered into a new form of life, a life in Christ through baptism. Men and women symbolised this by putting on a white robe during the baptismal ceremony, hence Paul's reference to putting on Christ: 'As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.' (3:27). For Paul then baptism means being clothed in Christ. Baptism is the moment when Christ, like a garment, envelops the believer. The robe was an outward sign of inner transformation. Racial, class and gender discriminations have been erased because social distinctions have been reinterpreted so that they do not benefit some while disadvantaging others. In Paul's society, where the male was the norm and consequently a woman enjoyed privileges only through her connection to an adult male, this was a radically new departure. Baptism erased the privilege that came with gender. Men and women are equal members because they share in Christ through the same baptism. Paul is saying that it is Christ who has restored the original purpose of creation, i.e., to make humankind in God's own image, male and female. In Christ people are 're-created'. Christ has established a totally new reality.

So what did this mean in practice for Paul? Throughout this paper I have been arguing that our baptism needs to be taken seriously. How did women in the early Christian communities actually live out their baptism?

Remembering the women³⁶

As Jerome Murphy O'Connor (1996, p. 289) points out, Paul took it for granted that women were ministers of the church in the same way as men were. He recognised the diverse gifts of both women and men as fruits of the Spirit:

To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes. (1Cor12:8-11)

We find evidence of what the women in the early Christian communities do by virtue of their baptism at the end of arguably the most important New Testament document outside the gospels, the letter to the Romans:

I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.

Greet **Prisca** and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. Greet **Mary**, who has worked very hard among you. Greet Andronicus and **Junia**, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. Greet my relative Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. Greet those workers in the Lord, **Tryphaena** and **Tryphosa**. Greet the beloved **Persis**, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; and greet his **mother**—a mother to me also. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them. Greet Philologus, **Julia**, Nereus and his **sister**, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. (Rom 16:1-16) [emphasis added]³⁷

Here Paul lists twenty-six individuals, including ten women. As Brendan Byrne observes (1996, pp.450-451) these women bear more than half of the descriptive phrases denoting service and labour on behalf of the community and the Gospel. Because time constraints prevent me from examining all ten women I will describe the first two only, Phoebe and Prisca.^{38,39} Elizabeth Castelli (1998, 1999), Gillman (1992), Margaret MacDonald (1999), Carol Meyers (2000), Carolyn Osiek, Margaret MacDonald with Janet Tulloch (2006) and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (2003) are some of the scholars who provide much valuable evidence about the participation of these women in the early church.

Phoebe is of particular significance.³⁹ As a deacon (*diakonos*)⁴⁰ of the Church at Cenchreae in eastern Corinth she is obviously one of the most prominent women in the early church. She heads the list of co-workers to be welcomed and greeted by the Church in Rome to which she is being sent as an official minister, one who preaches and teaches. Paul uses the same word (*diakonos*) to describe himself (1 Cor 3:5, 2 Cor 6:4). Paul also acknowledges that Phoebe has been a *prostati* (benefactor or patron)⁴¹ of many, including himself (Rom 16:2). This meant that she used her resources to support the missionary work of Paul and others, perhaps paying their expenses and ensuring connections were made to other wealthy patrons. It also meant that she was able to direct operations – choosing where missionaries were to go and what points they were to include in their message. As a patron her house would have been available for the community's Eucharistic celebrations and she probably presided over them (Reid, 2008, p. 2). Paul also calls Phoebe 'our sister' (*adelphē*). He frequently uses the masculine equivalent of the term, i.e., 'brother' when referring to his very important missionary collaborator, Timothy (e.g., Phlm 1; 2 Cor 1:1; 1 Thess 3:2).

Thus it is a title that bestows much respect. Phoebe's importance is also borne out by the fact that Paul recommends to the Romans (Rom 6:2) in the same way as he recommends Timothy to the Corinthians (1 Cor 16:10). Osiek and MacDonald with Tulloch (2006, p. 216) argue that it is likely that 'Paul is not just commending Phoebe to a new group but is participating in some greater plan, which may have been instigated not by Paul but by Phoebe.'

Another prominent woman is Prisca who, like her husband Aquila, is a co-worker (*synergos*) (Rom 16:3). Paul is grateful to the missionary couple because they have risked their lives for him.⁴² In fact all the Gentile churches are grateful. Her high esteem is borne out by the fact she is named first in four of the six times the couple is mentioned in Acts and the Pauline letters. Like Paul they are tent-makers and would have used these skills to support their missionary activity. In Ephesus they instructed the great missionary Apollos – perhaps about a baptismal matter since Luke tells us that Apollos knew only of the baptism of John (Acts 18:25).

Prisca and Aquila have a church in their house in Corinth, Ephesus and Rome (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:5). Several women were heads of house-churches where the early Christians gathered for Eucharist and preached the good news. According to Acts (17:4, 12) women were among the wealthy and prominent converts and would have had a significant role in founding, sustaining and promoting such house-churches (Schüssler Fiorenza, 2003, p. 209). For example, Paul greets Apphia 'our sister' who with Philemon and Archippus was a leader of a house-church in Colossae (Phlm 2).⁴³ There is a church in the house of Nympha of Laodicea (Col 4:15), while a prayer meeting took place in the house of Mary the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12). The business woman Lydia offered her house to the Christian mission (Acts 16:14). As Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza points out, there is nothing to suggest that women were excluded from the leadership of these house-churches and from presiding at their eucharistic celebrations.⁴⁴

Conclusion

So even with this very brief look at two of the women named by Paul at the end of his letter to the Romans there is much evidence to suggest that being 'baptised into Christ' for them meant something different from what it means for us today. Women were able to participate fully in the early Christian communities. Decision-making did not require ordination. I have argued throughout this address that our Catholic tradition gives us the mandate to seek reform. We must continue the struggle for our baptism to be taken seriously. Paul is still saying to us:

For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (3:27-28)

And he assures us:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38-39) □

We Gathered to Dream

A Church

Described as 'One of the best things to come out of Sweden since Abba', the lyrical and inspired film *As It Is In Heaven* provided a group of sixteen women with a powerful focus for reflection, prayer and discussion when they gathered at the Kiama home of Marie Milne on Saturday 28th February for a day facilitated by Bernice Moore.

In the film, the director and writer Kay Pollak departs from the usual stereotypical boundaries constructed by Hollywood and powerfully illustrates the complexity of humanity. This is what ultimately makes the characters so relatable, their stories so devastating and the triumphs so sweet.

It seemed fitting that it was held during the first week of Lent as the figures and events of the Lord's Passion were woven so poignantly into the symbolism of *As It Is In Heaven's* imagery, music and story. We wept, empathised, were enraged and uplifted as we watched the narrative unfold.

Both those who had seen the film many times and those who were seeing it for the first time felt the shared insights, and conversation proved invaluable in moving them to a new place of understanding, both of the multiple layers of the movie and the significance of the message for us as individuals and as the body of Christ.

A moving liturgy concluded the day in which many questions were raised, many issues explored and many wisdoms shared; thus enabling us to see with new eyes, act with renewed courage, and dream with renewed hope.

Marie Milne

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BANNOCKBURN (South Brisbane): This is still a tentative group which hopes to meet every two months on a Saturday at 2 pm at Therese Flynn-Clarke's home, 18 Thwaites St. Bannockburn 4207 (07)3804 0636 dctfc@optusnet.com.au

BROKEN BAY Group (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: knowlden@optusnet.com.au

EASTERN SUBURBS Group. This group usually meets on a Sunday 2pm-4.30pm monthly. Meetings dates for the rest of the year are 28th September, 26th October, 30th November. Venue: 8 Dudley Street, Randwick. Contact: Carmel Maguire 02 9398 1004 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: 02 9520 4240 Email: keyes888@bigpond.com Engadine group members also meet every 2nd Sunday of the month at 10am for Prayer and Reflection: for more information contact Alma Madden 02 9520 8684 Email: admin@watac.net

INNER CITY Group meets at 62 Boyce St, Glebe at 7pm on third Monday of each month. Contact: Margaret Cody 02 9692 9384 Mobile: 0419 426 174 Email: margaret.cody1@bigpond.com

LISMORE HEIGHTS Group meets 1st Tuesday of each month for coffee & spiritual nourishment at 'La Baracca Coffee Shop' 29 Keen Street, Lismore. 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 last dates for 2008 are 11th October, 22nd November. Venue: Varies each meeting. For further information 02 4456 4445 Email: powe@zip.com.au

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 02 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. Contact: Bernice Moore Email: bernice@watac.net or Maureen Hager 02 9580 5384: maureen_hager@optusnet.com.au

WAGGA WAGGA Group meet at Wagga Wagga on the first Monday of the month at 7.30pm at Ros Bennett's, 14 Tarakan Avenue. Contact: Rosslyn Bennett. Email rosbennett@ozemail.com.au

WOLLONGONG Group meets on the 4th Saturday of every month February to November at Thirroul, 2pm - 4.30pm. Contact: Jan Ryan 02 4268 5965 Email: jjryan@iprimus.com.au or Mary Medley mbmedley@bigpond.net.au Medley: mbmedley@bigpond.net.au

YOUNG: This Group has recently started. For information contact Pat Cudmore 02 6383 3205 Email: pat.cudmore@cg.catholic.org.au or Kerry Ray 02 6382 5460

Group Reports

Milton/Ulladulla

Eight members met on Saturday 4th April at Judi Powe's home just north of Milton. We welcomed a new member Monica, then we peppered Bernice with questions re the previous Saturdays meeting in Sydney at the Salvation Army's Citadel, to discuss Bishop Geoffrey Robinson's book. It must have been a very interesting day.

In preparation for the Conference we looked at the DVD 'A Well Founded Fear'. There is so much that could be said, the bleakness of Kabul, the poverty, the beauty of 'Hope' expressed so simply, the pain on the face of the old woman who spent hours trying to find the Westerners who may be able to help find her son, the young father who watched his daughters die, then the bleakness of the cemetery.

In the midst of this was Phil Glendinning. Caring, listening, encouraging people to open up and tell their story. Sensitive to the danger of those meeting him. The men trapped in Syria because of manipulative Australian officials left us speechless. How did we let this happen?

We were enlightened into how much we are 'protected' from much of the real workings of respective Government departments. That many refugees were sent to countries not of their origin with false passports smacks of behavior none better than the current 'Underbelly' corruption that causes us to shake our heads. Perhaps the ongoing National Human Rights Consultation forums would be a good place to inform the present Government of changes needed in Refugee Programs.

A lovely lunch gave us time and space to digest what we had seen. This was followed by more discussion and Bernice gave us some details of the Human Rights Consultation currently underway through the Attorney General's Dept. The day concluded with a Liturgy on the theme of Autumn. This picked up the theme of 'letting go' and leaving room in the heart for love. We will meet next at the Conference. Then locally at Kath Prendergast's on Saturday 4th July.

Judi Powe, Ann Troup & Kath Prendergast

Wagga Wagga

WATAC Wagga now has returned to meeting the 1st Monday of each month. This year we are still carrying on with the book *Roots and Wings* by Margaret Silf. Each month we are challenged and encouraged by her insights into the scriptures. Conversation often leads us to see how we can create change within our local area. Last month we looked at the issue of young people who seem lost, angry and destructive. Perhaps we can try more to be a listener rather than closing the door to them.

Three of us from Wagga were able to attend the WATAC conference: Peggy Adamson, Mary Crimmins and Ros Bennett. One of the real positives is meeting up with so many other women and share in their stories. Our speakers gave us much to think and ponder about.

Ros Bennett

Eastern Suburbs

We have met four times this year so far and have found much to discuss and learn from. Our reading of Bishop Geoffrey Robinson's book was followed up by the chance to listen to him at the [always wonderful] WATAC Conference 'Futuring Now' in May. Members who were able to attend reported to the rest of the Group at our subsequent meeting, where the quality of Sister Elizabeth Julian's contribution was also acknowledged and the other contributors in Professor Larissa Behrendt and Mr Glen Glendinning. Our reading of Michael Morwood's *From Sand to Solid Ground* is providing plenty of food for thought and debate. We also very much enjoyed participation in the liturgy on the theme of peace prepared by Bernice at our May meeting. We look forward to preparing a liturgy three or four times per year in future.

Carmel Maguire

Glebe-Inner City Group

We meet monthly on the third Monday and it is very gratifying to see familiar faces. Our last meeting on 18 May was just after the Conference which we discussed in full. We then had a brainstorming about what WATAC means to us. Comments included:

1. It is an arena where I can say what I really mean and be heard and understood;
2. I look forward to our meetings, whether structured or not;
3. Free spirits coming together - common pool of thought - refreshing, interesting, one of the few places where we can be heard;
4. The opportunity to meet such wonderful people and hear both diverse and relevant speakers;
5. Group spirituality;
6. Take part in discussion on various issues;
7. Strength/reassurance and affirmation of inclusive language;
8. Education of the next generation - children and grandchildren - consciousness raising and awareness;
9. Expression of what we are feeling;
10. Helping a thinking woman remain a Catholic;
11. Development of our spirituality in contrast to the patriarchy.

Many thanks to Alma Madden for her work involving Phil Glendinning's DVA *A Well-Founded Fear*. Such courage from Phil and his team!

Helen O'Brien

Broken Bay

For our March meeting we took an unusual step by inviting one of only two Seminarians in Broken Bay Diocese to join us. We thought it would be interesting to know what their training involves with regards to women and to give him the opportunity of hearing our thoughts on the current state of the church. Chris is a charming young man, with seemingly all the potential to make an excellent priest. As the only survivor of an original group of three who started three years ago, he has been on his own until recently when he was joined by one more Seminarian. They both attend the Catholic University and are free to mix with other students – unlike their counterparts in some other seminaries who remain strictly within their ‘enclave’ and never venture abroad.

The meeting took off well as we each introduced ourselves, giving a run-down of our connection with WATAC and the Church, and a potted life story. This was intended for Chris’s benefit but a more recent, younger member said that the introductions helped her to get to know others in the group in a very meaningful way. It made me realise that it is important for newcomers to be given background information – even those of us who have been in the group for nearly twenty years may need reminding.

Chris was quizzed on the issue of women’s ordination and he said that the subject was never mentioned in the seminary or as part of his training!!

Our meeting in May focussed on Elizabeth Julian’s concerns (as handed out at the Conference. We especially noted the statement:

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!!!

Margaret Knowlden

Penshurst

In recent months the group has continued our study of Bishop Robinson’s book *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church*. As we meet on the fourth Monday of each month our May meeting was spent watching ‘Australian Story’ as the program was about the St.Mary’s community in South Brisbane having to leave their Church at the request of the local Bishop .It seemed to all of us a very sad state of affairs when such an alive and active Catholic community can be excluded from the Church while there are so many dead and dying parishes everywhere.We noted especially how inclusive the St. Mary’s community is and admired their outreach to the poor and their leadership.

All of our members attended and enjoyed the Conference . Everyone noted the quality of the speakers and liked the one day setting.The Friday evening dinner was also a very pleasant event. Our thanks to all of the committee for the huge amount of work the Conference entailed.

Maureen Hager

Inverell

We now have a ‘Thursday Group’ which meets weekly from 1 - 3 p.m. for discussion, reflection and often a period of silence in the garden, weather permitting.

This week our discussion centred on Reconciliation Week and the coming Myall Creek gathering on June 6th. It being Christian Unity Week, we discussed the Unity Dinner which I had organised the previous evening – a last minute initiative which turned out to be a huge success. We needed twenty participants to make it viable and in the end there were fifty-two which surpassed our wildest expectations. Like all ecumenical events, Catholics sat themselves down with Catholics, Uniting folk with Uniting (only one Anglican so she was obliged to mix!) so after the first course, I invited all those who could to leave their seats (which they did very reluctantly, one fellow even muttering to me that I was taking him well out of his comfort zone) and mingle for a few moments and then go with someone they didn’t know and sit with them for the rest of the meal. I told them of the difficulties of getting Catholics to sit in different places and how the back pews were the first to be filled, trying to lighten the atmosphere and then a mini-miracle happened, everyone got into the mood and it swung on from there. We had community singing from hymns to “What a wonderful world” and I taught them to sing all the books of the Bible to the tune of “The Ash Grove” which was another minor miracle as I’m known to be tone-deaf! Problem was it was hard to get rid of them at the end of the evening – they wanted to stay on singing and chatting. My very best friend now is the Seventh Day Adventist minister who has promised some funds for Sanctuary Inverell, the refugee resettlement group.

Tomorrow we are welcoming a small family from the Republic of Congo – Bernice is now an honorary Sanctuary member as she is meeting the family, taking them to Domestic and putting on the plane northwards. So what with finding a house and furnishing it this week and having fun celebrating Christian Unity among the “grass-roots”, this week has been full-on. I begin to look back with nostalgia on the two months when I couldn’t walk because of the broken ankle and just sat in an armchair having cooked meals brought in daily (I reckoned that if I played my cards right, I need never cook again!) However, I do believe that we find God in the people and circumstances of every day and so each day is blessed though sometimes exhausting.

Rosemary Breen

WATAC 2009 Annual General Meeting

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