

## Editorial (Ann McNelley)

With each publication of Sychar Solidarity we hope to pay tribute to the natural season of the year as well as the liturgical season closest to the edition. Though we have celebrated the Easter Triduum we remain in the Easter Season.

Recently I found a beautiful poem by Joyce Rupp. Three of the verses are presented here.

### Autumn Blessing

“Blessed are you, Autumn,  
Chalice of transformation,  
You lift a cup of death to our lips  
And we taste new life.

Blessed are you, Autumn,  
Season of the heart’s yearning,  
You usher us into places of mystery  
And, like the leaves, we fall trustingly  
Into eternal unseen Hands. ....

Blessed are you Autumn,  
Season of surrender,  
You teach us the wisdom of letting go  
As you draw us into new ways of living.”

As we continue through this season may we be blessed with a new beginning, one which leads us into seeing with new eyes of redeeming grace.



**A preview of some of the many books available from Sychar's spirituality library:**

**The Divine Dance (Mary McConachy)**



I have long been a fan of Richard Rohr. I have read his books, listened to his tapes and CDs, and on a couple of occasions I have travelled to Brisbane to listen to him lecture in person. From reading "The Divine Dance" I have learned so much about the Trinity. I have learned a whole new way of understanding God - a God who is truly Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a God who is pure relationship. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each defined by the other, in the other, for the other, through the other, to the other. In the Trinity we discover ourselves anew. We are made for relationship with God and with each other. We are called to participate in the Divine Dance.

The Russian artist Andrei Rublev has captured the essence of the Trinity in his famous icon. Richard Rohr is captivated by the icon and its depiction of the Trinity. The icon features prominently in the Divine Dance. Father, Son, and Spirit are in a circle and the gaze between the three is one of deep respect. They sit at a table in a circle. Richard says there is room at the table for us. The Divine circle is not a closed circle. We are all invited to a place at the table and to share in the dance. The Divine Dance is a book I would highly recommend.

John O'Donohue, the Irish poet and mystic, in his book, "Eternal Echoes" has a beautiful chapter on prayer. He recommends each of us find our own special prayer and memorise it so we can carry it wherever we go. My special prayer comes from the Divine Dance.....

God for us, we call you Father  
God alongside us, we call you Jesus  
God within us, we call you Holy Spirit  
You are the eternal mystery that enables, enfolds and enlivens all things  
Even us and even me.  
Every name falls short of your goodness and greatness  
We can only see who you are in what is.  
We ask for such perfect seeing  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen

## Radical Amazement (Mary Otto)

The title on the cover said it all: “Radical Amazement: Contemplative Lessons from Black Holes, Supernovas, and Other Wonders of the Universe”. During the months of February and March, a group of seven



Hubble: Space Telescope: Galaxy Cluster Abell 520

gathered each Wednesday afternoon to share their reflections on the writings of Judy Cannato in her book, “Radical Amazement”. Having previously read the prescribed chapters leading up to each gathering, we began each session with a relevant song, followed with stillness and silence, as together we contemplated the wisdom of the author and its impact on our own life experiences.

*The reason why the universe is eternal is that it does not live for itself; it gives life to others as it transforms.*

Lao Tzu

Through the lens of science and faith, the weekly gatherings provided an opportunity for us to deepen our understanding of the presence of the Divine in our lives and in our world. We explored the wonders of creation, imbued with the presence of the Divine, through Judy Cannato’s gift of sharing, in simple and easy to understand terms, the science of such matters as photosynthesis, morphogenic fields, black holes, holons, supernovas, and dark energy and dark matter. During each session we shared what we found in Cannato’s words to be ‘radically amazing’ as well as that which we found challenging for us in our own personal lives, at the same time considering what it is the Spirit calls us to be.

On a personal level, I was reminded of the fact that the elements of the first instance of creation are present in and through me and all of life that surrounds me. Through the reality of science, coupled with my experience of faith, I gained a heightened awareness of the unmistakable connection of all of creation and through that, a deepening consciousness of the communion of love in which all of life exists – that which we name as Divine Presence. Radically amazing - it truly is!





### **The Universal Christ (John Briffa)**

In late December, the Sychar House of Prayer & Spirituality achieved another milestone with the formation of the first men's group, gathering to reflect and share their experience on reading *The Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr.

Billed as a seven week guided reflection, the group gathered in a prayerful way at Sychar to be lead through a series of focused exercises as a means of reflecting on the wisdom sourced from the pages of the popular and universally acclaimed book published in 2019.

The group of seven men bravely broke with convention to share their experiences of faith, a knowledge which expanded in light of reading the writings of Rohr, while being meaningfully coupled with real life experience.

Getting a group of men together to talk matters of faith is a big ask of itself, but timing it around school holidays and the Christmas break was always going to be problematic. Not to mention the continual uncertainties caused by Covid 19. Each meet however, provided the opportunity to express spiritual insights in a respectful and non-judgemental space.

*The Universal Christ* is a heavy read, embracing the concept of an Incarnational Worldview and seemingly written in a style that may be described as a verbal stream of consciousness. Despite the challenges, the group has been grateful for the experience and a pleasure to be a part of.



## Mindfulness Course (Jo Cosgrove)

Over the course of eight weeks during February and March, a wonderful group of people undertook the mindfulness course with me at Sychar. The origins of mindfulness go back thousands of years to many faith traditions, including Buddhism and Christianity. The Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh brought mindfulness to the fore at the end of last century with his published text, 'The Miracle of Mindfulness'. He shared a long friendship with Brother David Steindl-Rast, a Benedictine monk, who was sent by his abbot to participate in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, for which he received Vatican approval in 1967. In preparation for this course at Sychar, I really enjoyed linking the wisdom of St Julian of Norwich, St Teresa of Calcutta and others from the Christian faith tradition with mindfulness.

During the eight weeks of the course, the group was introduced to many meditations that they practised at home each week. They also undertook simple activities that helped them be present in the 'here and now'. One activity was to walk mindfully – really savouring the sights and sounds of nature, rather than our mind being filled with chattering and 'unhelpful' thoughts. Sychar was an ideal space for the mindfulness course as the beautiful grounds were so accessible and the picture windows allowed nature to spill in! The presence of kookaburras near the well during our mindful walk, was also very awe-inspiring!



Mindfulness teaches you to sense when things are overwhelming and to simply be in this moment of breath or sound, letting go of fearful thoughts. It also reminds you of the importance of gratefulness, kindness and self-care, the power to let go, to forgive and the power of community. Participating in a group setting when learning about mindfulness, is far more effective than learning by yourself at home. I have found, from experience, that mindfulness, like shared prayer, creates a bond between participants.

My favourite meditation of the whole course is the 'Befriending Meditation' where you think of blessings for yourself and others. This links with the following quote from Richard Rohr (daily meditations from the Centre for Action and Contemplation <https://cac.org/>):

*Faith is not simply seeing things at their visible, surface level, but recognising their deepest meaning. To be a person of faith means we see things—people, animals, plants, the earth—as inherently connected to God, connected to ourselves, and therefore, absolutely worthy of love and dignity. That's what Jesus is praying for: that we could see things in their unity, in their connectedness.*

The way participants entered wholeheartedly into the mindfulness experience resonates with the words of Brother Steindl-Rast:

*I think “wholeheartedness” is the English word that expresses what mindfulness as a technical term means; that you respond to every situation from your centre, from your heart --that you listen with your heart to every situation, and your heart elicits the response.*

**Reference Text: Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World [With CD (Audio)]** by Mark Williams also available from Sychar

**NOTE:** *I hope to run the eight-week mindfulness course again at Sychar in October/November. This would be in ‘after work’ hours for interested people who can’t attend at an earlier time. A flyer will be sent out prior to October, advertising these dates.*

**ANAM CARA** (Clare Smith)

*Anam Cara* means “soul friend” and is the name chosen for the group which gathers fortnightly at Sychar to deepen faith through a process of spiritual reflection and conversation based on the Ignatian tradition. The format of the sessions includes:

- Gathering
- Reading a piece of scripture, like the Sunday Gospel
- Spending 15 minutes in silent meditation and journaling,
- Sharing and listening.

If you are interested in personally participating in such a group or in gathering a group of friends or parish members together to set up an Anam Cara group, you may contact one of the following for assistance:

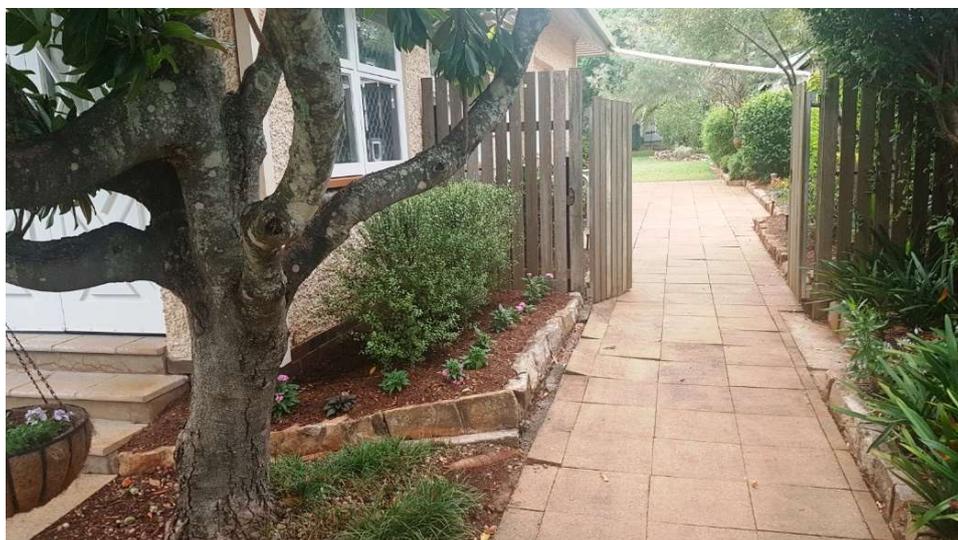
**Anam Cara Coordinators:**

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**Sychar Coordinator:**

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## **An Emmaus Journey (Sr. Elaine Morzone)**

We are all creatures of suffering and joy. Whether we recognise God or not, the One “in whom we live and move and have our being” is always with us in our suffering and our joy. The journey that Cleopas and his unnamed companion took to the village of Emmaus on the afternoon of the Resurrection was truly an Easter journey, moving through the mystery of the Cross to new life. The revelation they encountered in Jesus is exactly where the cross was leading them – exactly where our journey to the cross leads us today. Alleluia!



### **The Road to Emmaus (Author Unknown)**

We wept as we walked, Cleopas and I,  
Going along the dusty road to Emmaus,  
Talking over the heavy news we carried to our friends there,  
News of our Lord's dying, nailed to the wooden cross,  
Stripped and beaten and crowned with thorns,  
The Romans jeering and the disciples scattered,  
The sun darkened and the temple curtain torn in half.

We wept, and we remembered the last three days  
Full of fear and the sound of weeping, stifled.  
As we walked, a man came up with us  
And asked us what sad thing we talked of.  
So we told him of Jesus, and our hopes for redemption  
From the trampling boot heels of the Romans,  
And the death of all our hopes on the cross.

And we told him the strangest news of all,  
The tomb empty in the morning light, the stone  
Rolled away from the door, and the angel's message.  
Then he began to draw together strands of scripture,  
Words of prophecy that, taken all together,  
Laid forth the life and death of our Lord in a new light,  
A clear message of salvation.

We ceased to weep, and our dead hopes,  
crushed beneath the heavy cross,  
Stirred into the beginning of new life.  
And then, when he broke bread with us  
that evening in the tiny village,  
Children's shouts still ringing  
at their dusty games in the gathering twilight,  
We saw in the stranger's face our risen Lord,

And suddenly the world was full of light,  
And the beauty of the evening was piercingly intense,  
More filled with hope than any hour had been before.  
We were clean again, the marks of tears gone from our cheeks,  
Fresh, the road's dust and our sweat all gone.

Surrounded by light more brilliant than a thousand stars,  
We moved back along the road to Jerusalem,  
And our steps were as light as joy.

**Questions for reflection or journaling:**

- What AWAKENS in you as you reflect on this Scripture story?
- Which part of the Passage captures your attention, your interest?
- What feelings does it evoke?



**Meditation** (Clare Smith)

Treat Yourself.....

Take some time to sit in nature this autumn  
and contemplate the beauty of your surroundings.

Breathe in the sights, sounds and smells provided free for our enjoyment!

Breathe out the worries and troubles of the day.

Three garden stations have seen set up at Sychar:

1. The Well of Encounter



2. Oneness in the Mystery of Suffering



3. Creation: God's First Incarnation



**Newsletter Committee**

Ann McNelley (Editor)  
Gerard Bowe (Photography)  
Clare Smith  
Elaine Morzone

You are welcome to avail yourself of the peacefulness, beauty and invitation to deeper awareness that the garden at Sychar offers.