

**Editorial:** Ann McNelley.

With the cold snaps and the higher than usual winter rainfall it promised to be a better, and in some ways, different spring. Even during the cold months, there were signs of the promise



of things to come. The grass didn't "brown off" as it so often does. In my garden the birds starting nesting earlier.

So many of us are wondering what the Plenary Council will bring. Will it be a "Springtime in the Church" in Australia? Indeed, it seems the Universal Church needs a new springtime. I think it is said best in the words of Pope Francis: "We are not living in an era of change but rather a change of era."

Sr. Elaine put this beautifully in a recent reflection day when we were asked to increase the space of our tent. To look beyond what is now and challenge ourselves to a new way of seeing, understanding and participating.

The danger, perhaps, is in trying to fix everything at once. We need "a holding space, a time to allow something new to emerge."

### **Strategies to hold space in a world crowded with ideas, filled with busyness**

*("Holding Space for the Emergence of Religious Life", Sean Peters LCWR Occasional Papers Winter 2021)*

1. Listen and pay attention (specifically to what enlivens, brings you and others excitement)
2. Look toward the fringes (The outliers who are doing God's work in very different ways)
3. Remember, the emerging may not look familiar, but it will gather people and will generate enthusiasm
4. Read widely and in unusual fields (get outside your comfort zone)
5. Take time to play (encourages us to try the new, to experiment)
6. Pray to the Spirit for openness
7. Make time to just be
8. Recognise vision and building relationships (rather than administration) as essential aspects of leadership
9. Create opportunities for wonder and awe
10. Build diverse relationships (work to let go of familiar concepts and see life from another's point of view.)

## **“Enlarge the Space of Your Tent.” (Mary McConachy)**

On Saturday 21st August I had the good fortune to attend this workshop. The day was divided into three sections:

- *Creation- The first manifestation of God,*
- *Jesus of Nazareth- the definitive revelation of God in human life,*
- *“Resurrection – humanity awakens to the Universal Christ Mystery.*

Elaine gave in-depth explanations of each section accompanied by prayer, song and beautiful images. For me there were many “aha” moments that resonated deeply. One that I have dwelt on repeatedly is that God is a river and we are in the river with Him and He is with us as the river goes through many stages: some peaceful, some with suffering, some wild and free. We listened to the song “God is a River”, by Peter Mayer. I love the refrain in this song:



“God is a river not just a stone  
God is wild raging rapids  
And a slow meandering flow  
God is a deep and narrow passage  
And a peaceful sandy shoal  
God is a river, swimmer so let go.”

By the end of the day I felt that I had indeed enlarged the space of my tent .I had broadened my perspective and widened my horizons, and I hope to stretch them expansively into the future. I understand now that my tent is my mind, my heart, my soul, my psyche, all that goes to make up the inner me. I came home enriched, enlivened and full of hope. I wish more people could share the experience offered, so richly enhanced by Elaine.

## **First Spiritual Exercises Retreat (Jo Cosgrove).**

Friday 10<sup>th</sup> September was the final day for the First Spiritual Exercises Retreat entitled ‘Inner Peace in Friendship with Jesus’ at Sychar. The four components were:

- Week 1 – Jesus, A Friend in Creation
- Week 2 – Jesus, A Friend for Every Day
- Week 3 – Jesus, A Friend for Every Time
- Week 4 – Jesus, A Friend for Life

Sr Elaine and I directed this FSE retreat. Six retreatants participated by meeting five times for group prayer and reflection after prayer. At home, the retreatants undertook individual prayer which is guided by a prayer handbook ‘The First Spiritual Exercises: Four Guided Retreats’ by Michael Hansen SJ.



A special journal called a “Listening Book” is used by retreatants during the individual and group prayer experience.

My personal experience of Ignatian Spirituality began around 1999 when I was invited to participate in ‘Retreats in Daily Life’ which were directed by Jesuit Tertiaries visiting Toowoomba. These retreats were very profound experiences for me and I consider Ignatian Spirituality to be one of the most powerful ways of living my Catholic Faith. Ignatian Spirituality taught me to have a personal friendship with Jesus which I believe enriched my teaching of Religion to my students.

This retreat will be offered via Zoom for interested participants in Fourth Term (on the five Monday evenings of the month of November). A more detailed advertisement will be sent out as soon as possible. Many thanks to the participants of the retreat this term who gathered at Sychar and undertook this retreat with faithfulness and openness.

### **Awakening to the Giftedness of Male Spirituality (Rohitha [Robie] Jayawardhana)**

In a bygone time, a man’s life found meaning in providing for and protecting his family, producing or creating things, and talking regularly to God as he faced seasonal changes and weather events that would impact significantly his day-to-day life. Gender mattered because greater strength and power naturally directed men towards physical work and women towards home-making, child-rearing and nurturing. Technologies such as contraception, electricity, and machinery, along with the disappearance of jobs that reward physical strength, have made it less obvious why men should be the creators, producers, and breadwinners and women bring up children, do the cooking and keep house. Today, we tend to make money rather than things. We are more likely to interact daily with a computer screen rather than the elements, and God’s hand in redirecting our lives seems far less obvious.

This is the context in which six of us met each week for seven weeks to explore male spirituality. Our vehicle to stimulate discussion was the Richard Rohr book “From Wild Man to Wise Man: Reflections on Male Spirituality”, based on Joseph’s Campbell’s hero’s journey, but enlightened by Christian tradition. Like Campbell, Rohr invites us to step outside what we know or what our biology is calling us to be, and with the help of a mentor, embark on a journey that forces us to grow or perish. Unlike Campbell, Rohr’s mentor is Christ, and our journey is to explore the continuous call to die to oneself as we live for the world and for others.



Spirituality was therefore the state of consciousness that would allow Christ into our hearts, to lead us, so we are not leading ourselves. Each of us approached this quest differently.



Coming together was a wonderful opportunity to share these differences. It also highlighted a common desire - finding the right balance (for ourselves) of masculine and feminine energy that would allow us to be the embodiment of Christ's call to love. It is a privilege to be in the presence of men committed to these ideals and prepared to share their stories.

The sessions start with a prayer, move into a ten-minute meditation, then sharing where participants choose to talk about one of the following:

- What has my spiritual quest looked like this week?
- What struck me about the reading for the week?

The facilitator then identifies the chapter for the following week by reading a sentence or paragraph from it and inviting the group to share spontaneous reactions. We then have a closing prayer and retreat to the tea room for tea/coffee.

We all enjoyed it so much that the group wants to continue next term.

### **Sitting with the indwelling spirit. Resting in stillness** (Stephanie East)



This was a very enriching time, with a perfect balance of imparting knowledge, time for stillness and time for reflection.

Elaine Bartlett led us in a wide variety of meditative practices including a breath and gratitude practice, mindfulness, contemplative prayer, the practice of setting an intention before silent prayer, the use of music including every day music, mantras (the mantra I chose was 'fun') and an outdoor grounding practice.

Not only was the day a beautiful experience, but it was also inspiring. It has been easy to incorporate elements of practices learned on the quiet day into my day to day life.

**Essence**, Mary Southard CSJ

### **Stillness, Silence, Simplicity: Pilgrimage to our Centre** (Hilary Fogerty)

On Saturday, 11th September, a quiet, reflective morning was held at Sychar. The focus of the morning was to provide an introduction to Christian meditation.

A large group gathered to meditate, to listen to recorded talks by Benedictine monk Dom John Main, who revived the ancient practice of Christian meditation, and to spend time walking or sitting and reflecting out in the beautiful garden. There were also opportunities to talk and share thoughts and ideas.

It was a glorious day and it was wonderful to meet others who belong to various meditation groups in Toowoomba and Warwick.



*"Don't just do something: sit there."*

## Anam Cara (Mary Allen)

I have reflected on the previous twelve months and realised that I have travelled a great distance spiritually. I was feeling desolate and undernourished spiritually. I would become angry over news reports on local and world events. I experienced anger that I didn't know I was capable of. Then came my rescue package. Sychar offers many programmes and my involvement in Friday's spiritual gatherings has provided me with spirituality input second to none. It has reminded me that my God is with me at all times. If I felt distanced from Him it was because of my actions or inactions. These Friday sessions have shown me that the Blessed Trinity is at work in me at all times.

I have enjoyed the Word of God and the various interpretations coming from the Gospel readings. I have enjoyed the companionship, love and trust of others in a spirit of humour, care and concern. The sessions are conducted in a quiet, gentle way that tends to bring out the best in us. I look forward to each gathering and I am a much better me for being involved in this programme.

## REFLECTION

*Enlarge the space of your tent! Broaden your perspective, widen your horizons!  
Stretch expansively into the future!*

*(Spiritual Stretch Exercises (from "Stretching", Reflection-January 2018- by Joyce Rupp)*

**I stretch outward ...** toward the magnificent cosmos, a reminder of mystery, wonder and the vast expanse of creation. I re-balance my perspective in the light of this cosmic view, a much wider vision in which my problems and passing frustrations seem small.

**I stretch inward ...** to where my greatest strength and inspiration resides. I improve my inner flexibility by lessening the strain and stress of trying to manage everything by myself.

**I stretch around ...** to the suffering ones who exist both near and far. I improve my range of compassionate motion by restoring this virtue in my heart today.

**I stretch away from ...** my instinctual urge to take sides, fight back, mock or seek revenge for those whose ideas and way of life differ radically from mine. I improve my inner posture by nurturing peace.

**I stretch toward ...** hope that refuses to be obliterated by the turbulence and disjointedness currently submerging society. I release tension in my spiritual muscles by remaining confident that God is with us, especially in times of pain and sorrow.

**I stretch beyond ...** anything that keeps me from being at home with the Holy One, others and myself. I keep the loving joints of relationships strong by daily prayer and going beyond my self-orientation. This diminishes unnecessary pain and strengthens endurable kindness.

