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Community

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Unchanging truths in a changing world

Two contrasting images of the place of religion in today's society serve to test our resolve as a faith community. On the one hand the numbers speak of church decline. On the other hand, reassuringly, large congregations continue to celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas and witness the passion of Christ at Easter, as well as attending special events within the church. Church leaders are prompted to seek new ways to communicate for the "in between" of the good news and the drift away, to "re-imagine ministry" for a new age.

The contrast was demonstrated when more than 400 people attended the Bishop's Cathedral Convention held in Goulburn on 17 and 18 January to ponder some of the issues associated with church decline. The Archbishop of Sydney, Dr Glen Davies, was drawn to observe in an interview with the *Goulburn Post* that the number of people attending the conference was itself a testimony to people of God wanting to be encouraged in their daily life as Christians.

At the recent Church of England General Synod, the Archbishop of York asked: "How do we re-discover the well-springs of our solidarity and partnership in the Gospel? What must we become in order to re-kindle the fire of God's "love, abundantly poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us" (*Romans 5:5*)." In his Christmas message the Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn, Bishop Stuart Robinson, observed that a "new future requires a different spiritual harvest."

Inevitably debates on these issues will continue, as will the church as it sets a course for what the Church of England has called "intentional evangelism", being renewed in love for Jesus Christ and love for God's world. The first step in this renewal was to focus once again "on the wonder of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ, the image of the invisible God."

Communication inevitably becomes an important dimension in telling the story of the Gospels and Jesus' remarkable and unique life and Ministry. We are, as Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, (The Joy of the Gospel) said, engaged in an historical process and must take an active part in it, otherwise we become mere onlookers to decline. We must, he said, find new ways of expressing "unchanging truths".

In similar vein, the Archbishop of York reminded the General Synod that every Christian is a witness, empowered by the Holy Spirit, "to tell the story of their encounter with Jesus Christ, to share what we have experienced."

The challenge presented to the Bishop's Cathedral Convention was to equip lay people to be proactive in mission in their own communities, not to underestimate the power of the ordinary church service.

Our toughest question: what is Anglicanism?

Brian Douglas

The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams pondered the question: 'What is the real identity of Anglicanism?' This has become a more pressing and complex question than ever before in a world where internal Anglican relations, ecumenical and interfaith issues are prominent. Williams proposed three scenarios.

Is Anglicanism a matter of Reformed or Calvinist principle resting on an appeal to the sovereignty and all-sufficiency of Scripture interpreted literally? Is Anglicanism a form of non-papal Catholicism with strong emphasis on sacramental and ministerial continuity? Or does Anglicanism have an essentially indeterminate Christian culture well adapted to national and local difference?

Each of these scenarios is to be found within modern Anglicanism. Some, like those attending the Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) in Kenya long for a more confessional model of Anglicanism whereas others are happy with the Communion as federation of local bodies with diverging theologies and disciplines and yet united as one Communion.

Identity and unity

The question of identity, however, is really inseparable from the question of unity. Can another community be recognised as essentially the same, despite the differences and divergences? Are we one as we worship God despite the differences in thinking and practice?

Williams' answer to these questions

relies on the sharing of common worship together. When we stand at the same altar to receive communion we may disagree with the opinions of the person standing next to us but we are united as one in our worship of the Lord.

Williams argues that Anglican identity is really a blend of concern for ordered ministry and so ordered worship, where there is also freedom from uncritical acceptance of any hierarchical ecclesiastical authority.

Scripture at the heart of Anglicanism

Williams also sees an appeal to Scripture at the heart of Anglican identity and the central belief that common worship is the most important clue to defining Anglican identity in a world where there is a growing diversity of cultural contexts.

For Williams Anglican identity is Catholic in that Anglicanism acknowledges its history and tradition and the gifts of God in the past and its own errors but it is Reformed as well in that it remains subject to the judgment of Scripture, even though Scripture does not have the answer to every contemporary question.



The Rector of St Paul's, the Rev'd Dr Brian Douglas

As well as being Catholic and Reformed there is for Williams a further assumption about Anglicanism: that renewal in Christ does not abolish but fulfils the capacities of human beings and that as Anglicans we are set free to sense and to think about the texture of God's wisdom in the creation and brought to fulfilment in the cross of Jesus.

A response to the presence of God

Anglicanism therefore seems to be a response to the presence of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, lived out as a Christian community as a living tradition and not just an historical relic.

In its living Anglicanism shows that God is present in the particular but at the same time it is restrained in its claims about knowledge of God.

There is a modesty in Anglicanism and yet the action of God in the incarnation of Jesus Christ is central rather than a detailed set of confessional beliefs.

Anglicanism shows that God is present in the world and in the local community and that standing together at the same altar we affirm the presence of God in our world and lives.

Anglicanism demonstrates wonder at the presence of the divine but at the same time acknowledges the limited and fallible character of humanity with all its differences and ambiguity.

It is this blend that seems at the heart of Anglicanism. For some this is the genius of Anglicanism and yet for others it is a maddening compromise.

Perhaps we as Anglicans will never achieve a tight confessional status but it is vital that we consider who and what we are. Williams' questioning is important as we all consider our Anglican identity.



*A large congregation prepares to leave St Paul's at the end of the service on Christmas Eve, the organ displaying its pipes and trumpets.
Photo: Peter McDermott*

EAT SWEET AND TALK SWEETLY

Richness and diversity in Noah's pudding

Fethullah Erdogan

More than 50 people who attended the St Paul's end of year "fork and talk" luncheon were treated for dessert to the Turkish delight of "Noah's Pudding", shared with them by the invited speaker, together with the inspiring message that came with it as the dressing embodied in its creation.

The speaker, Fethullah Erdogan, is Executive Director, Bluestar Intercultural Centre, established by a group of young Australian Muslims in 2009 as a platform to bring together people in the ACT, positioned "at an historic crossroads of cultural encounters."

Founders of Bluestar saw the need for the Muslim community to interact with the greater society and increase its awareness of the Muslim community, its religion and culture. "When people know each other and try to understand in the other frame of reference a natural affinity emerges."

This is an edited version of the simulating address.

We have a saying in Turkish: "Tatli yiyelim, tatli konusalim". It means: "Let us eat sweet and talk sweetly". So let's start talking sweetly and reflect together on the essence of dialogue and on the richness of diversity through tasting a special dessert and sharing a long standing tradition.

We have today with us a very special, unique, authentic dessert -- Ashura. Ashura symbolises ultimate richness and diversity for us. Ashura is a dessert of Anatolia, where the memes of 26 different civilizations are woven into the soil. One of the most colourful and authentic dishes of the Turkish cuisine, Ashura has been selected as the third best and most original meal in the world in an

international food competition.

Ashura symbolises synthesis and dialogue, as very different ingredients come together in one pot: barley, white beans, chickpeas, apricots, cranberry, currants, sugar, water, walnuts, cinnamon, pomegranate, pine nuts, and others. They are brought together in harmony.

Ashura, or Noah's pudding, thus symbolises different cultures living together peacefully in harmony while

spiritual democracy that we need more than ever today.

Ashura stands here as a proof that it is possible for women and men of the world's many races, religions and cultures to live together.

As on the Noah's ark, we can accept and respect one another despite our differences, and work collaboratively to build open, resilient, creative and caring societies on our planet.

Diversity is the one true thing we all have in common.

Celebrate and enjoy it every day!

It is amazing that on almost every day of the year, some of our fellows and citizens are celebrating some tradition, festival, or a holy day.

Australia is like a cup of Noah's pudding: it embodies and contains the diversity and richness of almost all human civilizations.

Australia has become post-national and multicultural societies; containing the globe

within their borders, and we know that our diversity is a comparative advantage and a source of continuing creativity and innovation.

We grow socially, economically, culturally and spiritually by valuing our diversity and contributing to the world.

Sharing Ashura is a symbolic representation of the unity and essential relationship of humans to one another and to their Creator. The making of Ashura is a common practice among Muslims, Christians and Jews in the Middle East. In Turkey, we cook Ashura every year at home and send a cup of it to each of their neighbours, as tradition goes: the residents of 40 houses to your east, west, north and south are considered neighbours.

We believe Prophet Muhammad as well as Jesus Christ, Moses, Abraham and Noah (peace be upon them all) embody honour, dignity, and respect.



The Rector of St Paul's, the Rev'd Dr Brian Douglas, blesses the "fork and talk."

preserving original identities.

Ashura symbolises democracy, multiculturalism and tolerance. Ashura is not a melting pot; the ingredients are not melted and they all preserve their unique tastes while leaving some flavour.

Ashura symbolises synergy and team work. All ingredients add to each other's taste. Each of the ingredients preserves its unique taste but it is also a part of the whole wonderful taste.

Ashura symbolises diversity and tolerance. Each of the 40 ingredients is cooked and prepared in a different fashion. This symbolises a genuine respect for their differences.

Ashura is essentially a celebration of diversity, a living example of how diversity can enhance quality and richness; you can experience this through its marvellous delicious taste.

Ashura represents the global peace model and symbolises multicultural

We love and respect Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.

We are in communication with all faith traditions and communities because of our love, admiration, gratitude, and respect for our Prophets: Adam, Enoch, Noah, Hud, Salih, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, Shuaib, Job, Moses, Aaron, Ezekiel, David, Solomon, Elias, Elijah, Jonah, Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon them all).

As Muslims; we love and respect all of them; as it is clearly expressed in the *Qur'an*: "We make no distinction between any of His Messengers (in believing in them)" (Baqara 2:285).

Many things have been said about the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). In many ways he is as misunderstood today as he was in 610 A.D.; and like those who are often misunderstood, he lived through constant taunts, insults, and threats. Often his friends and family members witnessed his mistreatment.

The Prophet's companions often wanted to defend the Messenger with force, for they loved him; and yet, he called for restraint, peace, patience and positive action. They followed his guidance because they wanted to please God by practising Islam the way it is intended to be practised. The restraint, self control, and peaceful attitudes the Messenger (pbuh) and his companions exercised almost 1400 years ago are steadfast stars for those who have courage to gaze at the sky.

Respect is a prerequisite of Islam. Even at the most critical moments when they are hurt, Muslims should act with a sound mind, not with negative emotions. Acting upon reason and sound reaction should be our foremost principle.

Islam orders us to respect other religions and their leaders. Cursing in return for a curse, burning flags, and hurling insults do not solve any problems. On the contrary, such reactions increase the violence and hatred on all sides. Islam encourages us to get together with everyone, open our doors to everyone, and

open our hearts to everyone.

The practising Muslim strives to follow the guidelines and principles of the Holy *Qur'an* and the actions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in every aspect of his or her life. Thus if some Muslims are adhering to violence, then they are acting upon their own desires and not of the teachings of the *Holy Qur'an* and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). As Fethullah Gulen stated after 9/11 attacks, 'A Muslim can not be a terrorist, a terrorist can not be a Muslim'. It will also be true to change this and say 'a believer can not be a terrorist, a terrorist can not be a believer'.

We must show tolerance to all faiths whether we are Christians, Jews, Muslims, Quakers, Baha'is, Hindus or from any other religion. We must spread ideals of faith and love because that is what our faiths essentially tell us to do.

With so much violence in the world fuelled by racial, religious and ethnic intolerance; we should give utmost importance to interfaith dialogue, cross cultural awareness, respect for diversity and human rights, multiculturalism, and global common values.

In the midst of unfortunate violent events, there is still place for hope and love for all of us. Out of despair, comes hope. Out of hatred, comes love. Out of bias, comes dialogue.

We stand together on Noah's Ark against world problems. As in the case of the Noah's ark, we are all connected and interdependent on this planet. What affects me affects you.

As human beings, we have managed to conquer and reach far in the external world and universe around us; however, we have somehow failed to conquer and reach deeper into our internal universe: our hearts, spirituality,



Fethullah Erdogan speaks to an engaged audience on the constitution of Noah's Pudding and its symbolism for peace and reconciliation

conscience, values and virtues that make us truly human, that lead to real happiness, wellbeing and inner peace.

With hope, faith and love, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of humanity into a beautiful global symphony of being together. All of us united; experiencing the art of living together in harmony on the Noah's ark.

Noah's pudding and Noah's ark remind us of our common values we keep forgetting again and again: Dialogue, understanding, love, respect, peace, compassion, harmony, forgiveness, patience, generosity, modesty, service, altruism, trust, inspiration, hope, authenticity, and integrity.

After thousands of years following the Noah's ark, I hope and pray we can stand together again on this ship - as whole humanity - to face and solve the complex global problems of the 21st century.

This is the big picture Noah's ark and Noah's pudding provide us.

I would like to finish with a quotation from Fethullah Gulen, Islamic Scholar. He says: "Be so tolerant that your heart becomes wide like the ocean. Become inspired with faith and love for others. Offer a hand to those in trouble, and be concerned about everyone."

What you will taste now is the taste of global peace, diversity, richness, love, cooperation and dialogue.

Enjoy it!

‘Living Alongside’ faith in God

When Gloria Dowling, lay Minister at St Paul’s, decided after a long period of reflection to join the Sisters of the Community of the Holy Name in Cheltenham, Victoria, “to live alongside them” she knew she was engaging with an Anglican Religious Order with a long tradition of prayerful service: the first Anglican religious order for women to be founded in Australia, and one of only four such communities in Australia.

“When I first heard about living alongside the Sisters of the Holy Name,” Gloria said, “I felt called to participate. After a period of discernment and negotiating timing, it was 18 months before I started. This enabled my thorough preparation and openness to the Lord’s leading and the Holy Spirit moving to enrich my spiritual life.”

Gloria had already been an Oblate with the Community for many years. “I was certain,” she reflected, “that I was now being asked to take this next step on my journey with God and the Community”.

The Order had its origins as an Anglican welfare mission in 1888 as the Diocesan Mission to the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne. Its guiding light was a former novice of the Community of St Mary the Virgin in Wantage, England, known by her chosen title of Sister Esther. Melbourne at the time was in the grip of economic depression; Christian charity among the poor was fundamental to their well being.

Since 1946 a Community House, built to honour the memory of Sister Esther, had become a centre for retreats and spiritual opportunities for groups and individuals. Set in landscaped grounds, it offers meditative seclusion and contemplative spaces and provides for the training of novices.

Sister Esther’s creed was her life, lived out among the poor. Just as Sister Esther had undertaken a personal journey, so Gloria reflected for *Community* on the experience of her own journey.

“After I settled in at the Community House in Cheltenham,” Gloria said, “there was a very moving service of welcome where I was presented with a cross to wear whilst ‘living Alongside’.

The Community provided Gloria with guidelines for her stay including

an expectation of full participation and help within their life. “Being with the Sisters in worship in their chapel was a highlight for me,” she recalls. “I loved the Mass and three or four ‘daily office’ services; I often returned from my ‘free day’ to attend the late afternoon Mass”.

Sister Esther had written of her mission working with women and children of the back streets of inner Melbourne: “Few people seem aware of many hungry souls there are who are longing for some sympathetic soul to speak to them about spiritual things. Sanctified common sense is what is needed, tact to deal wisely with all comers.”

Sister Esther died on 11 September 1931. Her whole life and all her purposes were illumined by her love for her religion and for the church to which she belonged.

Gloria recalls: “I was very fortunate to attend the Oblates’ silent retreat after I had lived with the Community for 10 days. I was already aware of very strong spiritual renewal and enrichment occurring in the time in retreat”.

Gloria’s primary duties to assist the Community included helping with the guests and their accommodation; assisting the Sister who maintains the flower arrangements; helping with the after meals washing up roster; and occasionally driving Sisters to appointments.

“I also had some very special time with Our Lord, weeding the Calvary Garden and surrounding area when the weather allowed”.

Meeting weekly with the designated Sister was very helpful, discussing her experiences, both practical and spiritual.



Gloria receiving her licence to be a lay Minister from the Rector, The Rev'd Dr Brian Douglas.

“As expected, living ‘Alongside’ the Community has been very different from when I have visited over the past 30 years. I have thought of CHN as my ‘spiritual home’ for most of that time (as well as my parish) and have always found my visits to be very enriching”.

In the words of the Community, “Everyone is invited by God to share in his life and love and each of us has our own personal path as we journey into the fullness of life with Him. Each path or vocation has its own character, demands, responsibilities, and blessings. A vocation of the religious life means for the person involved a total commitment of themselves to God within the community to which He calls them.”

“What is wanted,” Sister Esther said, “is not your works, but your being: not your gifts but yourself.”

Gloria reflected: “This was a life changing experience for me. It confirmed my very strong call to the Community of The Holy Name. My fervent prayers for them all will continue.

“Much prayer for discernment and guidance of the Holy Spirit is now required for me to be able to continue to go forward on my path with God in faith, trust, hope and joy”.

Unveiling a plaque at St Paul’s Cathedral on 14 April 2013 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Community, and the granting of its charter, Bishop Gary Weatherill said: “May the witness of the Community continue to inspire others.” Gloria has lived that witness.

THE DIOCESE

The spiritual core of Christmas

In his Christmas message the Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn, Bishop Stuart Robinson, spoke of a new future requiring a different spiritual harvest as exemplified in the life of Jesus and the example Nelson Mandela.

Songs about Santa, mistletoe and snow fill our shopping centres and living rooms. In parks and public places all over the nation, communities gather to sing tunes about the Messiah's birth.

Our hearts can swell as these tunes remind us of the power of love, the importance of generosity and that light overcomes darkness. Yet, they can also give us heartache as the season's commercialism can obscure its spiritual core.

At Christmas, we declare that 'for us a child has been born for us, a son has been given to us, authority rests upon his shoulders' (*Isaiah 9.6* NRSV).

The spiritual core of Christmas is that genuine authority does not rest in power, pomp or parliaments but in God who chose to come to us as an infant. Jesus was born in a world characterised by cynical tyrants, ethnic conflict and intense religious dispute. Yet, the spiritual consequences of such a world did not imprison him.

At Christmas, we remember how Jesus' life yielded a different kind of spiritual harvest where love swallowed up violence, hope dispelled death and faith diminished opportunism.

Our world is filled with broken trust and promises betrayed. These events have a spiritual impact because they shape what we become. As trust evaporates, our hearts can turn spiritually to stone. It does not have to be that way.

The passing of Nelson Mandela, the father of the rainbow nation that is South Africa, reminded the world that a new future requires a different spiritual harvest.

Mandela discovered the authority of compassion at a time when many thought that apartheid was inviolable and that self-interest was insurmountable.

Mandela saw that a new and just South Africa could only be born through gentleness and inclusion rather than by more violence and exclusion.



Whenever we sing the traditional carols once again may we listen carefully to their spiritual story. What we value in Mandela's life is writ large in Jesus and celebrated at Christmas time by people everywhere.

My prayer is that a different spiritual harvest might grow as we renew our commitment to love, that our resolve to hope strengthens and we discover once again that God redeems humanity daily.

*The Rt. Rev'd Stuart Robinson
Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn
17 December 2013*

Cathedral Convention draws numbers and inspiration

The Bishop's Cathedral Convention held in Goulburn on 17 and 18 January drew over 430 people from around NSW and the ACT to consider the why, what and how of mission.

The event presented a theological basis for mission against the perceived backdrop of Christianity's diminishing place in Australian society.

Keynote speakers Archbishop Dr Glenn Davies and the Rev'd Dr John Dickson were deeply hopeful about Christianity's future, despite recent Census figures that showed a steady and sustained pattern of erosion in the number of Australians

identifying as Christian.

Archbishop Glenn opened the convention by preaching from 1 *Peter* 2.9-12, focusing on the church's spiritual identity as God's people in the world. The purpose and task of such a people, the Archbishop contended, is to praise God as the unexpected beneficiaries of God's mercy in Christ.

"Be phosphorescent Christians," Archbishop Glenn urged, echoing Paul's words to the Philippians who called everyone to shine like lights in the world.

Such a life, the Archbishop said, involves both declaring God's praise and doing that which is good. It is

through the quality of Christian lives that the world comes to know the reality of God, salvation from sin and the hope of the resurrection and the world to come.

Dr John Dickson, author and founding Director of the Centre for Public Christianity, anchored the program by speaking passionately about mission in the context of the rising tide of disinterest and scepticism concerning Christianity in Australian society.

In a pluralistic Australia, he acknowledged that the barriers to sharing the gospel were not only significant but often resulted in many Christians becoming shy about sharing the beauty and person of Christ.

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Yet, he contended, taking Christ to the world or mission is integral to the faith.

Dr Dickson, a historian of early Christianity, observed how the Genesis account of creation propelled first Jews and then Christians to take the knowledge of God outwards. The worship of Israel had a missional power to bring people to faith. This power continues to be present within ordinary Christian worship.

According to Dr Dickson, people can and do encounter Christ through the worship of ordinary congregations as they proclaim Christ's work.

"Don't underestimate the power of the ordinary church service," he contended, "because the things we say are a declaration of the praises of God that are an invitation to the outsider to come and worship."

“How might Christians respond to such a pervasive negative view?” Dr Dickson asked. The best answer, was not better debating points but the quality of a life lived for the gospel.

It was the life of ‘humility, compassion, love of neighbour, love of enemy’ that had the power to bring people to the knowledge of God and to transform the world.

The same pattern works in families where personal conduct profoundly influences how people hear and respond to Christ. “Behaviour can convince people, humanly speaking, that the Word is true,” in effect, preparing the heart for proclamation. Conversely, insensitivity and a lack of respect can have the opposite effect making it harder for people to hear and respond to Jesus.

“Good deeds, good news are one in the work of the Gospel,” he said.

“The best kept secret of the New Testament teaching on mission is that God sees the whole of life of the Christians as the promotion of the Gospel”, Dr Dickson said. “The promotion of Christ involves not only speech but many ordinary aspects of life.”

Dr Dickson highlighted three aspects central to promoting the gospel. First, he emphasised prayer particularly when born of compassion for those who are yet to hear. “Compassion for the crowds is the

hinge between the mission of Jesus and the mission of the church,” he said. “Unless we’re moved by the same compassion, Jesus’ call for us to be involved in mission won’t really work.”

The second most urged activity to promote the gospel in the New Testament is giving financially. Paul in Philippians speaks of such giving as a partnership. It is not a secondary, secular activity but an essential part in Gospel advancement as important as speaking to people personally.

The third activity urged in Scripture is speaking up for Jesus in everyday life with gentleness and respect. “There are all sorts of reasons to be shy about the faith” he suggested “the answer to which is a fresh vision of Jesus as Lord.”

Christianity’s future in Australia depends heavily on how this current generation engages with those who are sceptical or spiritually indifferent.

Christians cannot afford to be silent even though the pressure to do so is growing. Neither can Christians retreat into pietistic devotion or private worship services given the public nature of the Gospel.

The convention’s speakers left the audience in no doubt that the best way to propagate the Gospel is through prayer, self-sacrificial partnerships and speaking with gentleness and respect.

If Christians in NSW and the ACT can focus on the deep foundations for mission shared over the weekend then a new generation might yet hear, see and taste that God is good.

The Archbishop of Sydney Dr Glen Davies, told the *Goulburn Post* in an interview, that the number of people attending the conference was a testimony to people of God wanting to be encouraged in their daily life as Christians.

“The church,” he said, “is not the clergy but the people of God and every person has a part to play in His great mission. It’s a great way of mobilising, encouraging and equipping people to use their skills”.

Wayne Brighton courtesy of the Diocesan web site

Re-discovering the well-springs of our solidarity

“How do we re-discover the well-springs of our solidarity and partnership in the Gospel? What must we become in order to re-ignite the fire of God’s love, ‘abundantly poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us’” (Romans 5:5).”



This was the theme of an address to the Church of England General Synod by the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu. There was, he said, a vital need for what he termed “intentional evangelism”.

Worship and witness, in the power of the Holy Spirit, he said, were the Church’s reason for being. “Next to worship,” he said, “witness is the primary and urgent task of the Church.”

Every Christian, he said, is a witness, empowered by the Holy Spirit simply to tell the story of their encounter with Jesus Christ; to share what they have experienced.

All the best communication, he said, is done through story – the story of relationship; the story of events and new happenings; the story of perception and understanding; the stories of our past, our present, and our future. “We each have a story to tell of how God in Jesus Christ has met with us and changed our lives.

“May we be inspired as we hear stories of the Good News from one another of what is happening in our varied contexts.”

A revolution of tenderness

Susan Bridge

I think it is quite easy to believe in God. Even in a post-enlightenment age, it is still pretty easy for people to see that creation isn't random, no matter what the scientific process was or how long it took. God is revealed in the beauty of the oceans and the mountains, in the way a baby is born or a skin tear heals itself, or a rose bud opens. As Gerard Manley Hopkins put it, 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God'.

But I don't think it is easy to believe in Jesus as the Christ, a part of the Trinitarian God manifest as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is unlikely that any human being born at any time and in any circumstances would get rational people to believe that his life was significant for eternity, that he was God incarnate, God made manifest in the world in human form.

The 'incarnation' is the theological term for this Christian understanding that the Son of God or Word of God, who was present and active from the very beginning of creation, was born in human form in a specific place and time, and that this actual, historical figure was at once fully human and fully divine: God with us. And Jesus is still with us, as he assures his friends at the very end of Matthew's gospel, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus' birth in humble circumstances and his death in violence and shame are important features of what we call 'the Good News'. It is good news that God is with us: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth". But it is strange, I think, that although there is healing and teaching and welcome from Jesus, the focus is also on God sharing our human suffering.

It is helpful to reflect on that as we come to celebrate the incarnation at Christmas, because as we prepare for what we hope will be a time of joy and festival, we know that there remains a lot of suffering in the world, and even in our community Christmas time will have its stresses disappointments and sorrows. Because part of what we are "celebrating", is the idea that God is with us in our human suffering, not looking down from heaven with tea

and sympathy, but taking this pain into God's own self, God's own flesh.

Pope Francis released a short book a couple of weeks ago, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Latin for The Joy of the Gospel. It is a letter addressed to Christians concerning many things, but I want to focus on part of the Pope's discussion about the significance for us of the incarnation, the divine who was there from the foundation of the world, choosing a moment in time to enter the world, in the flesh. Francis writes, in part having a go at new age 'spirituality' and in part having a go at social media:

"For just as some people want a purely spiritual Christ, without flesh and without the cross, they also want their interpersonal relationships provided by sophisticated equipment, by screens and systems which can be turned on and off on command. Meanwhile, the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction. True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness".

In this revolution of tenderness, spirituality and virtual communities can't be an effective replacement for real relationships and actual community. Francis writes that the



physical fleshiness of Jesus draws us not just to God but relentlessly calls us to each other.

"Jesus wants us to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others. He hopes that we will stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune and instead enter into the reality of other people's lives and know the power of tenderness.Loving others is a spiritual force drawing us to union with God."

This is not, I think, to be confused with accepting the inevitability of human misery and finding in it a path to God and therefore some kind of virtue. We know that to be the opposite of God's plan. We know that God would have us fight against human suffering, especially inequality and exclusion.

We know from Jesus in the temple, tabling his agenda: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free'.

God in the flesh calls us to compassion and tenderness. We are called to be engaged with the world, summoned to be part of 'the revolution of tenderness'.

**The Rev'd Susan Bridge, St Paul's Manuka, Fourth Sunday of Advent
22 December 2013**

A poem a day

Robert Willson

Religion and poetry, spiritual and poetic development, are often seen to be inseparably intertwined. In the *Faber Book of Religious Verse*, Helen Garner spoke of a religious poem as being one concerned in some way with revelation and with man's response to it. The Rev'd Robert Willson reflects on his own acquaintance with poetry "through which God may speak" and his love of the Word and words.

Sir John Gielgud used to quote the literary scholar who once remarked that the quickest way to empty a hall was to announce that a recitation of classical poetry was on the programme.

It is exactly 50 years ago that I was appointed to the post of Presbyterian student minister in a little church in Sydney, St James, Lane Cove.

There I made friends with a retired minister who lived in the parish and was a reader and scholar and book collector. He loved poetry and knew much of it by heart, and he greatly influenced me. He knew the exact page in the *Oxford Book of English Verse* where any poem was to be found.

I purchased a copy of that marvellous anthology and its daughter, *The Oxford Book of Christian Verse*, edited by Lord David Cecil. Later on I was delighted to receive for review the *Anthology of Australian Religious Poetry*, edited by Les Murray. He and I were at Sydney University together in the 1950's.

These three books would be an excellent foundation for a poetry collection. But the poems are no good in the book. Learning them by heart is both a duty and a joy.

What the Dean of Jersey taught me

Years ago I read the biography of Lillie Langtry, the beautiful actress who was the mistress of King Edward VII. Her father was a priest, the Dean of the Island of Jersey where she was born. (The television series *Bergerac* gives you a picture of that lovely

place, the only part of Britain to be occupied by Nazi Germany).

Lillie Langtry tells us that her father had a marvellous habit. Whenever he found a poem he liked he would copy a few verses on a card and read it over to himself in spare moments on his daily rounds. He could learn a new poem each day that way. At the end of his life when his eyesight failed he knew whole glorious ranges of English verse by heart. He did the same with Latin and Greek verses. He took to heart the Psalmist who wrote (119: 11): "Thy word have I hidden in my heart."

The Bishop

When I read this I made a resolve to do the same and I have stacks of index cards with scraps of verse written or pasted on them.

Almost any passage of Scripture can remind us of what Shakespeare or Milton or Wordsworth said. In the year 2000 I was asked to contribute a poem to a Carol Service in the Girls Grammar School Chapel. I chose that marvellous Australian poem by Douglas Stewart, entitled *The Bishop*.

"Robed and mitred the bishop
stands and hard by his ear a
pigeon
Preens in the sun on top of his
head and tells him about religion...

..I mightn't have liked the bishop
alive but I certainly like him dead,
The good old man in his suit of
bronze, with the pigeon on top of
his head."

The poem was inspired by the bronze statues outside St Mary's Catholic Cathedral in Sydney.

Dover Beach

Sometimes a poem may have profound theological and spiritual significance. In 1851 a young Englishman named Matthew Arnold was spending his honeymoon in the English town of Dover. Late one evening he invited his bride to admire the beauty of the view. The poem he wrote was *Dover Beach*. It is both beautiful and revolutionary.

It is one of the first 19th century poems to express openly an atheist or agnostic vision of our existence. It reflects the loss of religious faith by many people at that time of massive intellectual and social change.

It is too long to quote in full but the poem can be found on the internet.

"The sea is calm to-night.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French
coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of
England stand;
Glimmering and vast, out in the
tranquil bay.
"Come to the window, sweet is
the night-air!"

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and
round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright
girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing
roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast
edges drear
And naked shingles of the world."

Christians know that we live in a secular age when faith in God is difficult for many sincere and good people. The distracted father of the sick child spoke for many when he cried out to Jesus: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9: 24). Jesus honoured that prayer.

Recently I attended the Eucharist in St James Sydney. The preacher ended his excellent sermon with that marvellous poem on love by George Herbert. It begins: "Love bade me welcome, but my soul drew back..." It is without doubt one of the greatest Christian poems in English.

The Scriptures are filled with poetry, including of course the Psalms. But even St Paul, when he addressed the Athenians (Acts 17), quoted "as certain of your own poets have said..."

If he could learn and quote poets then I have no excuse. There are the sublime words of the poets for every occasion and God may speak through them, as through the words of the hymns.

Flowers and the life of the church

Mary Pollard

“What lovely flower arrangements”, the visitor to St Paul's extolled to the sides person waiting to greet her at the entrance to the church. "Yes," the sides person answered with enthusiasm for her task, "we have a great tradition of flower arranging in the church for normal services and special occasions. It is a ministry in its own right". The visitor stood looking along the red carpet of the nave to the altar and the flowers decorating the pulpit and the lectern and beyond.

Have you ever taken time to observe the flower arrangements in the church? What's more have you ever stopped to think of the effort that lies behind their collection and arrangement? Like many things we come to know so well in their repetition each Sunday they tend to be taken for granted. Their beauty shines through their unobtrusiveness.

Flowers in the church embody creation, celebration, remembrance, thanksgiving, resurrection and sacrifice. With their delicate tints, fragrance and blossoms, their arrangement in the church also represents joy and renewal. They are part of the aesthetics of the church. They enhance the beauty of our Church and greatly contribute to the atmosphere in the building. We come to appreciate something beyond their physical appearance. A dedicated group of flower arrangers ensures flowers are available for each service. Some are especially donated in remembrance of others.

It was to recognise the contribution of the flowers arrangers that Mary Pollard embarked on a journey to discover a roll call of dedicated workers, past and present, opening a door on another aspect of our history. **Editor.**

What started my search for those who over time had contributed to flower arranging in the church was when one of the older ladies who had retired from the flowers mentioned that the flowers ladies deserved greater recognition.

Hearing of the artistry and drive of a "Mrs. Wright" I was astonished to see a "Mrs. Wright" recorded in the index in Eddie Braggett's book *Camps, Settlements and Churches*, but no one could remember her name as it was about 60 years ago that she attended St Paul's with her husband. Eddie Braggett records that "in November 1951 parishioners gratefully erected a plaque to Mrs. Wright who had contributed more than 500 pounds to (the rectory) building fund."

I soon discovered links to the stained glass windows, one of which is dedicated to Victoria Winifred Wright. And the mystery unravelled.

I did not want all the other flower arrangers to become nameless, with the older ladies for example, Joan Bruce, passing away just last year.

Over the years many women have devoted hours to the flowers in the church. To find out their names I

spoke initially to Margaret Roberts, former flower roster coordinator and flower arranger. Mrs. Winifred Wright (1897-1980) was the name she remembered from the early times. Winifred Wright, with her husband, Jack, was a pillar of the church.

Mrs. Wright, as she was always known, assisted with fund raising through social events and catering for card parties. She had a lovely garden and sold flowers to raise funds for the church. She and her husband Jack donated three stained glass windows to the church; one is dedicated to her by her husband.

In the time of Bishop Neville Chynoweth's incumbency, Joan Chynoweth helped with the flowers and told me that the ladies did the flowers on Saturday mornings while the men cleaned and vacuumed the church.

Four of the new recruits Janet Graham, Narelle Gibson, Rebecca Harris and Pauline Emmott with Mary Pollard, convenor of the flowers group. (Photo: John Gibson)



Bishop Stuart Robinson preaches amid a colourful display of flowers complementing the pulpit, stained glass window and the cross

Names of ladies she remembers were Aisla Livermore, Pat Taylor - Rogers, Helen Munro, Jean Coombe, Phyllis Bullock and Irene Mather. Afterwards everyone went to the rectory (the old rectory on Canberra Avenue) for a cup of tea!

In the seventies, Joan Falkingham, the wife of Canon John Falkingham, assisted with the flowers for special events. Dorothy Hookway who owned a florist shop in Manuka was also one of the early flowers arrangers.

I contacted Joan Haldane-Stevenson (Smith) in Melbourne, the widow of the Rev'd Pat Haldane-Stevenson, who used to assist at St Paul's when the Rev'd John Griffiths was rector of the parish. She is now 92 years old and keeps in touch with John Griffiths who now lives there.

When John Griffiths was minister at St Paul's Joan arranged flowers for very special occasions, including for the service which the Queen attended on her visit to Canberra in 1991. Joan also did the arrangements for the

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military funeral of a VC winner, Lt. Col. Charles Anderson VC, MC, a former member of the parish, in 1988. Joan's arrangement for the funeral included real Flanders poppies from the Forrest garden of Bobbie Fenner, Professor Fenner's wife. She also organised for 60 flags to be displayed for the event.

Joan told me she learnt the art of flower arranging when she was in Melbourne attending St Silas, North Balwyn which had a marvelous flower club. Joan was a very capable and creative lady who ran an interior design shop in Braddon for many years. She supplied cushion fabrics for the handicraft ladies to make up for the fete and the curtain material in the hall.

Flowers arrangers at that time included Margaret Roberts, Enid Crutchett, and Viva Jeffrey who also wove the cane baskets hung on the walls and columns for the special flower festival displays. Viva was a keen ikebana specialist. Margaret Roberts took over the flower roster for many years when Barbara Griffiths and John Griffiths left in 1998. She arranged the flowers and coordinated the roster for decades and could always supply abundant greenery from her own garden.

Joan Bruce did marvellous work. She organised many helpers to assist with the floral festival in the church for the yearly fete. Joan was Treasurer and later president of the Church Women's Union which was later renamed the Senior Women's Fellowship. In those days flowers were donated by parishioners from their gardens.

Other arrangers were Doreen Green, who was President of the Senior Women's Fellowship, Bettie McPherson, Val Smith, Cynthia Youngman, Sue (Hargraves) Youngman, Barbara Pape, and dearly loved Ash Cliff, who, with Mary-Alice Pelham Thorman, arranged the flowers for about 20 years.

More recently Christine and Rob May, Trish Levick, Jeanette Evans and her golfing friend, Susan Pushack, Lesley Jemesen, Mary Pollard, Keva North, Fiona Bannerman, Claudia Hyles, Gwen Le Comte and now Pat White, recruited last year.

Following the recent call for more recruits it was pleasing that Pauline Emmott, Janet Graham, Rebecca Harris, Narelle Gibson and Pat Walker volunteered to join the flowers arrangers team this year.

Christine is completing a floristry certificate course. I was inspired by her to take up floristry this year at the CIT. Janet is also doing a short recreational course.

We are always looking for parishioners to become a part of our special group of flower arrangers. Your commitment can be on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis, whatever works within your schedule.

For the skill of these women and of the many other unremembered women over the years we give thanks.

(Mary Pollard is convener of the flowers group. She was helped in her research by Margaret Roberts, Joan Chynoweth, Joan Haldane-Stevenson, Jeanette Evans, and Christine May).

The Editor appreciates the spirit of cooperation within the flowers group which brought this story together.



Flowers arranger Jeanette Evans



Photos: Kay Pendlebury

SERVICES

St Paul's

Sunday Services

7.00 am Holy Eucharist (Book of Common Prayer)

8.00 am Holy Eucharist (A Prayer Book for Australia)

10.00 am Holy Eucharist - Sung (A Prayer Book for Australia)

Choral Evensong

6.00pm Service of Choral Evensong on the second Sunday of the month, February to November

Prayers for Healing—

on the second Wednesday of the month immediately following the 10am Eucharist

Weekday Services

10 am Wednesday- Holy Eucharist

St David's

Sunday Service

8.30am - Holy Eucharist

Weekday Service

10 am Thursday- Holy Eucharist

St Luke's

Sunday services

8 am Holy Communion

10 am Family Service

Thursday

10.30 am Holy Communion and Healing Service

OUR EDITORIAL PURPOSE

Community aims to connect people with God, with each other and with our community by sharing experiences through reflective dialogue.

Community seeks to create a sense of encounter and belonging, to build relationships within the church and beyond, to recognise the capacity of religion to nourish individual lives, and to reflect the unique position of St Paul's, St David's and St Luke's in the life of the Diocese and the nation.

It will do this through stories of the Parishes and the wider Anglican community in ways relevant to its readers.

Community needs the engagement of readers and contributors to reflect the richness and diversity of the Parishes and to honour and proclaim an expression of faith in our life together.

ST PAUL'S PARISH COUNCIL

Members of St Paul's Parish Council are: The Rev'd Dr Brian Douglas (chair), the Rev'd Susan Bridge, the Rev'd Kevin Stone, Dr Ingrid Moses (Rector's Warden), Robert Deane, Peter McDermott (People's Wardens), Catherine Bohm, Robert Bailey, George Menham, Mary Pollard (Parish Councillors), Duncan Anderson, Lorraine Litster (St. David's Wardens), Tony Ralli, Sandy White (Rector's appointments). Helen Raymond. (minute taker)

ST LUKE'S PARISH COUNCIL

Members of St Luke's Parish Council are: The Rev'd Kevin Stone (Chair), Edna Sturman, John Pilbeam, Alison Heath, Julie Hirst, Jenny Joyce, Chris Murray, Perry Wiles, Jacqui Marsden (Secretary)

EDITORIAL NOTE

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