

## A Christmas Reflection

### **God of God**

Only the sound of an infant  
crying in the night,  
a familiar, homely, human sound  
like the sound of hooves on flagstones,  
like the rattle of chains tethering cattle,  
like the crunch of straw in the mouths of  
oxen,  
like the rustle of hay tossed into a  
manger.

### **Light of light**

Only the light of a star  
falling on an infant in a crib,  
like the light in a shepherd's lantern,  
like the light in the eyes of a mother,  
like the light in the learning of wise men.

### **True God of true God**

Only the pillow of straw  
and an infant in rags and tatters  
like the weather-worn blankets of the  
shepherds,  
like dusty, travel-stained garments of  
travellers,  
like old clothes thrown to a beggar,  
like cloths stuffed in a stable window  
to keep the draught out and cattle warm.

### **God is with us**

terribly, simply with us,  
and the shadows of men  
with arms outstretched to take him  
fall across the manger  
in the form of a cross.  
like the light that lightens each dawn.



**This Christmas may God be with us  
in the terror of a world at odds with itself.**

*Chandran Devanesen*

## CONTENTS

<b>A Christmas Reflection</b> <i>Chandran Devanesan</i>	<b>1</b>
<b>NEWS FROM HERE AND THERE</b>	<b>3</b>
Melbourne	3
Sydney	5
Brisbane	10
Townsville	11
National	12
<b>OSCAR ROMERO AND PAUL VI: TWO FACES OF JUSTICE AND PEACE</b> <i>Claude Mostovik, MSC</i>	<b>13</b>

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## NEWS FROM HERE AND THERE

### Melbourne

The chaotic effects of climate-change have been felt this Spring in Melbourne as they have across the country. These effects have been mirrored in the many and varied experiences of members as well as by the ins and outs at 'Hesed'.

The season began with a visit to 'Hesed' by Sydney member, Mary McDermid. Mary spent some time with Dinny Culican in between seeing other friends and joining members for a dinner out. In addition to Mary, we have had two visits from Alison Healey who has been researching some Melbourne Grail history and spending time with Joanna Waite. We also welcomed a Filipino post-graduate student for short-term accommodation in early November.

As well as the visits, 'Hesed' continues to be our 'home' for regular *lectio divina* gatherings and other meetings and special events. One such special event was our evening in late September to celebrate Jo Flynn and Joan Bruton's marriage. Dinny gave a beautiful prayer of blessing and we all imbibed some champagne cocktails and savoured the delicious finger food provided by members. It was a lovely, warm occasion.

Another happy time was a gathering at Eva Tilly Memorial Home in October. Nine members and friends came to pray with Joanna Waite and then enjoyed afternoon tea which included a celebration of Rita Flipo's 90th birthday. Rita's family have many links with the Grail in its early days in Sydney and Rita has been a long time friend of the Grail in Melbourne and regular participant in our *lectio* group.

Our main public event this season was held at St Peter's parish, East Bentleigh in early September. Catalyst for Renewal and The Grail presented 'An Evening with John Allen Jnr', editor of *Crux*. There was an insightful talk and discussion on Francis' papacy and his attempts at reform. The evening was well attended and included many Grail members and friends. As well as the Grail's contribution to the planning and advertising, Dinny

Culican, Genny Grabau, Kathy Wayland and Andrea Venier assisted with hospitality on the night.

In early November, Carol Farmer and Andrea attended the National Team handover meeting and retreat on Bribie island which was planned and presented by the Brisbane group. The Melbournians greatly appreciated the beautiful reflections, interesting sessions and warm hospitality of the Brisbane members. We take this opportunity to thank Ann Aboud, Tricia Gemmell and Andrea for their dedication and work in the National Team over the last four years. We wish Carol and Helen Jeffcoat, along with the indefatigable Tricia, much success and many blessings in their role for the next term. We also thank Mary Robertson and Anne Day for their great work as National Treasurer.

Our end of year Eucharist was held on the first Sunday of Advent at June and Laurie Ryan's. It has become a lovely tradition and in recent years our celebrant has been June's cousin, Fr Michael Mason. However, this year because Michael was not well, Fr Bruce Duncan took his place seamlessly to contribute to another reflective and enjoyable evening. We wish Michael a speedy recovery. Thanks again to June and Laurie for their kind and cheerful hospitality.

Despite a persistent 'bug' this Spring, Dinny Culican has been active in various ways. In addition to her contributions at *lectio* and all other events, Dinny has been providing assistance and hospitality to guests at 'Hesed'. At an All Souls Mass at St Bede's, Dinny represented the Grail and lit a candle in memory of Pat Sheeran. She also wrote a letter of welcome to Archbishop Comensoli on behalf of the Melbourne Grail, which was gratefully acknowledged.

Other active members in Melbourne, such as Genny Grabau, Kathy Wayland, Irena Dunn and June Ryan have also given regular support in times of difficulty for Ann Niall and Andrea, in particular. We are happy to report that Ann Niall's cancer is in remission. Andrea's mother, Gemma, is settling in to a community-based Aged Care facility, though there is much still to be done.

We would also like to inform readers that Mark and Colleen Lewis have moved into residential care. We thank them for all their contributions over the years and pray for their good health and care in the years to come.

Melbourne members would like to recognise the wonderful life of Cath Mullane and we send our condolences and prayers of peace to Fran Warner and her family.

Blessings to all this Christmas season!

*The Melbourne group*

## Sydney

In the first two weeks of Advent we invited people to two evenings of *lectio divina*, choosing two Gospel texts, Matthew (1:18-2:23) and Luke (1:26-56; 2:1-40). In Matthew, it is Joseph in the spotlight, faced with difficult choices, while Mary takes centre stage in Luke's prophetic gospel. We meditated on the texts and shared our responses with one another. *Lectio divina* is a practice that can bring new insights and unexpected nourishment. And so it was this Advent; despite the fact that the stories are so very familiar, we discovered anew their power to challenge and inspire and move us.

Cath Mullane, a creative and generously active member of The Grail for 70 years, died just a few days short of her 100th birthday and, on the last day of November, was buried beside her dear husband, Jack, after a beautiful farewell liturgy in their long-time parish church in Penrith. Soon after the 'First Five' Dutch Grail women arrived in Sydney, Cath became a member of the Grail Student Group at Sydney University where she was studying to become a secondary school teacher. She met Jack at the university around the same time and both became valued leaders in the Family Apostolate Movement, a Grail initiative in Sydney which expanded into several regions of the city from the 1950s through the 1970s. Having had seven children, their family now extends to three generations, the last one of whom, Alice Warner's baby Franky, was born just as Cath's life was ending. Two of Cath's daughters would be particularly well known in the Australian and International Grail – Fran Warner, former member of the National Team and Inter-national Council member, and Mary-Ellen Mullane, director of the film, *Inspired Lives*, a documentary on The Grail broadcast nation-ally by

the Australian Broadcasting Commission in the *Compass* program on ABC-TV. All of us in The Grail join the extended Mullane family in the sadness of loss believing, however, that Cath and Jack know the full truth of Hildegard of Bingen's words:

‘Good people,  
God hugs you.  
You are encircled  
by the arms  
of the mystery of God’.

The two day-time programs Tricia Gemmell led through the year ended in November: one based on readings from *Women of Vision*, the book of Marian Ronan and Mary O'Brien (USA), telling the stories of several remarkable women of the International Grail; the other, called *The Grail meets Laudato Si'*, connected the vision and mission of The Grail with the themes of Pope Francis' encyclical. Next year, Tricia is planning a similar reading/ reflection series based on Judy Cannato's book, *Field of compassion: How the new cosmology is transforming the spiritual life*.

The Book Club is in recess for a month after a happy and productive year and its final gathering on 30th November, where the works we will read in the first six months of 2019 were chosen.

The Australasian Association of Mission Studies, an ecumenical project, in which Alison Healey has participated for many years on behalf of The Grail (originally together with Philippa Green and now with Sheila Hawthorn) ended its program in late October with a reflection on Christian mission in Australia, enlightened by a challenging analysis of the latest National Church Life Survey. The Association is preparing to host an international mission conference in Sydney in 2020.

On 14th October, we organised a special celebration of the Eucharist in the Sydney Centre to mark the canonisation in Rome of Pope Paul VI and Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador. We wanted to honour these two men, not because they were flawless, but because they were profoundly faithful followers of Jesus, selfless and courageous leaders who championed the cause of those suffering disrespect of their culture or lack of social power

and justice. There is a reflection on these two great men of the 20th century by Rev. Claude Mostovik, MSC on p.9.

Ruth Crowe was asked by the International Leadership Team (ILT) to coordinate a Work Team on our International Structures and so spent a couple of weeks in October in Portugal beginning this work. It was a gathering of the ILT and all the international work teams, meeting separately and together to gain the greatest benefit from their mutual exchange. Ruth's sister, Elizabeth, travelled with her and went touring during the working week.

The Rosemary Goldie Memorial Lecture, inaugurated in 2012 as a biennial event, took place again in September, sponsored jointly by Catalyst for Renewal<sup>1</sup> and The Grail in Australia. The guest speaker was John L Allen Jr, American journalist and specialist in Vatican affairs, who spoke on *Pope Francis' efforts for reform and implications for the Australian church preparing for its Plenary Council*. He spoke also at a dinner held a few days earlier. A total of approximately 500 people attended these two events. John Allen also spoke in Melbourne.

In 2020, the Australian Catholic Church will hold a Plenary Council with a view to reform and renewal. Preparations for it began half way through this year with a nationwide consultation, calling for and encouraging collective and individual submissions until the beginning of Lent 2019. The Grail NSW/ACT has completed a collective submission and individual members are also sending comments and proposals. We will follow through the process and contribute as effectively as we can.

Anne Stevens, Mary McDermid, Sheila and Alison continue work with the Grail national archive each week. Alison has also now completed researching the Jesuit and Archdiocesan archives in Melbourne for material

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<sup>1</sup> Members of Catalyst for Renewal describe themselves as believers who are attempting to establish a forum for conversation within the Catholic Church of Australia.

relevant to the Grail's history there. Both archivists, Elizabeth Parker and Rachel Naughton, were very kind and helpful guides.

We were delighted to see Anne Farraway again in Sydney in November. Anne, originally a Queenslander, is a member of the Grail in Canada, who returns home every few years to visit family members in Queensland and New South Wales and we always look forward to seeing her. This year, she timed her visit so well that we were able to take her to the presentation of the Sydney Peace Prize in the city Town Hall - this year awarded to Professor Joseph Stiglitz, world-renowned economist and public policy analyst. He is a recipient of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences and the American John Bates Clark Medal (also for economics), yet said in his acceptance speech with evident emotion that he valued this prize for Peace most of all. The defining challenge for our time, Stiglitz said, is 'how to break the cycle of power and greed to enable all people and the planet to flourish'.

Helen Gomez and Sheila attended an inter-faith symposium in NSW Parliament House, organised by Women and the Australian Church (WATAC), of which they are both members. The theme was *Peace: Exploring the distinctive response of religious traditions*. The speakers were Elsie Heiss, born into the Wiradjuri nation, NSW representative in the national indigenous Catholic council since 1999 and Dame of the Order of St Gregory; Nadia Mahmutovic from the Islamic Science and Research Academy (ISRA); Jan Barnett, Sister of St Joseph; and Rabbi Dr Benjamin Elton from Sydney's Great Synagogue. It was good to see fifty senior schoolgirls among those present. What emerged from the discussion that followed was that, whatever the differences in the religious traditions, all are called to create and nourish harmonious, welcoming communities in our society.

A team, spearheaded by Elizabeth Lee, Terese Sheridan and Nour Barcha, has been working for some months on a Youth Engagement program for 2019. Kendall Benton-Collins, our Administrative Assistant, is assisting the team with her IT skills and ideas.

Following through from their involvement with Pace e Bene and Circles of Peace, Anne Marie George, Gill Burrows, Kay Hunt, Ruth and Terese have been continuing their reflections together on peace and non-violence. They have plans to expand this program in 2019.

Have you heard of Treehouse Theatre or seen any of its productions? It is a project that began in Miller High where Christine Reynolds was teaching English as a Second Language. Drama teachers at the school began with the refugee students to develop short plays telling their own stories. What a transforming experience this has been for the players and the audiences! There they are, performing pivotal moments from their lives, speaking confidently in a newly-acquired language, sharing their true stories of horror and joy, laughter and pain, wonder and endurance. And audiences laugh with them, cry with them and leave with a greater understanding of the refugee journey and the amazing contribution these young people are already making to the Australian community. This year, Sheila saw and deeply appreciated one of the performances in the Seymour Centre called *Missing: Suitcase Stories 2018*, in which twelve Iraqi and Syrian students from Holroyd High presented, in word and song and dance, some 25 short episodes from their lives. Look out for these wonderful productions in 2019.

Finally, some well-wishing:

Welcome home to Liz Lee after her resource leave full of rich experiences.

Congratulations to Norma Tracey on the achievements of the project she founded, known as 'Gunawirra', devoted to the healing and well-being of aboriginal families. On 1st November, Norma retired from all administrative duties while continuing some professional involvement.

And to an extraordinary number of folk who have been smitten with illness or injury or both and are at various stages of recovery - Mary Robertson, Nour Barcha, Marian Kelly, Denise Whip, Sonia Mrva, Anne Day and Kendall Benton-Collins - may they and any of our readers similarly affected regain their health speedily.

A blessed Christmas and New Year to all.

*Alison Healey and Sheila Hawthorn*

## **Brisbane**

Individually and collectively, it has been a very busy time in Brisbane for the Grail. Liz Lancaster and Berna McLay came back from overseas with tales of their adventures – 18 inches of water in Liz’s Venice hotel and Berna’s cruise from Amsterdam to Budapest cancelled because of lack of water in the Danube! Apart from these small hitches they had very interesting experiences and looked decidedly trimmer because of all the walking. They told us of the highlights of the Reunion Lunch of former ‘Ballybrac’ residents, valiantly organised by Berna and held at Tricia Daly’s lovely house at Yerongpilly.

Mary Mennis flew to New Zealand (NZ) to see her grandson perform in the NZ ballet and then to Papua New Guinea (PNG) for the launch at the University of PNG of her most recent book on the lakatoi canoes. This year, we farewelled Mary’s dear husband Brian, who edited her books and supplied illustrations, frequently affirming that each book would be his last. Mary writes: ‘Another book of mine on Fr Ross of Mt Hagen was launched by Arch-bishop Douglas Young in Mt Hagen. Both of these books have been well received. I had a third book to launch in Madang on the flagged history of Madang, but was told that Sir Michael Somare (first Prime Minister of PNG) had launched it the week before. First I knew of it, so I am still waiting for photos of the event. I met for the first time Cardinal To Ribat, MSC, Archbishop of Port Moresby and PNG’s first Cardinal. No one has done his story yet. He suggested I do it. Who knows? I ran into Grace Wohuinangu in Port Moresby and she was with two other women who want to join The Grail.’

Congratulations are in order for Duncan and Keith, Helen Jeffcoat’s sons, and Poppy, Ann Aboud’s granddaughter, on their Grade 12 graduation. Ann’s grandson Lucas is off to play cricket in New Zealand and her son Niall’s family is in Mexico marvelling at Diego Rivera’s social justice murals and the ancient indigenous civilisations. Naome Rusera, accompanied by several of her family, came to one of our meetings and

gave a stunning pictorial presentation of her leadership training in Mozambique on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – an International Grail program. We then gathered for a sumptuous lunch prepared by Jill Herbert.

Mary and Darryl Nelson, Janet Galos and Ann attended an *Honour the Earth* ritual led by Mary Tinney of EarthLink at the Mt Coottha Botanical Gardens. Mary T. kindly allowed us to use her reflection at our Bribie Island retreat, to which Janet also contributed her learnings from the Christian Meditation Conference in Bruges. A reflection of Daniel O’Leary and a session, ‘Living the Sacramental Life’, presented by Ann completed the retreat program. Thanks to Judy Brown and Mary Mennis who prepared Congeau House for our arrival. Mary gave a presentation on poet Emily Congeau and famous painter Ian Fairweather, whose house is in the grounds. In between all this, the National Team members, retiring and newly elected, managed their hand over. Consy Sakaria, who joined us from Townsville, was so impressed by the ocean, that she bought a fishing line and caught four fish! What talent we have in the Grail!

We are so pleased to hear that Mary Nelson’s mother is doing well with her pacemaker.

Jan O’Donoghue and Ann caught up at a short course on theology at the Cathedral and Liz, Jan and Janet have been active in preparing for the Plenary Council in their parishes. Some of us are attending *Catholic Women Speak* at the Cathedral. Ann recommends Wim Wenders’ film on Pope Francis at the Cine Latino Festival. Helen is planning to run a workshop on sustainable fashion and Ann will introduce ‘Fields of Compassion’ by Judy Cannato in 2019. We will ask Bishop Bill Morris, author of *Benedict, Me and the Cardinals Three* to speak on the future of the church at a local parish. We are committed to the three IGA priorities and care for refugees in 2019 and expect another busy year.

*Ann Aboud*

## Townsville

I was very grateful to be invited by the Brisbane group to join them on Bribie Island for their retreat in November. The honouring of the earth with

prayer to the four points of the compass and the naming of what we lament was a profound experience. While I was a dismal failure in Helen's painting and drawing session, I did catch four sea bream when I could not resist the temptation to do a little fishing from a beckoning jetty. There was a fish and tackle shop nearby!

On 19th October, I was invited to Saints Catholic College at James Cook University to present the Grail Award during the annual Valedictory Dinner. Now in its nineteenth year the Award is given to a woman student who has made an outstanding contribution to the spirit and life of the College community. This year, the Award was shared between two students: Claire Stewart in her third year of study for a Bachelor's degree in Veterinary Science and Brooke Stevenson, also in her third year of a Bachelor of Education course. I was very happy to represent The Grail in Australia on such an occasion. It was said that Claire and Brook were chosen because 'they had been very dedicated to the College community, serving as Residential Assistants, always supporting the College spirit and offering assistance to fellow students, especially the first year students'. Claire also represents the College in several University sports. Brook, having participated in the National Association of Australian University Colleges (NAAUC) is eager to share the experience and knowledge she has gained there to make a positive difference in her home College. Both young women have been residents of St Raphael's precinct within the College and intend returning there in their fourth year.

At the Annual General Meeting of the Townsville Multicultural Support Group (TMSG) in October, an annexe to the Group's offices in Mundingburra was named 'the Sheila Hawthorn room' as it is part of the office where Sheila, for many years, sorted and made ready for distribution the household goods, clothing and other items donated for the refugee families the TSMG helped to settle in Townsville.

*Consy (Consolata) Sakaria*

## **National**

On 1st November, the results of the election process for members of the National Team were announced. The new Team will formally begin its term of office on 1st January 2019.

Tricia Gemmell was re-elected for a second term. We are grateful for Tricia's generosity in accepting the responsibilities and work involved for another four years. Carol Farmer (Melbourne) and Helen Jeffcoat (Brisbane) were elected to replace the two retiring Team members, Andrea Venier and Ann Aboud. Both Andrea and Ann have made very significant contributions to the life of The Grail with their creativity and energy and steadfastness.

Heartfelt thanks go to all three of the Team of 2015-18. At the same time, we look forward to the leadership the new Team will offer and wish them very well.

In November all five met in Queensland for a hand over meeting. Carol will be the Australian representative in the International Council, which will be meeting in Tanzania in 2019.

## **OSCAR ROMERO AND PAUL VI: TWO FACES OF JUSTICE AND PEACE**

Excerpts from a reflection by Rev. Claude Mostovik, MSC



As I turn my attention to Oscar Romero and Paul VI, I am reminded of the story in Luke's Gospel of the two disciples of Jesus on the road to Emmaus after Jesus' death. Jesus himself joined them on the road but they did not recognise him until they later sat down to supper with him and we are told 'they knew him in the breaking of the bread'. (Lk 24:35) Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?' (Lk 24:32) As it was with those two disciples, so it was with these two men: confronted with the word of God, their hearts burned within them. And so may it be with us.

It was the murder of Rutilio Grande, Oscar Romero's Jesuit friend, that opened his eyes to the widespread injustices around him. Jesuit theologian, Ignacio Ellacuria, said: 'With Archbishop Romero God passed through El Salvador'. With Romero's canonisation we can now say that God passes through the universal church. Romero's words and actions embody the gospel of Jesus for all people who are undergoing systematic brutality from the tyrants in their lives

The people of El Salvador recognised the truth of Ellacuria's words and acclaimed Oscar Romero a saint long before the church did so officially. Questions were raised: Was Oscar Romero killed for his politics or was his murder a truly Christian martyrdom? Finally now, his death, like that of Jesus, has been declared a consequence of his witness to God's reign, a consequence of his faithful proclamation of the gospel.

To recognise Romero as a martyr is to embrace his model of holiness and his announcing of the gospel without compromise or apology. It is not about piety alone. It is not about quietism that separates faith from works. Romero embarked on his own road to Calvary. He continues to walk ahead of the church on the path of Jesus showing the way towards a church that is, in Pope Francis' words, 'poor and for the poor'. The inhuman social conditions that most of the population of El Salvador was suffering opened the eyes of Romero, like many others in Latin America. He believed that the church had to have an opinion about the world it existed in; that taking sides with the poor was the only possible response if he were to be faithful to the teachings of Jesus. Romero was not meddling in politics, but preaching the gospel which had consequences in defending human life from torture, from killing by the army, from exploitation on the plantations and in factories and from the unjust land system which brought a slower but equally certain death from hunger and disease. For him there could be no split between faith and practice, between orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

We see in Romero a convergence of evangelisation (or the inculturation of the gospel) and work for justice, which is also what Pope Paul VI calls for in such memorable writings as *Populorum Progressio (On the Development of Peoples)* 1967, and *Evangelii Nuntiandi (On evangelisation in the modern world)* 1975. The lives of both men meet in this convergence. Both believed that the church cannot stand aside from historical processes. Both were concerned with reframing the approach and stance of the church in relation to world realities. Paul VI is described as the ‘pope of dialogue’. He wanted a church open to evolving in dialogue with the modern world, a church deeply in touch with the currents of modern culture. ‘If you want peace, work for justice’, was his cry to the world in his World Peace Day Message, 1972.

What is the meaning of our remembering Oscar Romero and Paul VI? ‘*Do this in memory of me*’. Remembering means continuing their work by loving and defending the poor, pursuing justice for the crucified peoples of the world, taking risks for peace and for the true reign of God in history.

Do we hear the cry of our world today? Do we hear what the gospel calls us to? What is happening in our hearts?