



A memory of Kreisler once:
At some recital in this same city
The seats all taken, I found myself pushed
Onto the stage with a few others
So near that I could see the toil
Of his face muscles, a pulse like a moth
Fluttering under the fine skin
And the indelible veins of his smooth brow.
I could see, too, the twitching of the fingers
Caught temporarily in art's neurosis
As we sat there or warmly applauded
This player who so beautifully suffered
For each of us upon his instrument.
So it must have been on Calvary
In the fierce light of the thorns' halo
The men standing by and that one figure,
The hands bleeding, the mind bruised but calm,
Making such music as lives still
And no one daring to interrupt
Because it was himself he played
And closer than all of them the God listened.

R.S. Thomas (1913 – 2000)

*[Fritz Kreisler was one of the world's great violinists 1875 – 1962]
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CONTENTS

News from here and there	3
Brisbane	3
Sydney	5
Melbourne	7
Lenten Program 2020: Understanding Easter – A New Story	9
Papua New Guinea (PNG)	11
In Memory	12
Weathering the Storm, Part I	13

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News from here and there

Brisbane

The Brisbane Grail was pleased to meet members and friends of the Grail in Papua New Guinea (PNG) who were here, together with the Archbishop of Port Moresby, Cardinal John Ribat, to celebrate the blessing of the shrine of Blessed Peter To Rot in Marian Valley outside Brisbane. Mary Mennis and Judy Brown went by bus to the Valley with other excited participants from PNG who sang all the way, to the entertainment of passing motorists. Peter To Rot, Martyr, is the first Melanesian to be declared Blessed - a catechist in the province of East New Britain, who was killed serving his fellow Christians during the Second World War.

Albina Namuesh and her two friends, Emma and Teresia, joined us at a Grail meeting and an informal meeting at Mary's. They were happy with the coverage by the *Catholic Leader*, a Brisbane weekly paper, which showed the procession and celebration in all its splendour. Albina brought photos of their National General Assembly and told us of the elections of office bearers, which was all very impressive. Albina was interested in Helen Jeffcoat's son's study of nursing and paramedics and invited him to do his placement in PNG and then consider transferring to medicine. When he hesitated she assured him it would be possible. Her own daughter is a very busy medico.

Mary will be helping Cardinal Ribat write his life story. The Cardinal speaks very strongly about climate change, rising sea levels, the washing away of parts of Tuvalu, Kiribati and other low lying islands. Mary has been engaged to teach at the Seminary in PNG and to provide her many books for their library. Albina and others will be back in July and we look forward to meeting them again and to catching up on the progression of Blessed Peter To Rot to sainthood. We almost feel we know him now. Mary has written extensively about him in articles and journals and will be writing a book about him.

Everyone is very busy in their parishes and work places. Liz Lancaster is active in her Social Justice Group who impressed us with their forward planning. Helen is teaching a class how to make sustainable beeswax food wraps. Janet Galos and Judy attended a day on *Laudato Si'* at Queen of Apostles parish organised by Louise Scott whom I was encouraging to join the Grail. However, she has found a niche in her parish for her activities. Judy suggested we ask some of the young people who spoke that day to speak with our Grail group and after we heard of the wonderful work Jan O'Donoghue's grandchildren are doing, we decided we would ask them as well.

Joan Chittister is speaking in Melbourne and Sydney in September and indicated she would speak in Brisbane if invited. An ecumenical group has formed and is meeting fortnightly. Judy, Janet and I are involved in this group. We are conferring with Melbourne and Sydney wondering whether Joan will still come with the coronavirus spreading as it is.

We have bought multiple copies of the biography of Anne Hope, an influential Grail leader in South and East Africa, and are reading it avidly. She was a complex woman who contributed significantly in opposition to apartheid and to Steve Biko's education. She thought he would be a future president of South Africa and was horrified to hear of his murder. Anne's own niece was killed because of her work against apartheid. The program, *Training for Transformation*, developed by Anne and Sally Timmel, has become the primary source of inspiration and practical guidance for justice and liberation groups in all the continents of the world.

My granddaughter Sophie has been brought home from Sweden urgently because of COVID-19. As she was driving to the airport she heard that the University of Uppsala where she was studying had closed. Relieved to be home she will be in quarantine for a month.

Jill Herbert and Helen were the planning team for a commemorative Paschal Meal before Easter. Janet recently prepared and facilitated a reflection day based on the works of Evelyn Underhill and John Main. We look forward to her next presentation on the topic, *A 21st Century Paradigm Shift: from Historical Jesus to Cosmic Christ*.
(Ann Aboud)

Sydney

Of the two programs that we postponed from late 2019 to early 2020, only one took place before our Federal and State Governments agreed to impose strict bans on group activities to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This program was a day forum with the title, *How can we make our society more civil?* It was led by Eva Cox, well known sociologist, feminist and activist. The event was fully subscribed with many newcomers to the Centre; and the energy in the room was palpable even before Eva began to speak and intensified as the day went on. But our plans for effective follow-up have stalled until we know not when.

Our intention to continue working with Susan Connolly rsj and Sheelah Treflé-Hidden on René Girard's thought and our contemporary world remains a firm intention until we can make it a reality – perhaps later in the year.

Tricia Gemmell's series of reflections, scheduled for seven Tuesday mornings through the year, began in February with an unexpectedly large number of participants keen to ponder and discuss Richard Rohr's *The Universal Christ*. Now suspended. And we had one gathering for a very promising Lenten evening program – again with a welcome number of new faces in the midst of the more familiar - before we had to cancel further meetings. Anne Marie George, one of the planning group has written more about this program (see p.6 below).

Our first Book Group discussion in January centred on Ruth Park's classic tale of poor Irish residents of inner-city Sydney, *The Harp in the South*. February's book was the best-seller, *Dark Emu*, by Bruce Pascoe, which uncovers evidence of Aboriginal systems of food production and land management that refutes the portrayal of the First Peoples in Australia as entirely nomadic hunter-gatherers. By the end of March, we had replaced our coming together over an evening meal with an e-mail exchange of comments on Thea Astley's powerful *Drylands*. Now in April, we are each reading whatever we choose and exchanging our separate reviews.

Joyce Kornblatt's *Creative Writing Workshop* has been meeting at the Centre every first Saturday of the month for several years, 10 am – 4 pm. After our first face-to-face in February, Joyce proposed we continue via Zoom. And so it was in March; there we were smiling at one another, connecting over a span of 200 kilometres. Everyone affirmed the experience: of course, not as good as being together physically but a lot better than not communicating at all.

We've had an effective Grail meeting in the same way and plan to use this medium from now on for both regional and national purposes.

The Work Groups of two networks in which the Grail is actively involved - the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET) and the Faith Ecology Network (FEN) - also meet regularly via Zoom. AFTINET had plans to celebrate its twentieth anniversary with several public events all of which are postponed till the latter half of the year, hopeful for some reprieve by then. Meanwhile, its educative work, its critical analysis of trade negotiations and its campaigning against their unjust and overreaching features continue, using digital media. FEN, an interfaith network, has two public events in an advanced stage of planning – an interfaith conference and a city prayer vigil. Rather than abandon or delay these events, the Core Group has decided to propose to Australia's national public broadcaster, the ABC, that they be adapted for broadcasting. We wait in hope.

On 7th March, Tricia Gemmell, Helen Gomez, Ruth Crowe and Sheila Hawthorn joined a number of women and men on the steps of St Mary's church, North Sydney, for a prayerful acknowledgment of International Women's Day, organised by Women and the Australian Church (WATAC). Earlier Helen had also attended the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of WATAC, which affirmed the importance of the organisation, especially at this time of a Plenary Council of the Australian Church. The meeting elected a new executive and the participants emerged from it evidently energised and enthusiastic about the future.

Albina Namuesh, from the Port Moresby Grail group in Papua New Guinea, came to stay with us in the Sydney Centre for nine days or so in February - a visit which we all enjoyed very much.. Albina was among the very large number of Papua New Guineans to join in the ceremony of blessing of a

shrine of Blessed Peter To Rot erected in the Valley of Shrines outside Brisbane. (See Brisbane News above.)

Elizabeth Lee alerted us to the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Lenten appeal for contributions to their foodbank which serves Asylum Seekers who receive no support from the government. They are often described as ‘illegals’ although there is no such thing as an illegal Asylum Seeker. ‘Avila’ became the drop-off base and Liz drove a boot load of non-perishable food to JRS on Easter Tuesday. Thanks to all those who contributed.

In February, we had a farewell lunch party to express our deep thanks to Kendall Benton-Collins who, sadly, resigned her position as Administrative Assistant here after over three years of highly skilled and reliable service. Kendall expressed the wish to remain connected as a volunteer and, true to her word, was (and continues to be) very helpful in the process of selecting and inducting her replacement. We welcome Rosamund Burton and look forward to her working with us.

There are more birds singing in the garden more happily than we have heard since before the fires last year A delight.

May this Easter season bring us all and our world a new life of peaceful flourishing. *(Alison Healey and Sheila Hawthorn)*

Melbourne

At the time of December Newsletter, we were praying for a less disastrous bushfire season. How the world has changed over our summer! What can one say without seeming to trivialise these events? We continue to pray for everyone in dire straits and for all the rest of us who try to adapt to this ‘new normal’.

Despite the people who are reacting in an apparently selfish way, the goodness of many lifts the spirits. A sense of real community, kindness and respect is evident across the world. We are also inspired by the ability of human beings to use their creativity to cheer us and to make valuable use of their time. Using our Grail initiative, we, too, will find ways to be of service to others. It is most significant that we may now have the space to reflect on

our lives, to reassess and spend time on our spiritual growth. We are grateful to belong to a movement of women whose resource in this area is incredible.

As our planned events for this year have been cancelled or put on hold, we are nevertheless keeping in touch via technology. Our *lectio* group had two gatherings in person, one at Hesed and one at Irena and Kevin Dunn's home, before the physical distancing began. We continued discussing Greg Sheridan's tome, *God is good for you*, but also reflected on some of the Grail International Leadership Team's questions on leadership. We will be facilitating further contributions on this subject in the near future. By the time this goes to print, we hope to be linked up via phone-video for future *lectio* gatherings which will include time for meditation.

In early January, Alison paid a quick visit to see Joanna Waite and to have a short break. (She planned to return in April but, to safeguard the residents, no visitors are permitted into the Retirement Centre until further notice.) Later in January, thanks to information received from Ruth and Alison, Andrea made contact with Elizabeth Kavuu from Kenya, who arrived in Melbourne to begin a Masters in Engineering at Melbourne University. We had an enjoyable lunch together on Australia Day and discussed the possibility of Elizabeth's residing at Hesed from the second semester, where she would be interested to participate in and assist the Melbourne group. At our first Regional Meeting for the year, Elizabeth met some of our members over afternoon tea after negotiating her way on Melbourne's trams.

It was lovely to have more happy news in January when Lauren and Mark Lockwood- Porter became proud parents of their beautiful baby girl, Harriet Ann, born on 25th. As seen in recent photos, bub and parents are going well. Many congratulations from all of us!

With most of our planned 2020 activities now being on hold, we set the wheels in motion for the Hesed bathroom renovation, thanks to Genny Grabau's planning. We have very recently seen the architect's completed plans and hope to move to the next stage, if the builder's recommendations are approved.

We ask for prayers for Colette Gomez and her husband Mark, whose heart surgery has been repeatedly delayed, due to the COVID-19 situation. We

also keep Mary Robertson, Colleen and the family in our thoughts and prayers as they mourn the loss of John, a loving, caring man. May we take strength from wonderful people who inspire us.

**Many blessings to all over this Easter Season and in the months ahead.
Stay safe and well.** (Andrea Venier)

Lenten Program 2020: Understanding Easter – A New Story

Planning for the Sydney Grail Lenten program began in early February 2020 with the single suggestion from Ruth Crowe that we present new theology on the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection. With Lent early this year, the planning team was hard-pressed to create a program and find speakers in time, so we decided that we would collect readings for communal reflection instead. And so over a few meetings, we settled on excerpts from Judy Cannato, Richard Rohr and others, to be spread over three evenings in March with the themes:

- How do we understand the death of Jesus?
- How do we understand the resurrection of Jesus? and
- The Kingdom of God – the Easter celebration.

Twenty eight people attended the first evening on 11 March. There was lively exchange in the small group discussions and we were very encouraged by the response. As the second week approached, however, concerns about COVID-19 forced us to rethink the gathering, and we replaced the face-to-face program with email sharing of the readings and reflections. During the following week, the Australian government imposed further restrictions on social gatherings, so once more the readings were shared online. If only we had known the possibilities of Zoom back then!

To give a taste of the readings and reflections in the program, here are sample responses from the third session, *The Kingdom of God – the Easter celebration*.

- 1 There was one paragraph that jumped out at me today, not so much because it is the most revelatory or revolutionary but because it seems to speak into this time.

The 'kingdom of God' as we witness Jesus living it, is about responsible and caring relationships, ones that come out of a bigger story than Jesus' listeners were accustomed to hearing. 'What counts is people', writes John Fuellenbach., '[Jesus'] interpretive key is compassion and justice, not holiness and purity. Love is the heart of the Reign of God. By loving this way, Jesus himself creates a liberating lifestyle and exhibits a wonderful freedom to do good.' In and through his easy way of being with people, Jesus modelled and fostered relationships based on respect and love, for that is what he had experienced in his relationship with incomprehensible holy mystery. (Judy Cannato, Field of Compassion)

It is evident that relationship is the focal point of the kingdom. I'm grateful to our Grail community that aspires to "live the kingdom", in compassion for humanity and all of creation. *(Liz Lee)*

- 2 I was particularly heartened by the words, *What counts is people*, and I am hoping this is an idea which will catch on in this world, rather than focussing on how much profit can be made and marginalising people, seeing those who have no work as not contributing to society. The first paragraph seems to sum up who Jesus was and his whole ministry of relationships of love with people: *Encounters with hypocrisy filled him with anger, and the sight of suffering moved him to compassion.* The presence of love is healing. This reflection is not only a comfort for me but a reminder that unconditional love as Jesus taught changes us in a deep and spiritual way. I wonder whether people's experiences because of the coronavirus will lead to a more compassionate society? *(Kay Hunt)*

(Anne Marie George. for the Planning Team: Sheila Hawthorn, Margaret Hetherington, Kay Hunt, Helen McCabe)

Papua New Guinea (PNG)

We have drawn on letters we have received from Grail women in various provinces in PNG to put together these news items.

A major event in December 2019 was a National General Assembly (NGA), hosted for the first time by the Grail group in East New Britain (ENB). It was held at the Seminary, where Adriana George is currently teaching. All who attended affirm their gratitude to the planning team for a well-conducted and stimulating meeting.

PNG consists of a number of populated islands; and the main island is substantially mountainous. This makes travel across the country expensive as, most often, it must be done by plane. However, seven women from four Local Groups managed to participate. We congratulate them. It was a pity that, of the four women representing the East Sepik who planned to attend, only one was able to do so in the end.

Highlights of the Assembly were:

- the commitment into The Grail of three women from Port Moresby in a ceremony in which the other members also renewed their commitment. We all want to warmly welcome *Anne Lema*, *Concepta Tikot* and *Angelica Bambano* into the International Grail. In the same ceremony, the Assembly remembered in gratitude Jacques van Ginneken SJ and all the founding members of The Grail 'who are with the Lord'.
- the election of a new National Team (NT) and National Treasurer. NT members are *Monica Liumene* (from West New Britain), *Susan Pope Karun* (ENB) and *Nancy Yahu* (Manus); the National Treasurer is *Joan Pepi* (also from Manus). They live on two different islands and, most of the time, will have to rely on telephone and electronic communication. They do plan to meet in July. Let us hope the restrictions on movement to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in PNG do not force them to cancel this. The news of the virus in PNG at time of writing is that there are seven reported cases of infection in three provinces - one case in New Britain.

Lenten programs of reflection and prayer took place in the Local Groups. In Moresby, Rose Maule reported that they followed a program called *Forty days with Jesus*, consisting of texts, prayers and songs, which they found enlightening and inspiring. They decided to meet together on Saturdays only and leave it to members to reflect in their own homes on the other days, but ‘social distancing’ required them to give up on even weekly meetings before the program was completed. What was especially good about this program, Rose writes, was that it helped them to know Jesus better – his personality and style of leadership as well as his great impact on people of all walks of life – and they felt more strongly how ‘very privileged (they were) to have been called to be his disciples in The Grail’.

To all our Australian readers, the PNG Grail express their sadness and send their deep sympathy for the terrible destruction brought to the land and its inhabitants over the last six months by drought and fires and floods and now the coronavirus. And they send their Easter greetings and good wishes.

Sources: Albina Namuesh, Rose Maule, Nancy Yahu, Adriana George, Monica Liumene.

In Memory

I went to sleep; and now I am refreshed.
A strange refreshment, for I feel in me
An inexpressive lightness, and a sense
Of freedom, as if I were at last myself
As never had been before.

In St John Henry Newman’s poem, *The Dream of Gerontius*, he has Gerontius speaking of his dying and death in these memorable lines. I recall them now, writing of three long-time faithful friends:

Rita Corby sent us news that her brother, *John Rasmussen*, priest of the Rockhampton Diocese, died in Mackay on 1st January. John was a member of a highly respected and generous Mackay family, who have been friends and supporters of The Grail since Joanna Waite and Pat Sheeran first arrived to establish a Grail Centre there in 1955. John had been suffering a long

illness, eased by the unfailing, loving care of his siblings. He is remembered as a man of integrity and kindness in his service of others.

Anne Boyd lived in 'Avila' as a young woman. As a registered nurse, she then worked for many years with Ryder-Cheshire projects in India. Having married and moved to Singleton on the Hunter River north of Sydney, Anne and Philip would come down to North Sydney each Advent to participate in the Carol Service presented in the St Mary MacKillop Chapel by the Grail Singers - and to join us over supper. Anne died on 16th March. Philip arranged for Anne's Requiem to be videoed and live-streamed. I was grateful to be able to feel present in the serene liturgy and to honour a warm, loving woman and her life of care.

Mary Robertson's husband, John, suffered a stroke and died in Sydney on 21st March. Mary has carried major responsibilities in the Grail in Australia over many years and John has been a source of quiet strength and ready support, whom we have all deeply appreciated. Sadly, the 'social distancing' regulations allowed only ten people at John's Requiem. We could but assure Mary and all the members of the Robertson extended family that we were one with them in thanking God for the life of this honourable, good man.

(Alison Healey)

Weathering the Storm, Part I

The community of the Southern Highlands in New South Wales, like many places around Australia, has been weathering the storm in recent times - years of drought, followed by bushfires that destroyed homes and properties, then torrential rain. And many of us could do little but watch on. We knew that the loss, trauma and grief would not just wash away with the next passing cold front. Rather, this along with many past traumas would be carried by individuals and communities for weeks, months, even years to come. Surely there must be something we could do.

Four of us got together - Christine Carlton, a professional story teller, Patricia Thomas, a grief and bereavement counsellor, Elizabeth Lee, who accompanies people through compassionate listening, and Sr Marilyn Lee at Hartzler Park. We envisioned offering opportunities for people to restore life

after these crises, through sharing stories in the beautiful surrounds of Hartzler Park. We were fortunate to have the support of others who offered to come and hold space at these gatherings.

Unfortunately, the storms and crises did not abate; COVID -19 began to spread across our nation, as did directions for social distancing. Events were cancelled, leaving us with a quandary, whether to proceed or not with the first of these quarterly days on Wednesday, 18th March. Then, two of our facilitators, Patricia and Christine, became unwell. It was obvious that we could not offer what we had planned. But the loss, trauma and grief had not gone away and, as we were to discover, it continues to co-exist with the building anxiety and fear of the COVID-19 pandemic. We contacted people we knew were planning to come, with the following message:

“ In support of community attempts to slow the spread of COVID-19 and ‘flatten the curve’ of its spread, we are reluctantly cancelling our *Weathering the Storm* gathering at Hartzler Park on Wednesday, 18 March. However, if you wish to have some ‘time out’ at Hartzler Park or talk about your experience of living in these times of crisis you are still most welcome to come on Wednesday. Please be assured, that while maintaining appropriate physical distancing, we will continue to offer social connection and compassionate presence. We hope to be able to offer *Weathering the Storm* in its entirety when this public health crisis has abated. Please feel free to contact us on 02 4861 3223 or hartzprk@bigpond.net.au.”

And so, Marilyn and I prepared to welcome those who came. And three did. One from Narooma on the South Coast, another from Mittagong and a third from Melbourne. It so happened that these three women were known to each other. As well as companionship, delicious food and glorious autumn weather, the gifts of the day included: the sharing of stories of being overwhelmed, of devastation, love and miracles; a sense of being heard, embraced and affirmed; a space for silence, savouring and reflecting; the freedom to name, claim and naturalise feelings; an opportunity to care for one’s body, mind and spirit; a sense of knowing that we are not alone, that friends, acquaintances and strangers are in this with us in these extraordinary times.

I sense that the biggest learnings for us were:

- 1) This time of retreating from the 'busyness' of the world is vital for our individual flourishing, particularly following trauma.
- 2) Fostering social connection is crucial for weathering storms, more so when surrounded by messages advocating 'social distancing'.
- 3) Despite the layers of trauma we may be carrying, like layers of an onion, the outermost layer, the now, is where our attention and intention is most desperately needed. Stay with the now and the wisdom it holds.

As we concluded the day, there was an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the blessings of one another and the gift of the day. Events beyond our control will influence what happens next, so watch out for *Weathering the Storm Part 2*.

With much appreciation for Christine Carlton, Patricia Thomas, Merrilyn Lee, for their trust in exploring this space and for the support of *Grief Care* and the *Our Lady of the Sacred Heart* Community at Hartzler Park.

(Elizabeth Lee, 23 March 2020)



On the way to asylum seekers (Photo by Liz Lee)

Despite the difficulties associated with the COVID-19 crisis, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is continuing to support the asylum seekers. One problem is that their regular volunteer pool has necessarily shrunk, due to the current health advice.

The JRS is calling for volunteers to pack hampers and others who have a car to drive the hampers to the asylum seekers. JRS has developed comprehensive protocols, although, as we all know, there are risks of community transmission through many daily activities that we need to undertake. It is a requirement that people have a current 'working with children clearance'.

The days volunteers are required at present are Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Contact Jane Turner by email Jane.turner@jrs.org.au or ring Reception on 9098 9336. Many thanks and sending love and greetings in these extraordinary times – Liz.