

The Grail Newsletter

The Grail
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Holy Thursday

Carol Siemering (Grail USA)

Back in those days
they were not wearing shoes
and detergent-clean socks...

Just simple sandals
and all week they'd been tramping
uphill and down,
bits of palm fronds in their toes,
grit, fig-stuff.

He was their teacher,
their rabbi, their guru.
They'd seen him do impossible things.
The kind of master
who would make a woman
want to unknot her hair,
and clean his feet with it.

But now *he* was holding the basin,
a towel over his arm.
It made them as nervous
as flies on a camel.
They looked at one another
from the corner of their eyes
and gave their feet over to him.

He was softly singing
a tune in Aramaic,
'Be kind,
Be loving,
That's where God is',
it went.

It was a catchy tune
and all through the meal
they found themselves
humming it again and again
in their heads.

But when the stars
came out that night, it seems
they couldn't remember
any of it at all.



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DATE CLAIMER

A WORKSHOP ON ENGAGING WITH DEMOCRACY Sydney Grail Centre

SATURDAY, 2ND MAY, 10 AM – 4 PM

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News from here and there

Sydney

We met as a Regional Group for the first time in 2015 on 14th February, pleased to see one another again after a few weeks' break over Christmas and January and concerned that illness had overtaken Anne Day, Jillian Morrison and Margaret Quinn. Good that all are feeling better.

Anne had not fully recovered from the shingles when she represented The Grail at the annual conference of the Australian Catholic Religious Against the Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH). This was held in the Passionist Conference Centre in Templestowe in Melbourne. Some of the founding members of ACRATH, which is at work now in nearly all the States, spoke of its early development and achievements. Anne reports that it was evident at the conference 'that today's members are fired with compassion for those who are trafficked and a determination to work against this modern day form of slavery'.

The weeks that have gone by since our February meeting have seen us busy continuing programs and activities from 2014 and preparing new ones.

The Book Club had already met in late January, having decided last year to read George Orwell's *Coming Up for Air*, his lively evocation of life in England between the wars. February saw us in Paris pursuing the fortunes of Balzac's characters in *Pere Goriot* and, in March, Olga Masters' *Amy's Children* took us into the hugely different world of the inner suburbs of Second World War Sydney. We're having fun entering into these varied works of imagination which, at the same time, confront us with so much to consider about human behaviour and relationships and societies. In the next couple of months, we will leap from Vera Brittain's autobiographical *Testament of Youth* to Katharine Susanna Pritchard's novel, *Coonardoo*, which caused such controversy when published in 1928.

Former members of The Grail Singers delighted in one another's company when they gathered in Margaret Quinn's house for a reunion. It was an animated evening of talk and laughter over an attractive table of food and

drink, ending with a sing-along of favourites from our repertoire. Everyone left talking about our next get-together.

We have had three reflection programs running these last months. There were the usual Wednesday evenings, 7.30 – 9 pm, of ‘lectio divina’; throughout Lent we contemplated excerpts from Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*. Tricia Gemmell has planned a series of sessions on the spirituality of Benedict on Tuesday mornings every second month through the year. Between now and the next Newsletter, this group will be meeting on 21st April, 2nd June and 28th July, 10 am to 12 noon. On three Saturday mornings during Lent, also 10 am – 12 noon, another group gathered to contemplate texts from the writings of three women mystics - Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila. This initiative proved popular and very enjoyable. Anyone interested in joining us on Wednesday evenings or Tuesday mornings, just come when you can. No preparation is necessary and it doesn’t matter if you can’t come regularly.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a so-called ‘free trade’ agreement being negotiated among 12 countries bordering the Pacific, is now a topic being presented and argued about in the daily press, in journals and in television and radio news programs. Much of this is due to the long years of effort of the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET) to alert the Australian public to the power of trade treaties to override national laws and policies. The Grail NSW has been a member of this network from its beginnings. We feel really pleased with the markedly increased awareness in the Australian community, though there are still many changes to be made, especially in regard to the present exclusion of the Australian people from the processes of the negotiations and the final decisions. AFTINET’s annual fund-raising dinner will be held on Wednesday, 20th May. Interested readers could contact Alison Healey at the Sydney Centre address (inside front cover).

On Friday 13th March, Gunawirra celebrated the launch of the first book to emerge out of its work among young Aboriginal parents and children. *Transgenerational Trauma and the Aboriginal Preschool Child - Healing Through Intervention* is also the first psychoanalytically informed book on working with Aboriginal preschool children. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

professionals under the leadership of Norma Tracey contributed to the content of the book. Congratulations to all concerned.

Anne Stevens and Mary McDearmid resumed their steady work on the Grail national archives early in February. Working several hours once a week, they have picked up where Moya Merrick, Shirley Collins and Denise O'Hara left off and are achieving a big work.

Kincoppal Rose Bay, a girls' secondary school under the auspices of the Sacré Coeur sisters, schedules 'spirituality evenings' each year attended by a mix of senior students, parents, alumnae and members of the local church. This year Mary Shanahan rscj asked Alison to take part in a panel presentation and discussion on women's spiritual leadership in the church. Patty Fawcner sgs and Emily Shaw, Senior Student, were the other speakers.

We continue to get inquiries about the *Personal Journal* for prisoners which we printed and distributed through last year. Having no copies left, the Journal team is meeting soon to make plans for a new production for 2015. The feedback from men and women prisoners and chaplains has been very encouraging.

Our next major event will be a workshop on Saturday, 2nd May, 10 am – 4 pm, entitled *Democracy. Let's do it. For a change.* There are so many expressions of dissatisfaction with how our democracy works and doesn't work that this workshop is timely. The planning group, led by Anne Marie George, are close to completing their preparations and hope for strong participation.

On Easter Sunday, Nour Barcha arrived home after several weeks in New York, where she was hosted by the Grail in the Bronx and participated in the program at the UN, organised by the Commission for the Status of Women (CSW), with whom the New York Grail is very active.

Nour is not the only one travelling overseas this year. Elizabeth and John Lee leave for a few weeks in the USA in mid-April. Fran Warner will soon be one in a tour group arranged by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan that will visit centres of Benedictine life in Italy and England. Kay Hunt will be going to Europe mid-year for a meeting of an International Grail Formation group. And Tricia and Geoffrey Gemmell are visiting family in Europe just

at the right time for Tricia to be able to spend a few days at a meeting of Grail network co-ordinators in Utrecht in July.

In late August – early September we will be hosting a meeting of the International Council which will bring some 25 Grail women from around the world to Sydney. It is twenty years since we last had such an international gathering in Australia, so we look forward to the stimulus it will surely bring.

Visitors to the Grail Centre will notice signs of some enlivening activity in the kitchen. Our old stove that has been quietly but steadily dying over several months - with now only two functions out of seven in operation - will soon give way to a new replacement. As well, walls, cupboards and tiles have changed colour. When we have a new cupboard beside the stove and the laminex is replaced, yet another sector of the house will be smiling.

During this time between Easter and Pentecost when we are particularly conscious of the abundance of God's blessings, we wish you all well.

Sydney Grail group

Melbourne

The final Regional event for 2014 was the Advent Eucharist at June and Laurie Ryan's home with celebrant Fr Michael Mason. It was a wonderful evening of prayer and sharing. The year concluded on a sad note with the death of Andrea's beloved father just before Christmas. The support of members was most comforting and greatly appreciated. We were also saddened at the news of the loss of the brother of Mary Nelson (Brisbane).

Over the holiday period, Dawn McGann underwent surgery for a serious illness. She is recovering slowly and has been in our prayers and thoughts.

Ann Niall and Andrea have continued to be busy with improvements to and maintenance of the Grail unit, 'Hesed', in Balwyn. We had assistance from a plumber to fix some of the water pressure problems. There are still a few matters to sort out with the body corporate on the externals of the unit. Otherwise, we are happy with the internal improvements including the decluttering of the office. Genny Grabau has continued to deal efficiently with financial matters relating to the unit and the Melbourne region.

Our first event for the year was hosting the old and new National Teams over the weekend of 7th – 8th February. We were a group of 7 in all – the old team (Mary Nelson, Jill Herbert and Kay Hunt), the new team (Ann About, Tricia Gemmell, and Andrea), together with Mary Robertson (re-elected National Treasurer). After beginning with a very apt ‘New Year’ liturgy prepared by Tricia, the outgoing team reported on national and international events and gave us helpful insights and suggestions on handing over. Genny contributed to the meeting on Saturday afternoon with a financial report for Melbourne, and the Melbourne members joined us on Saturday evening for a shared meal. We spent a lovely evening together. It was great to be able to both renew friendships and make new ones. It was a special moment when the outgoing team presented us with a candle for our future gatherings. On Sunday afternoon, the new team discussed immediate ‘to do’ actions and began planning for the coming months while Mary R, Mary N, Kay and Jill spent some time with Pat Sheeran. Many thanks to Ann Niall for her help in setting up for the weekend and to the Sydney and Brisbane members of both teams for joining us down south!

We recommenced our *lectio divina* group in February with a weekly reflection on Lenten readings taken from ‘Rich in Mercy’, a publication from the Brisbane diocese. The group continues to meet on Wednesday mornings with regular attendees, Dinny Culican Ward, Ann, Irena Dunne, Alice Ley and Andrea, and sometimes others. We are finding our reflections and discussions very fruitful and hope to be able to expand the group as the year progresses.

Pat’s birthday in February was celebrated over a few days with visits from members and friends such as Joanna and Ann, and an outing for afternoon tea on the day with Genny and Andrea. Various members continue to visit Pat regularly.

At our last Regional Meeting, we discussed some options for events for the rest of 2015. We are very open to inviting some International Council (IC) members to Melbourne before or after the IC meeting. We also started to address the questions in *Blessing the Space*, a current international Grail reflection, but feel we need more time over the next few weeks to reflect on our responses. We were happy to welcome back Jane Brennan to our

meeting and we were interested to hear her insights into her Grail experience. We look forward to the year's developments!

Andrea Venier

Brisbane

In February, members met at Our Lady of Mt Carmel Parish for 8.30 am Mass followed by a blessing of a plaque in memory of Mamie O'Keeffe, who was among the earliest of the young women attracted to the Grail when the first group of five Dutch women visited Brisbane. Mamie lived in the parish for most of her life and the unit that she bequeathed to the Grail was just round the corner. Late last year, this property was sold and the funds invested. Fr Jerome Watt, O Carm, mentioned during his introduction to the Eucharist that he remembered Mamie well. In fact he often tried discreetly to avoid her after Mass! A keen local historian working at the John Oxley State Library, Mamie would often seek him out to urge him to send the Parish Bulletin to the State Library collection, while he, though proud of the Bulletin, didn't think it merited saving for posterity.

After Mass, we joined Fr Paul Sireh in the memorial garden, which is lovely with its hedges, paving and benches for the weary. Fr Paul is from Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, and knows Maggie Janesch, as he officiates at the regular Eucharists for Papua New Guineans in Brisbane. In the garden we prayed and the priest sprinkled holy water: *Let this garden be a place of peace and quiet reflection. Let it be a refuge and an oasis among busy lives. Let it be a place of encounter with you, the living God.* Then Jan O'Donoghue who knew Mamie spoke a few words of tribute to her.

Ann Aboud's granddaughter, Lily Aboud, and Helen Jeffcoat's daughter, Olwen Paterson, both achieved the highest mark possible in their final year secondary school results in 2014. So both are now off to University, Lily to study medicine at James Cook in Townsville and Olwen to the University of Queensland to pursue a Science Honours degree.

Members of our Grail group are practically involved in a project sewing sustainable feminine hygiene kits for girls in developing countries so that they do not miss school each month. It is a project that has reached women and girls in 76 countries on 6 continents. A group at St William's parish in

Grovely, Brisbane, join us in making the kits. It is an opportunity too for women of the parish to hear about the Grail and meet Brisbane members. Last year Margaret Hounslow took a supply of kits to Ethiopia. At an afternoon tea in March, Margaret spoke about the project to those who had contributed and told of the girls' reactions to these precious gifts. See www.daysforgirls.org for more information.

Helen Jeffcoat.

North Queensland

Another year has got away to a busy start, no doubt, for most people. As I write, I am remembering my comments in the last Newsletter about 'peaceful Pacific'. Today's news announces: 'Vanuatu (a small Pacific nation of many low-lying islands) lashed by the severest winds ever experienced as cyclone *Pam* storms through. Communications are completely cut. Screams are heard as people's homes blow away'. At the same time, *Nathan* continues to hover in the Coral Sea after depositing 400+mls of rain on one town in 48 hours. Of course, the Australian media gave ample and dramatic coverage to *Marcia* which struck Yeppoon, Rockhampton and other places on Queensland's central coast in early March. Bargara, where Daphne Tighe lives, was also affected by cyclone *Marcia* but Daphne was in England at the time. She recently wrote that she married John Tanner in January and now plans to live 'six months in Australia and six months in the UK'. Loving congratulations to Daphne and John and our wishes for many blessings in their life together.

The House of Prayer was the venue for an inspiring and contemporarily relevant Lenten course based on 'Les Misérables'. Titled *Another Story Must Begin*, the course was written by Jonathan Meyer, a priest in Oxfordshire. It called us to reassess what we can do with our lives, for ourselves and those around us.

I recently attended a book launch which was very informative, as well as being a most enjoyable social occasion. Professor Don Gallagher, a long-time friend of the Grail in Townsville, has written *In the Picture*, the fruit of his devoted, indeed passionate, research into the life of Evelyn Waugh. The book was launched by Professor Michael Ackland, James Cook University, Townsville. Don's account of his comprehensive probing to sort the facts

from the fiction of Waugh's life and his description of the writing process and the challenges involved in this latest of his books were an added highlight of the evening.

Our sympathy and prayers are with Bill and Althea Norton and family on the death of Bill's mother in Richmond recently. May she rest in peace.

Deborah Pennington has a 4-day working week this year. I am not sure if this means that she has added more items to her inventory of activities or has increased her involvement in the Aquapella Choir and the Townsville Folk Club. Townsville Little Theatre is currently enjoying very welcome 'good houses' for their performance of Robert Harling's play, *Steel Magnolias*. The Front -of-house Coordinator (me this time) is getting plenty of exercise.

The first months of the year are supposed to be the Wet Season in the tropics, but Townsville has had its driest February on record and March has hardly been different.

May a new story of love, openness and peace begin for all of us this Easter.

Sheila Hawthorn

Nuclear Weapons Seventy Years After Hiroshima

A letter from Chris de Leeuw

Chris is a member of the Grail in the Netherlands, active in the peace movement and in campaigning for humane treatment for refugees. A letter has just arrived from her describing an action in the Netherlands aimed at alerting the public to the total inventory of nuclear weapons in the world and the danger they threaten.

On 26th February, some forty men and women of peace were summoned to appear in court because of their action in March last year during the Nuclear Security Summit. While President Obama and 55 other world leaders were talking about nuclear safety, some seventy of us from different peace movements and the Catholic Worker, wanted to bring them a letter with our request to abstain from a new generation of nuclear weapons and to follow through with the Non-Proliferation Treaty they had signed. We had been informed that the old B-61 bombs were to be replaced by more advanced nuclear bombs. We were arrested by the police, detained for hours and sent away with a fine of €150 each. History repeats itself: in the 1980s we had demonstrated against nuclear weapons and I was imprisoned for 24 hours three times. This time, too, I decided that I would not pay, but go into prison for the required three days (24 hours' confinement for every €50), as part of my demonstration. People have gone to sleep not thinking any more about the danger of these weapons.

This overview of the world's nuclear weapons gives me the creeps:

Country	Deployed strategic	Non-strategic	Non-deployed warheads	Total inventory	Growth trends
USA 2013	1950	200	2650	7700	Decrease
Russia 2013	1800	0	2700	8500	Decrease

UK 2011	<160		65	225	Decrease
France 2011-12	<300	50		298-300	Slight decrease
China 2013			240-300	300	Growing
India 2013			80-100	80-100	Steady
Pakistan 2013			90-110	90-110	Steady
Israël 2013			80	80 (200)	Growing
North Korea 2013			<10	<10	Growing

Why don't we protest more that countries are not adhering to the Treaty they signed? Why do we not protest against the fact that these new bombs will cost more than their weight in gold? By international law, nuclear weapons, like chemical weapons and cluster-bombs, are illegal, although, when we try to bring law-suits, the courts seem to squirm. In our country, PAX has begun a campaign to get 40,000 signatures to ensure that our Parliament will debate again the topic of 'nukes'.

So, on 26th February, we were at the Palace of Justice, first standing outside with a big poster NUCLEAR SECURITY IS NO NUCLEAR BOMBS. To our surprise we had to wait in the corridor because our lawyer held a preliminary defence that the prosecution had made several mistakes. When we did go in, the judge told us that the prosecution case was declared inadmissible. Most of us were disappointed, as we had prepared a plea against nuclear weapons and for the freedom to demonstrate. I myself had planned to sing – my *cri de coeur* - a 'Song against the third world war'

(from Huub Oosterhuis). But, as the case was called off, we were not allowed to say, or sing, anything...

On my bookshelf stands a card with the text: 'If injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty'. That encourages me to make my voice heard again and again against injustice, writing about it, talking about it, acting against it.

The Harrowing Of Hell

We say in the Creed: 'He suffered died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose...' Holy Saturday, then, is the day which marks Jesus' descent into hell.

The three well-known cycles of medieval mystery plays, the *Chester*, *Wakefield* and *York* cycles, all included, in their dramatisations of the history of salvation, a play that tells the story of Jesus' coming to Satan's domain and liberating the souls languishing there awaiting their redemption. The play derives from an old legend, which can be traced back to the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, one of the apocryphal gospels of the early church. It seems that in Chester the play was presented by 'the cooks' and in York by 'the saddlers'.

The Chester and York plays have the title, *The Harrowing of Hell*, and the Wakefield play is called *The Deliverance of Souls*. 'Harrow' has many meanings. Probably, the most familiar is 'plough, pulverise, lacerate, tear'. We draw an analogy from harrowing a field to speak of a human being having a harrowing experience. In medieval English, 'harrow' was used to mean a 'cry of distress or alarm, a call for succour'. In this sense, 'the harrowing of hell' refers to the cries from the souls yearning for deliverance.

The York and Wakefield plays are virtually the same and are more intellectual, so to speak, than the Chester play. They feature a disputation between Jesus and Satan, where Satan attempts, but fails, to win by argument. These two plays rely more on words and less on dramatic action than the Chester play, which has more popular, immediate appeal.

The scene is hell. In all three plays we find *Jesus* and *Satan*, *Adam*, *Isaiah*, *Simeon*, *John the Baptist*, *David*, *Archangel Michael* and *demons*. The Wakefield and York also include *Moses* and one woman, *Eve*. The Chester

includes *Seth*, Adam's son, and three souls already in heaven, *Enoch*, *Elias* and the *Good Thief*. It also has a female character - a thieving, lying *Woman* who kept a tavern on earth and who remains with Satan when the others leave with Jesus. She has a lively monologue, very comical to our ears, in which she makes clear to the audience, in detail, what kind of activities unrepented will land you in Satan's domain forever. *Eve*, on the other hand, is deeply repentant and says that, if God chose to leave them confined there longer, it would be no more than they deserved.

Symbol of light

All three plays use the symbol of light to signify the approach of Jesus and this symbol is also what connects the various persons in the play. For example, when the light of Jesus' coming is seen in the distance, *Eve* comments that it is 'the same light we saw in paradise'; *Isaiah* recalls his prophecy, 'the people who walk in darkness have seen a great light'; *Simeon* remembers the presentation of Jesus in the temple and his joyful greeting of the coming of this 'light of revelation'; *John the Baptist* speaks of the coming down of the Spirit on Jesus when he was baptising him in the Jordan; *Moses* reminds everyone of his experience on Mount Tabor when Jesus was transfigured in glorious light.

All three plays speak of the long time of waiting, in hope of the fulfilment of the promise Adam recalls God made in the Garden that Jesus would conquer Satan.

Jesus at the gates of hell cries out the words of Psalm 24, 'Open up ye gates, and let the king of glory enter'. There is immediate pandemonium. The lesser demons are ordered to 'ding and dong' him if he attempts to enter, but they remember that Jesus was so powerful as to raise Lazarus from the dead and, fearful that Jesus will prevail, they hint that their loyalty to Satan depends on his supremacy. Satan realises he must confront Jesus himself.

Satan's power forever confined

In this confrontation, in the York and Wakefield plays, Satan ends up pleading for some company in hell. Jesus explicitly refers to Cain and Judas, as well as tyrants and all who refuse his way as appropriate companions. 'Great', says Satan, 'in that case I'll have more than I have now. And I'll go

out travelling in all directions seeking them'. But this Jesus forbids, ordering that he be confined forever in hell's pit. Then the released souls give voice to their penitence and love of God, David quoting from his Psalm 50, 'You will not leave my soul in hell'. The plays all end with the Te Deum.

In the Chester play, the released souls find Enoch, Elias and the Good Thief in heaven ahead of them and ask them how this came about and each explains how it is that he is already there.

Some concluding thoughts

Despite our distance from medieval England - in time and place and culture there is wisdom for us in these plays. Jesus' opening speech in the Wakefield play gives his reason for descending to hell 'to challenge what is mine'. And in another place, he speaks of 'passing from pain'. Joan Chittister writes, 'The spirituality of our time is the spirituality of Holy Saturday: a spirituality of confusion and consternation, of ineffectiveness and powerlessness, of faith in darkness and the power of hope'. How is Jesus challenging what is his in our time? What hells are people living in today? What confinement, what languishing are people experiencing, are we personally experiencing? How great is the need in our world for liberation and peace which the risen Jesus can bring.

Alison Healey

Romanesque frieze, Lincoln Cathedral

