



Walking the Labyrinth in Avila's garden during the Fridays of Lent.

'For the Sydney Grail Lenten Program this year I offered a series of 3 walks at Avila. I constructed a temporary Classic Labyrinth using some flagging tape and garden pins in the garden. These walks provided the participants with the opportunity to pause and contemplate three Lenten Gospels in an embodied way: Upturning the Tables, Anointing at Bethany and Mary at the foot of the Cross. Each story continues to speak into our lives in these uncertain and confusing times, and individually and collectively we contemplated the Divine invitation now.'

Elizabeth Lee

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NEWS FROM HERE AND THERE

Brisbane

'In March we held our Sunday Brisbane Grail meeting at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Brisbane. Afterwards, we joined the Papua New Guinean community in Brisbane for a Memorial Mass for Sir Michael Somare, who died in PNG on 25th of February, 2021.

Sir Michael, widely known as the 'Father of the Nation' (Tok Pisin: papa blong kantri), was the first Prime Minister of the country after PNG achieved independence in 1975. He served in that role for 17 years over three separate terms: 1975-1980, 1982-1985, and 2002-2011. He was greatly respected by the PNG community and recognised as a man of great vision for his country.

Some PNG women had joined us before the Memorial Mass and one told this story:

'In the 1970's the move for PNG independence was growing and the mood of the people was to be in charge of their own destiny. She recollected a meeting in the Mt Hagen region where Gough Whitlam and other Australian dignitaries were gathered with Somare. The Australians were not denying that independence should come but demurred saying that, PNG lacked the skilled manpower to run their own nation. 'Where', they asked, 'were the doctors, nurses, pilots, engineers that the country would need? Not foreign nationals, but Papua New Guineans'?

Sir Michael looked around. Standing close by was a large group of teen-aged girls in

their grass skirts. Girls, who probably had had little contact so far with education and technology. 'These girls', he said, 'these girls will be the mothers, strong mothers, of what the country needed: of doctors, of engineers and the like. The women would birth the nation'. The woman said she has always remembered those words!

Maggie Jentasch, a PNG Grail member from the Sepik Province, now living in Brisbane with her husband and family, was chosen to lead the procession into the Cathedral carrying a picture of Sir Michael Somare. She was thrilled to be asked to do this!!



Maggie Jenatsch and friend outside St. Stephen's Cathedral, Brisbane.

We have enjoyed listening to the latest podcast from the podcast, Australian Women Preach- great words!

Please remember three of our Brisbane Grail women, Mary Nelson, Barbara Erskine and Judy Brown, who have been seriously unwell but are recovering gently.

Helen Jeffcoat

Melbourne

After the on- again- off- again Corona virus restrictions in Melbourne, we have arrived at a semblance of 'normal' life, or at least a happier Covid normal here. We are grateful to be able to resume 'in person' relationships, especially with the many family and friends we have been unable to see for such a long time. As a result, the Easter season has been truly a time of serious reflection and joyful celebration for many of us.

Some of our members have had to suffer the loss of beloved partners and family members during lockdown. Easter will have brought sadness at their absence, yet being able to have more personal contact of late with other loved ones will have provided a wonderful gift of support. In particular, our Melbourne Grail community holds close Irena Dunn, Mark Lewis and Genny Grabau after the loss over summer of Irena's husband Kevin, Mark's wife Colleen and Genny's father Dr Keith Grabau. We have been enriched by knowing these three gifted and faith-filled people, whose lives exemplified compassion for others and courage in dealing with failing health. They are greatly missed. We also extend our condolences and care to Dinny Culican and Ann Niall who have experienced the loss of dear extended family members.

Despite the difficulties of the last year, our lectio group has been in regular contact with one another, thanks to technology. In addition, since restrictions began to ease, we have been able to support one another in person in ones and twos. Andrea Venier has been particularly heartened by the frequent visits and assistance given during her hospitalisation

and rehabilitation in care and at home, especially by Kathy Wayland, Ann Niall and Genny Grabau. Dinny Culican, Irena Dunn, Colette Gomez and Carol Farmer and interstate well-wishers have also provided much needed moral support. In addition, many thanks to Genny, for taking over email and newsletter communications during this time.

Our first in-person gathering this year has just taken place at Hesed, a combination *lectio divina* and regional meeting. We have so far reflected on some of the material presented by Tricia Gemmell at the International Grail's first Spiritual session, held in early April on zoom. We intend to continue discussing Tricia's material as well as that of the following speaker, Ntombi Nyathi from South Africa. We will do this alongside the second Spirituality Dialogue zoom session.

During the meeting, we discussed essential maintenance for Hesed and the viability of its future use as a Grail centre. We are searching for reasonable options and alternatives. In the meantime, Genny has been busy looking into garage repairs and gardening requirements amongst other issues involving the body corporate. This is whilst the planned bathroom renovation is placed temporarily on hold.

The international zoom events have so far been valuable for experiencing solidarity amongst members around the world and for helping us to focus on present needs and to re-envision the future. As pointed out in the discussions so far, we are again in a process of transition and reading the signs of the times, of which the Melbourne group is keenly aware. We look forward to the rest of the

programme, the ideas to consider and the celebrations to share in.

We send our thoughts to members and friends around the country who have experienced loss or ill health during recent months, and hope that many blessings of love will sustain all of us and bring special times of joy.

Andrea Venier

Sydney

Fratelli Tutti is the focus for Reflection Mornings being run by Tricia Gemmell through 2021. We have been happy to welcome people back to Avila while still following Covid Protocols. So nice to be back face-face! Tricia also keeps us up-to-date on preparations for the Plenary Council in Australia to be held October, 2021.

The *Non-violence Spirituality Group* continues to meet fortnightly and we continue with *Lectio Divina* every Wednesday evening. This year we are reflecting on Mathew's gospel. Ruth has convened a small group to work their way through the booklet, *Advocating for a New Story for our Shared Humanity*, an initiative of Creators of Peace.

Father Phil Crotty SJ, an old friend of the Grail, died in Sydney early in April. He was one of the first generation of Jesuit Scholastics to make the long and it was assumed, 'one way' journey by boat to India. Based at the Hazaribag mission for the next 48 years he served the people of that area well and to this day is held in high esteem there. Fr Phil had a full and remarkable life. May he now rest in God's peace and loving embrace.

A number of Sydney Grail women are taking part in the activities organised by

international teams during our 100 years celebrations. Tricia Gemmell presented a paper, *Óne Hundred Years of Grail Spirituality*, at one gathering and you will find a summary on pp. 9-10. Others have also presented wonderful papers which have provided a lot of insight and food for thought about the challenges for the International Grail in the future.

The international Grail communications team taking care of all the technology that make these Zoom meetings possible comprises women from Uganda, Brazil, Portugal and elsewhere! We are so grateful for their expertise and the time these give to this.

WE ARE DELIGHTED TO LET YOU KNOW THAT THE GRAIL IN AUSTRALIA HAS A NEW WEBSITE.

grailaustralia.org.au

Special thanks to Anne Marie George and her team Fran Warner, Alison Healey, Tricia Gemmell, Margaret Hetherington and Ros Burton for all their time, energy and creativity. Thanks to Martha Mollison and Rowena Potts who did the video-interviewing and editing respectively. And to the 8 brave Grail women who agreed to be interviewed on camera. Liz, Nour and Tricia who currently appear on the website and Fran Warner, Terese Sheridan, Kay Hunt, Sheila Hawthorn and Ruth Crowe who will appear soon!

One last snippet of news. Ros, our administrative assistant and her husband, Steve, came third in the sailing regatta on Sydney Harbour on Australia Day in January. Well done you two!

Ruth Crowe



Raising the voices of Australian women preaching the Gospel

‘The Grail in Australia and Women and the Australian Church (WATAC) have collaborated on an exciting initiative to highlight and share the voices of women breaking open the Word of God’ writes Tricia who is a member of the National Grail Leadership Team. (Tricia and Elizabeth Lee, both Grail women, will give reflections. **Liz’s reflection** will be available on Monday, 14 June for the following Sunday’s Gospel and **Tricia’s** will be available on Monday, 21st June for the following Sunday’s Gospel. See link below. Ed.)

Launched on International Women’s Day 2021, this podcast will run the 30 weeks leading into the Australian Catholic Church’s historic Plenary Council in October. The Plenary Council was actually the impetus for this project.

The Listening and Dialogue phase enabled thousands of Catholics across the country to imagine a different church, and it was clear from the final report that many of us wanted Sunday sermons that opened up the Scriptures in ways that nourished our faith and were relevant to our daily lives. The discernment paper, Prayerful and Eucharistic, went so far as to recommend that lay preaching be supported and encouraged. And the final document so far, the working paper, *Instrumentum laboris*, acknowledges “the need for a renewal of preaching (128).”

Australian Women Preach, then, is the fruit of Plenary Council discernment. Our focus on women’s voices arises from our consciousness not only of “the woman question” being one of the big challenges for the Plenary Council but also the fact that women’s voices have too often been silenced within the church. We are modeling the change we would like to see.

The podcast will feature diverse Australian women from across different Christian denominations. Each Monday an episode will be released with preaching on the following Sunday’s Gospel. To listen, go to <https://australianwomenpreach.com.au>

Tricia Gemmell

***RESPONSE TO THIS INITIATIVE FROM BISHOP VINCENT LONG OFM Conv Parramatta Diocese**

“Go and tell my brothers [sic] that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”. At Easter Vigil, we hear these words of the risen Jesus who empowers Mary

of Magdala to reclaim her agency and to proclaim the Good News to others. She is known in the Christian tradition as apostle to the apostles.

But it was not just Mary of Magdala who had a pivotal role in the early days of the followers of the Way. Throughout salvation history, women disciples have played a critical part in forging a new future out of the hopeless present. Puah and Shiprah acted as catalysts for the exodus by their civil disobedience.

Esther boldly intervened for her Jewish people at the foreign court. Ruth broke new ground of inclusion as a consummate outsider to Israel's strictly safeguarded bloodline. Mary MacKillop, of course, started a new and hitherto unheralded group of women who took the Good News to the edges of colonial Australia.

If the Church is to be faithful to the biblical narrative and responsive to the living presence of God, it must reclaim a discipleship of equals and empower men and women disciples to share their gifts for human flourishing and the growth of the Kingdom'.



THE LABYRINTH, ITS POWER AND POTENTIAL

I have been facilitating labyrinth walks in various contexts over the past 10 years but in 2021 they have been more prominent on my schedule. **On the First Friday of each month at 10am**, 3-10 people meet at the magnificent Chartres Labyrinth at Centennial Park and each time I offer a walk with a different theme. **You are welcome to join us.** In January it was Intention Setting, February Gratitude, March the Beauty and Grief of Autumn and April Universal Pain. On the Fourth Friday I have been inviting people to walk with The Beloved in John's Gospel, drawing on walks from Sally Longley's beautiful book "Walking the Labyrinth with the Beloved in the Gospel of John." People passing by sometimes join in! Each occasion concludes with some time to share our reflections on our walk over a cup of tea or coffee under the trees nearby. I am forever amazed at the deep places that people are drawn through their experience of walking the labyrinth and how the focus provided will touch at least some participants in the most profound and unexpected way.

One lingering memory: At the Centennial Park Labyrinth on Good Friday morning, I laid out 30 images and headlines of pain and suffering around the world, inviting participants to walk with this pain and offer their compassion to the suffering world. Many of the people walking by the labyrinth slowly approached the images and words, obviously contemplating them in their own way. I was reminded of those who would have passed by Jesus as he was suffering on his way to his crucifixion.

Elizabeth Lee (Website: visionandaction.com.au)

Henri Nouwen reminds us “Good Friday is much more than reliving the passion of Jesus; it is entering into solidarity with the passion of all the people of our planet, whether in the past, the present, or the future. In Jesus, all human suffering is collected. The broken heart of Jesus is the broken heart of God. The broken heart of God is the broken heart of the world.”



100 years of Grail spirituality

In 1921, Father Jacques van Ginneken, a Dutch Jesuit priest, founded the Women of Nazareth. At its beginning, it was a lay movement of young women who made a lifelong commitment to a simple and celibate community life dedicated to the conversion of the world. These women were formed by van Ginneken in

decidedly traditional religious ways and were to be responsible for training lay Catholic women to become creative and active in the lay apostolate.

The Grail youth movement came into being in 1928, the name chosen by van Ginneken himself. Who in the Grail has not meditated on this legend many times? For us, the story poses the crucial questions we return to, again and again. “What is the cause of all the suffering in our world? What and who are we as the Grail? And whom does the Grail serve?” Across the span of 100 years, and across the countries of the globe today, we remain united by these questions of the Grail legend.

If you want to understand more of our Grail history, culture and spirituality, from these beginnings until the 1980’s, read *Women of Vision*, by Marian Ronan and Mary O’Brien. These were the great missionary expansion years, fuelled by faith and intense interior lives.

Magdalene Oberhoffer thought, “The whole of the Grail is so active; we need personally and as a group to be rooted in an intense spiritual life. And for that we need prayer. Van Ginneken said that without this interior life of prayer we would lose our spirituality, since the Grail is not just a Catholic action movement – it is, first, a spiritual movement.”

Other fundamental aspects of Grail culture are our focus on developing the talents and strengths of women, our compassion for suffering, and our openness to be changed by “otherness”, and the willingness to learn to live with difference. By the end of the formation and foundation years the Grail had emerged as a Catholic faith community of women, consciously championing the dignity and rights of women, dedicated to transforming the suffering of the world, and working effectively across social and cultural divisions in doing so. This remains a good working definition of the Grail movement. But it doesn’t capture the Grail spirit. This is, as I reflect on it, a spirit of restlessness, of voracious appetite for life, of reading the signs of the times and moving forward with them. We embraced Vatican II, and ecumenism became a significant impetus within the Grail. We expanded our thinking with liberation theology, feminist theology and, more recently, eco-theology. In 2011 our vision statement says we are “women of various religious traditions and on life-giving spiritual journeys.”

The Tiltenberg and Grailville, our two great formation centres during those years, were significant in inspiring the Grail women of those times. I think it is safe to say that they remain in our collective memory and DNA, though the Tiltenberg was sold in 2003 and Grailville no longer functions as it once did. What is it that we envy or miss about those times and places?

I first met the Grail in 1980 when I joined a group of young professional women interested in learning more about injustice in society. The Grail was to play a large part in opening my eyes not only to the sad realities of systemic injustice but in developing my social conscience as an integral part of my faith. It’s now 40 years on. I have no doubt that Grail life and spirituality as I have known it is very similar to your own experience.

In the 21st Century, we had the Spirituality Forum held in Palmela, Portugal, in August 2007. After this forum the Grail Theological Resource Workgroup came into being and over the course of five years it facilitated and co-ordinated a global conversation on topics deemed of major importance in the Grail. Round 1 studied our Christian origins, round 2 looked at cultural changes and spiritual challenges. Round 3 was on ecumenism and round 4 on interreligious understanding. I need to say that the Eucharist was clearly a major sticking point. Sometimes when we gather as Grail, and particularly when we gather as an international ecumenical community, there is tension and pain when it comes to celebrating the Eucharist. The Catholic mass is no longer the sacrament that unites us, but sometimes the sacrament that divides us. We are aware of this reality but we have made no concerted effort so far to come to any completely satisfactory arrangement. This is spiritual work of deep discernment, and dare I say it, painful letting go, which we need to do. Within the Grail today, this is our sorrow. We must ask ourselves the compassionate question and we must listen to the answers.

At the International General Assembly in Fatima in 2017, Marian Ronan gave a talk – “Challenges Facing the Grail in Its Second Century: Burning with the Passion of the Founders.” In her closing remarks she challenges us. “Finally, let me suggest that for the Grail Movement to respond with the passion of our founders to these two massive global

challenges (climate change and war), we must face a third, internal challenge: the revival and intensification of Grail formation.

Much has changed since Father van Ginneken mandated rigorous spiritual and intellectual formation for the Women of Nazareth...But the challenges confronting us today are, if anything, even more serious than they were in 1921. So clearly, for the Grail to respond to these challenges, we need more than ever the passionate dedication and knowledge that energized our foremothers. And to develop that passion and commitment, we need strong, ongoing formation...I challenge us, then, to commit ourselves to a renewed, powerful, and ongoing Grail formation process. Why is this so important? Because only with such rigorous formation will we be able to carry out the mission to which God calls us—the transformation of the world.”

There are golden threads running through our history and they will continue. Unity in diversity is one of them, and we must find a way around the problem of the Eucharist. We must continue our efforts in “renewed, powerful and ongoing Grail formation” as Marian says. Perhaps this could include a new conversation on the place of prayer in the life of the Grail?

May I suggest that, in the light of all this, we turn to Pope Francis and his latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*? He calls for a culture of encounter and a culture of care. In that respect, his encyclical encapsulates the spirit of the Grail as we have tried to live it for one hundred years. In these troubled times, let us go once more with Parsifal into the wilderness and let the Spirit lead us from there.

(Summary of the talk given by Patricia Gemmell on Zoom to the International Grail, April 2021).

New International Grail Leadership Team

We thank **Lucy Jones (USA)**, **Lucy Kimaro (Tanzania)** and for a second term, **Dilma Rodrigues Alves (Brazil)**, for making themselves available to serve the International Grail, now in 20 countries, from January 2022-December 2025. Blessings on each of you.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

We send our thoughts, prayers and special love to all our Grail women, their families and friends living in countries where Covid is still rife. It is heart-breaking to see people suffering so much. We pray that there will soon be enough effective vaccines available to bring relief to all. We are petitioning our government to share vaccines and other resources with our Pacific Neighbours as there are thousands of cases now in Papua New Guinea. We pray all countries will share what they can with those countries needing help, with vaccines, ventilators, oxygen...

Source of all being mercy us at this time