

## Magpies

Along the road the magpies walk  
With hands in pockets left, and right.  
They tilt their heads, and stroll and talk  
In their well-fitted black and white.

They look like certain gentlemen  
Who look most nonchalant and wise  
Until their meal is served – and then  
What clashing beaks, what greedy eyes!

But not one man that I have heard  
throws back his head in such a song  
of grace and praise – no man nor bird.  
Their greed is brief, their joy is long.  
For each is born with such a throat  
as thanks his God with every note.

*Judith Wright, Collected Poems,  
1942-1985, used with permission*



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## PUBLICATIONS

### ***Global Justice Overcoming Poverty Bulletin***

4 pages of short up-to-date reports and articles. Issued bi-monthly from January.

To receive a copy, contact [info@grailaustralia.org.au](mailto:info@grailaustralia.org.au)

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## ADDRESSES

The Grail Centre  
22 McHatton Street  
North Sydney NSW 2060.  
Tel. 61 2 – 9955-3053  
[info@grailaustralia.org.au](mailto:info@grailaustralia.org.au).

Jill Herbert  
14 Carawatha Avenue  
Ferny Hills QLD 4055. (Brisbane)  
[vidler.herbert@aapt.net.au](mailto:vidler.herbert@aapt.net.au)

Andrea Venier  
2/ 25 McBean Street  
Clayton VIC 3168. (Melbourne)  
Tel. 61 2 – 9548-9432  
[avenier@bigpond.com](mailto:avenier@bigpond.com)

Contact in North Queensland  
ref. Sheila Hawthorn  
at Sydney address above.

Website [www.grailaustralia.org.au](http://www.grailaustralia.org.au)

## NEWS FROM HERE AND THERE

### Melbourne

Despite the on-going shadow of COVID and the many illnesses this winter season, the Melbourne *lectio divina* group has been very thankful to be able to meet in person every fortnight. We have been dipping into various resources – some excerpts from *Ageing as a Spiritual Practice* and the *Madonna* magazine on meditation, the audios of relevant sessions from *Australian Women Preach*, and currently, *The Wisdom of the Beguines*, by Laura Swan. While we usually convene at *Hesed*, we have been meeting on occasions at Irena Dunn's apartment at St Joseph's Mews.

On August 10<sup>th</sup>, a few of us gathered again at St Joseph's Mews, to view, via *zoom*, the first webinar on *Creating a Just Synodal Church*, organised by Garratt Publishing. We are grateful to the staff for their assistance in setting up the technology for us. Bill Uren *SJ* gave an informed overview, followed by two interesting, young German women explaining the collaborative, synodal approach underway in Germany. We are continuing to view the series, and look forward to discussing Tricia Gemmell's impressive presentation, televised on August 17<sup>th</sup>. Thank you, Tricia, for all you are contributing to a vibrant, representative church! (An abridged version of Tricia's presentation is in this Newsletter (pp. 9-11).

A surprise lunch for Irena's ninetieth birthday was held in mid-August. Irena has been an integral part of our group for over thirty years. We are always moved and inspired by Irena's early life experiences in particular, and appreciate her wisdom and generosity. She was delighted that Joan Ryan could join the party, as were we all to have her company. We wish Irena many blessings for the years to come.

In late August, a beautiful lunch was prepared to celebrate Joanna Waite. Mary McCormick hosted Joy Beer, Maureen Bounader and Lorna Junck, Joanna's close friends, along with Ann Niall, Dinny Culican, Kathy Wayland, Irena Dunn, Genny Grabau and Andrea Venier, from the Melbourne Grail group. The afternoon included a thanksgiving prayer, a toast in memory of Joanna and 'thank yous' to Mary and Joy for all their efforts in settling Joanna's estate. Much joviality ensued, with discussion ranging from reminiscences of earlier times with Joanna to current events, especially concerning women in the Church and the recent Plenary Council – of course! It is wonderful to be reminded of the impressive 'valiant women' in our midst. Many thanks to Mary for a wonderful day!

Back on April 11<sup>th</sup>, the Monday before Easter, we enjoyed meeting up with Helen Jeffcoat, Tricia Gemmell and Carol Farmer for lunch after they, the National Team, had convened at *Hesed* to begin planning this year's National General Assembly (NGA) and discuss other important matters. Some of Melbourne's recent concerns were broached at this time, to be pursued in the following months – questions about the Melbourne Regional Group and *Hesed*, the Grail apartment in Balwyn. A follow-up *Zoom* meeting occurred, and plans for the

future affirmed at the NGA just concluded. We are grateful that the Assembly was a fruitful experience.

Our temporary resident in *Hesed*, Patricia O'Brien, moved out in late July and we wish her well on her new ventures. We are pleased that Dinny's grand-daughter, Sophy, has recently returned on a part-time basis.

*Andrea Venier*

## **Brisbane**

Greetings. Here in Brisbane, we have been preparing for the National General Assembly in September, looking forward to connecting with Grail members we haven't seen for a long time. It was very enjoyable and productive.

Recently Joan Chittister spoke in Brisbane and some members attended. Judy Brown organised a follow-up gathering to discuss how to 'speak up' about the future of the Catholic church, as urged by Joan. Around 30 people attended and valued the opportunity to discuss how they might contribute to Church renewal.

We are relaunching a campaign to sell the remaining Personal Journals for prisoners produced by the Sydney Grail, now that COVID restrictions have eased.

Liz Lancaster, out of hospital, is feeling well, but has taken the decision not to live alone anymore and has moved in with her sister-in-law, Annie. Jan O'Donoghue is slowly regaining strength after her stroke late last year. Jan's new address is: 17/2 Ozcare Bakhita Villa, 169 Seventeen Miles Rocks Road, Oxley. 4075. Jan delights in receiving news from Grail members.

In July this year, Mary Mennis and her brother, Dr John Eccles, went for a week to Bomana, Port Moresby, in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Bomana is the location of a national Catholic seminary for the education and training of priests. While there Mary gave the end-of-semester lecture on her work. Two years ago, Mary was invited to teach a history course at the seminary, but was prevented by COVID. Instead, she wrote a 700-page textbook for the students, covering the history of 16 dioceses in PNG. The book, titled *Lotu Katolik: Catholic Missions in PNG and Oceania, 1880s-2020*, is the result of decades of research, including personal interviews with numbers of key people in the story. Mary enjoyed meeting the seminarians at Bomana who are already using the first draft of the book in class. In August, Mary and John attended the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of their sister, Alice Ley, a long-time member of The Grail in Melbourne.

A few updates from our members: Ann Aboud has two granddaughters working as graduates in Canberra – one in the Department of Defence and the other in the Department of Home Affairs. Another granddaughter is a new medical graduate working at The Royal Brisbane Hospital. Great achievements. Judy Brown has recently written a book about her mother's very interesting life, which will be self-published for the extended family. Maggie and Reto Jenatsch's son, Claudi, has recently moved into assisted accommodation. He is loving being independent from mum and dad, especially as he is located near the Gold Coast.

Jill Herbert and her husband, Pat, recently visited Regina (Battiston) and Ray Lecquerica, on their farm near Gumlu, south of Ayr in North Queensland. Regina and her family are well known to the many Grail members who worked at St Raphael's. They offered hospitality for those passing through and sent boxes of capsicums to St Raphael's kitchen – they are 'like gold' today with the current prices. Sheila Hawthorn and three other women from Townsville walking to Bowen on the Diocesan Pilgrimage in 2000, were extremely thankful for the hospitality offered by Regina's family. While their three sons and their families live in Ayr and Townsville, Ray, and Regina, Regina's mother (92 years) and her brother Tony still live on the farm.

*Jill Herbert*

## **Sydney**

*Anne Day's* daughter, *Maree*, died recently after 3 long weeks in palliative care. Maree was 57, married to Alan, with three children, all in their early 20s, Joshua, Shaun and Alicia. Our hearts go out to them and Maree's sisters, Therese and Rachel. They had so many months of stressful waiting; Maree had been in hospitals since Easter 2021.

*Food for the Soul*, our regular practice of *lectio divina* on Wednesday evenings, continues on *Zoom*. Our current text is Neil Douglas-Klotz's book, *Prayers of the Cosmos* – a study of the Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes translated into English directly from the original Aramaic, revealing layers of meaning not previously available to us. *Zoom* enables women in distant locations to participate. If you would like to do so, contact the Sydney Centre.

On selected Tuesday mornings, *Tricia Gemmell* has been facilitating reflection on Sally Longley's book, *Conversations with Silence*, at the Grail Centre. The program was disrupted in July when Helen Gomez, Ruth Crowe and Nour Barcha caught the COVID virus – fortunately mildly.

*Ruth and Kay Hunt* with two teachers, *Jenny Cook and Martha Mollison*, are involved in providing English Classes in Parramatta for Afghan refugees living in the Western Suburbs. Providing this service to new arrivals in Australia is such a pleasure. We thank our friend *Nasiba Akrim* and *Host International* for providing a classroom and other resources.

Ruth also continues as the Grail representative on the ‘Voice from the Heart Alliance’, which meets monthly on *Zoom* to report on action taken to ensure a successful Referendum supporting an Indigenous Voice to Parliament being enshrined in the Constitution.

We continue our long-time engagement with the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network ((AFTINET). *Alison Healey* has represented The Grail in the Working Group of AFTINET since its inception at the turn of the century and *Nour Barcha* joined her several years ago. The initiator and convenor of the network is a capable, dedicated woman, Pat Ranald, with a PhD in trade economics and a reputation as a trustworthy analyst and policy developer. The International Grail launched a Justice and Trade network in 2005, which Alison co-convenes with *Mary Boyd* (Canada). If you would like to receive a 4-page Bulletin produced monthly from this network, contact [info@grailaustralia.org.au](mailto:info@grailaustralia.org.au)

*Alice Warner*, daughter of Fran, and Bill, has good news after the third Hawkesbury-Nepean flood in 18 months wiped out her vegetable farm in the beginning of July. Alice writes:

‘We have been busy preparing beds on our new farm site in Yarramundi. I am back on a big tractor again, after a 6-year break, to do this initial preparation, and then we will move to our new permanent beds. I am so grateful to Chi, the wonderful human who approached me with an offer of land. and so excited to start anew at an even more beautiful location. Stay tuned as we transform the fields from sod to delicious organically-grown veggies.’

<https://www.facebook.com/fiveserves/>

*Tricia and Geoff Gemmell* have a beautiful, new granddaughter, Dominique Eniko, born to Michael and Nushi recently in Canberra, sister to Roger.

On the last weekend of August, Helen enjoyed a welcome visit from Regina and Alison, the wife and daughter of her nephew Colin Gomez, who live in California. They made a stop-over in Sydney to see Helen on their way to Singapore, the former home of the Gomez family. Over the same weekend, Sheila Hawthorn ‘had a great catch-up’, with four former colleagues from the Townsville Multicultural Support Group (TMSG) in which she had volunteered for more than 20 years. While only one of the four is still with the TMSG, all continue to care for people in need – one in the Department of Children’s Services in Sydney; another in a Townsville Nursing Home; and the third, in her retirement, researching for a PhD the experience of *African women re-settling in Australia*.

*Ruth Crowe*

## **National General Assembly**

Held every four years, this year’s Assembly brought representatives of Grail Regional Groups to a three-day meeting at May MacKillop Centre, North Sydney, September 22-24. Unfortunately, members in Melbourne and North Queensland were prevented from attending by illness and conflicting commitments. However, the Melbourne delegates were able to participate each day via *Zoom*. We, of course, greatly missed their physical presence and that

of Consy from Townsville but we worked together through the agenda to reach agreed outcomes, despite the difficulties, uplifted by the commitment and hopeful spirit that pervaded the meeting, beginning with an inspiring, introductory prayer time.

We will be able to say more on the Assembly in the December Newsletter when the Report will be available. For now, to our National Team, Tricia Gemmell, Helen Jeffcoat and Carol Farmer, to those who offered themselves for important roles in the coming period and to all the participants, congratulations and gratitude are due for an encouraging achievement.

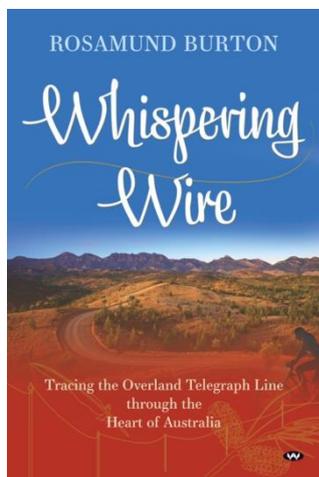
*Alison Healey*

### **Papua New Guinea (PNG)**

A few months ago, we heard that a Grail member's house in Port Moresby had burnt down. The occupants were out at the time, so no one was physically hurt. The Port Moresby Grail group and friends of Grace Wohuinangu, together with Grail members in Australia raised funds and made donations to help Grace rebuild. So far, the foundation slab has been re-laid. Just before the fire, Grace had bought the building materials to extend her home to include a pre-school she intended to open for the children in her locality. Fortunately, most of this escaped the flames. We wish Grace every blessing and good fortune in the time ahead. A Port Moresby Grail woman, Jacinta Warakaj, who works for the PNG Foreign Affairs Department, has recently been appointed Ambassador to Japan. Because of recent severe weather in Japan delaying her travel there, Jacinta has been able to spend some special time with her Grail friends before taking up her post. Jacinta is a niece of Maggie Jenatsch, a long-time Grail member in Brisbane. We congratulate Jacinta on her appointment. May the Holy Spirit be her guide and strength

*Sheila Hawthorn*

## **150<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE JOINING OF THE OVERLAND TELEGRAPH LINE**



Several years ago, *Ros Burton* followed the Overland Telegraph Line from Adelaide to Darwin, travelling the first 800km by bicycle and then by four-wheel drive. Her book, *Whispering Wire: Tracing the Overland Telegraph Line Through the Heart of Australia*, is published by Wakefield Press on 22 October 2022. She writes here of her trip back to the Centre to celebrate the completion of the line 150 years ago.

On 22 August my husband, Steve, and I were on a remote section of the Stuart Highway between Tennant Creek and Daly Waters for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the completion of the 3200km

Overland Telegraph Line, constructed by three teams of workers, working on the Southern, Central and Northern sections.

There was a marquee at the Sir Charles Todd Memorial Rest Stop and about 250 people inside it. They had travelled from all over the continent to mark this extraordinary moment in Australian history, including the Administrator of the Northern Territory (NT), Vicki O'Halloran, and the Governor of South Australia, Her Excellency Frances Adamson. From Western Australia was Nick Trethowan, a direct descendant of John Lewis, the man who operated the pony express in 1872 carrying telegrams between Tennant Creek and Daly Waters, until that final section of the telegraph line was completed.

The Overland Telegraph Line connected to an undersea cable, which ran between Darwin and Java, and its Morse code messages heralded the advent for Australia of instant communication with the world. Mail from England had taken three months by ship, and now a telegraph message from London reached Adelaide in seven hours. Alan McGill, chair of the NT Heritage Council, said that, when the line opened in 1872; seven messages could be transmitted simultaneously, and he compared it to a recently laid undersea cable that transmits six terabytes of data per second.

In her speech Vicki O'Halloran acknowledged the Jingili and Mudburra people, whose Country we were on, and 'the great sacrifice of the lives and the land of traditional owners who lived here'.

"In so many ways,' she said, 'the completion of this project would mean that life would never be the same, certainly not for Aboriginal people from this region who had and would go on to witness this steady intrusion on their land."

From the Stuart Highway, we walked 1.7km through lancewood forest to the Frew Ponds Reserve where a segment of the original telegraph line and its poles still stand. Here large billy cans of tea were poured into tin mugs for us all, and we helped ourselves to homemade cakes and Anzac biscuits.

A brandy bottle filled with tea was smashed against a telegraph pole, re-enacting the event 150 years ago when Robert Patterson, the leader of the construction team for the Northern Section of the Overland Telegraph Line, joined the line.

Ninety-year-old Ted Egan sang *Riders in the Mirage* about John McDouall Stuart on his mare Polly and his numerous expeditions across the continent to find a route for the Overland Telegraph Line. Generations ago, the grandfathers in his family helped the linesmen navigate through the bush, so a traditional owner, Harold Dalywaters, told ABC reporter Roxanne Fitzgerald. He sang his song *Jarnba-Nu* about this land, which has belonged to his people for 40,000 years, accompanied by his five-year-old granddaughter, Rebecca.

*Rosamund Burton*

## CREATING A JUST SYNODAL CHURCH

*Tricia Gemmell*, (Sydney), member of the National Team, was one of a panel of speakers in a national webinar recently. *Fran Warner*, with Tricia's permission, offers this abridged version of Tricia's presentation

First of all, let me acknowledge that I live and work on Cammeraygal land, on Sydney Harbour's northern shore, and I WISH to pay my respects to one ancestor in particular: Barangaroo, described in the Dictionary of Sydney as 'a skilled fisherwoman with presence and authority in her community and the early colony'. As a strong and independent woman, she continues to inspire Indigenous leaders present and emerging.

From the age of 25 I have been involved with the Grail. The Grail taught me how to *do* synodality long before we had ever heard of the word; it enabled me to find my voice, and most importantly, it has allowed me to engage in forms of ministry that I could never have done anywhere else.

When the Plenary Council was announced, I had no intention of getting involved, but I did. One early significant event was the colloquium for Australian Catholic Women, held in Adelaide in February 2019 and attended by 160 women from all over the country. It began on the Friday night with an address by a certain bishop who told us to listen with humility and speak with courage, but he was gone before the evening was over. What a lost opportunity for him, what a painful moment for us! It said a lot to us about the attitude of bishops to women. To add insult to that injury they dissolved the Office for the Participation of Women not long afterwards.

At that colloquium Michele Connolly delivered an address on synodality in the context of Mark's gospel and for the first time I heard that concept thoughtfully unpacked, with much reference to Jesus and his struggling disciples. When I look back on my notes, I wonder to what extent she wanted us to see just how hard synodality is in practice. That thought must have made some impression because I noted the following in full: 'It works to the degree that each person is ready to hear the other person, to be mutually vulnerable, to be prepared to learn and change.' And more recently, Patty Fawkner wrote, 'Members of the Plenary Council learnt from experience that synodality is not for the faint-hearted.' (*The Good Oil*, July 2022)

Perhaps that is why there has been so much episcopal resistance to the recommendations of *The Light from the Southern Cross*, the governance review that the Australian Catholic Bishops themselves commissioned and which was released in 2020. Bishops and priests just don't seem to want to share their authority with the laity. This is what *The Light from the Southern Cross* has to say about synodality:

*Synodality involves the active participation of all members of the Church in its processes of discernment, consultation and co-operation at every level of decision-making and mission. (5.2.3)*

Pope Francis has made it quite clear that this involves **everyone**. He has said that synodality calls for massive cultural change in the church. For that to happen there needs to be conversion on a very wide scale. And *The Light from the Southern Cross* reiterates the point:

*Even more important than appropriate structures, true synodality requires a conversion of minds and hearts. Without the wholehearted embrace of a culture of synodal decision-making, structures will be 'simple masks without heart or a face'.* (6.5.1).

The most important thing to note, in my opinion, is the call to conversion. Structures do need to change but structural change alone will not bring about cultural change. This needs conversion of heart. Simply, ordained men must be prepared to listen, to learn and to be changed; so too must the laity. And perhaps most crucially of all, the laity need to grow up and stop being passive recipients of grace – they need to accept co-responsibility and wake up to the meaning of their baptism and the call of discipleship. My early experience of facilitating 13 *Listening & Dialogue* sessions and later 7 discernment sessions, was that we Catholics are seriously ill-equipped for synodality: we don't know how to listen deeply to one another, nor are we patient with the slow processes of spiritual discernment. And we find it very hard to let go of our entrenched positions.

For this reason, I believe that the diocesan phase of the Synod on Synodality was such a missed opportunity for most dioceses in this country. I found the preparatory document and the handbook (*Vademecum*) to be excellent resource material for putting synodality into practice, but the bishops, by and large, just weren't interested. It was up to them as our leaders to get us organised and, for the most part, they didn't. How can we have that experience of walking together, of learning to be humble in listening and courageous in speaking, and of being open to conversion and change, if we don't get the opportunity to practise? We have a long way to go on our journey towards a more synodal Church. And we need our bishops to come down from their ivory towers and join us.

However, something else has happened in these last few years, totally unexpected and extraordinary. I am speaking, of course, of the COVID pandemic. Something came into being that I call the Zoomosphere. It's been for me a period of intense formation, enabled to attend many conferences, assemblies, webinars, and the like. It's been a time of great purpose and learning but, more importantly, I discovered there were lots of women like me all over Australia. I found my tribe. We are not the same as we once were. It is this conversion, already in progress, that is, I believe, our deepest hope for the future.

Let's come back now to the place of women in the Catholic Church. *The Light from the Southern Cross* goes a long way to providing a road map for greater inclusion of women in the governance of the Church, particularly at parish and diocesan levels. But the role of women in ordained ministry was beyond its remit. When it came to the second, most recent meeting of the Plenary Council, there was reason to be hopeful that some things may change for the better. The introduction to the *Final Framework for Motions* said things like this:

- We need to find ways to develop the charisms...of all the baptised...in existing and new ministries. (9)
- Each of us is called by our baptism to be a missionary disciple. (35)
- The Plenary Council affirms a culture of synodality for parishes and dioceses – a Church which listens. (38)
- The deepest sources of Christian faith speak clearly of equality. (51)

And there were a number of motions on the table that encouraged us to believe that some of the concerns of women were being taken seriously.

Well, you all know what happened. Who will ever forget Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2022 when the bishops collectively voted to erase women from the Plenary Council altogether? I was shocked, devastated, speechless. Hearts were broken. And whether you saw the motions as crumbs from the table or a huge leap forward, either way they were the product of long years of discernment and they needed to be affirmed. The words of Dr Angela McCarthy of the University of Notre Dame Australia, the women's response to the vote moved the Council 'into a totally different frame of mind to become more mature in our deliberations and discernment'. We are deeply grateful to those women who took a prophetic stance and refused to be excluded. The motions on the equal dignity of women and men were re-drafted and, when put to the vote, were emphatically passed by both the members and the bishops. The one motion that did not pass that week was the one asking that Rome be approached to change Canon 767 so that lay preachers would be allowed to preach in the Eucharistic assembly. Only ordained men, i.e. deacons, priests and bishops, may preach at Sunday Mass. Synodality does not extend to allowing lay persons to do so.

In the Plenary Council, the church in Australia just overwhelmingly voted in favour of acting in ways that witness clearly to the equal dignity of women and men, with their diverse gifts and experiences. It commits the Church to enhancing the role of women within it. What better way to do this than allow women to break open the Word of God at Mass on a Sunday? Not to mention laymen! Given that women may now officially become lectors and acolytes at the altar, being able to preach seems like the next logical step.

Some of you may be aware of *Australian Women Preach*, a weekly podcast that aims to raise women's voices in preaching the gospel and modelling the church we want to be – diverse, inclusive and welcoming. I believe that until women are heard in our churches, in the one space which is common to us all – the Sunday Eucharist – we have little hope of flourishing. We are in a liminal space right now where the future is uncertain. But look at us in this present moment, accompanying one another on the road, sustaining and supporting one another in our vision for a church where the voices of women are heard and their gifts fruitfully employed. We are the hope we are looking for.