



*Photo by Christopher Burns on Unsplash*

## **Jeu d'esprit**

Flame-dancing Spirit, come,  
Sweep us off our feet and  
Dance us through our days.  
Surprise us with your rhythms,  
Dare us to try new steps, explore  
New patterns and new partnerships.  
Release us from old routines,  
To swing in abandoned joy  
And fearful adventure.  
And in the intervals,  
Rest us,  
In your still centre.

*Ann Lewin, Watching for the Kingfisher (2009)  
Used by kind permission of Canterbury Press*

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Dear Friends,

We wish you all the blessings and fruits of the Holy Spirit.

It's hard to believe it is June already, but with so much happening in our world it is also understandable that we become absorbed in the everyday trying to make sense of it all as many of the events and changes impact our personal and family lives, indeed our brothers and sisters across the world. We pray especially at this time for the people of Gaza. Children have become a threatened species it seems! May the Spirit soften the hearts of leaders of all countries involved in wars currently, so the gift of Peace may bring healing.

One of the frightening things happening today, I believe, is the number of armaments being developed and sold on the international market. Australia is involved in this trade. Although it appears that we do not sell arms directly to Israel, for example, the multinational companies making armaments in Australia send their products to other countries to distribute and a number of these products end up in Israel. Wars, the killing of innocent women and children, climate change, increased violence in family life... So much to ponder in our hearts. May the Spirit help us to hear what responses are being asked of us as individuals and as Christian communities.

As I let you know just before Christmas 2024, the Grail Centre has been sold and the Grail in Australia now has an office in 12 Mount Street, North Sydney. We have the same telephone number, 02 9955 3053 and our Administrator, Ros Burton, is in the Office on Tuesdays from 9.30am - 5.30pm. While we miss having Avila as part of our lives and activities, we are adjusting to the new situation. Our new office space in North Sydney is opposite the Mary Mackillop Chapel so we are in good company!

The Grail women in Sydney continue to meet monthly to discuss on-going business and celebrate together special times like Pentecost. *Kay Hunt* and *Terese Sheridan* continue to facilitate a reflection morning each month when members of the group take a turn in providing the material for a *lectio* reflection followed by discussion. Also, the *Food for Soul Group* continues to meet weekly online. *Anne Marie George* remains as facilitator and members of the group now includes women from Brisbane and Perth as well as Sydney. This year they are using the writings of Richard Rohr OFM for their meditation and discussion.

I hope you enjoy the articles in this edition of the Grail Newsletter which include an update from *Patricia Gemmell* on the wonderful work she and other women from The Grail and WATAC have done over recent years, providing Church Women an opportunity to share their insights on the Sunday Gospels through the Podcasts of *Australian Women Preach*. Also, please read about the incredible work carried out over many years in the rainforest of North Queensland by Grail member, *Roberta Michna* and her husband Paul. And there is more!

Richard Rohr suggests that Pentecost is a time to reflect on how we live life 'with an energy and aliveness that Paul called the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control'

(Galatians 5:22-23).

***Ruth Crowe (Editor)***



## BRISBANE CALLING

We are delighted to celebrate the elevation of Cardinal Robert Prevost as Pope Leo XIV who will legislate to carry on the great work of Pope Francis so that is not swept away. He is pastoral and close to nature and the poor coming from missionary work in Peru – reportedly possessing a sharp mind and a kind heart.

*Helen Jeffcoat and Ann Aboud* have been busy preparing National Grail Reports for the International Leadership Team (ILT). These included a Financial Report for 2024. We are grateful for the assistance of our Treasurer, *Anthony Hunt*, and others, regarding this report.

The Grail women in Australia also wish to express our deep gratitude to **Judy Brown** for her tireless work for the Grail in Australia over recent years.

Recently, Helen flew to Townsville lugging a huge suitcase full of colourful materials. Consy Sakaria, a Grail member and Social Worker living in Townsville, invited Helen to join her in conducting a sewing workshop for migrant women now living in the region and who have suffered torture and trauma. In 2024 the Grail made a grant of \$4,000 in response to a request from Consy on behalf of a woman's group she runs for her employer Qld Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma. The grant was for the purchase of seven sewing machines and associated handcraft items—scissors, fabric, thread etc.



*Consy Sakaria and Helen Jeffcoat*

Helen writes, ‘The whole two days were a LOT of fun and a privilege for me. The women can now make whatever they like with the machines. Clothes, mending, fun projects, items to sell or whatever they like. It is calming, gives you a sense of achievement, costs little and is a great group activity. Well done, Consy!’



Judy and Ann celebrated birthdays – Judy’s noted by a poem of her life by Earthlink’s resident poet, Margaret Gillespie. Some people have all the luck! *Mary Mennis* is writing ‘Village to Vatican’, the story of PNG Cardinal John Ribat which we are eagerly awaiting. She and *Maggie Jenatsch* look forward to visiting the Marian Valley in Brisbane in July to celebrate the path to sainthood of Papua New Guinean catechist, Blessed Peter To Rot.

*Jill Herbert* is hosting an afternoon tea for the Grail in Brisbane which we are all looking forward to after the great effort we put into making the visit of the ILT a memorable experience for them and us. Ann has joined Judy for The Grail’s online reflection group, *Food for the Soul*. *Mary and Darryl Nelson* continue to support the people of Ethiopia who find themselves desperate since the US cut off their aid.

Recently, Father Frank Brennan SJ spoke to us on Catholic Social Teaching using mainly documents written by Pope Francis including, **Laudato Si 2015** and **Fratelli Tutti 2020**. We also learned that Fr Frank is 50 years a priest this year and we wish him many blessings and thank him for all he has done to raise awareness about Indigenous Affairs, as well standing with refugees, asylum seekers and other groups who have been discriminated against and marginalised in Australia.

***Ann Aboud***



## **POPULAR WOMEN'S PODCAST ENDED ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, March 2025**

A popular long-running podcast of Australian Christian women preaching on the Gospels aired its final episode on International Women's Day this year.

Launched in 2021 during COVID, the Australian Women Preach Podcast, an initiative of Women and the Australian Church (WATAC) and The Grail in Australia, featured a woman preaching on the Gospel each week for the coming Sunday. In the four years it was going, it clocked up more than 200 episodes and almost 50,000 listens.

In that time 175 women from all walks of life around the country preached on the podcast, including from remote Aboriginal communities.

One of the founders of the podcast team, Tracy McEwan said preaching was a gift from the Holy Spirit.

"Everyone benefits from hearing a diversity of voices preaching the Gospel," she said.

Many of the women on the podcast are Catholic and most serve the faithful in some way. For example, the nine women preachers from the Diocese of Parramatta include members of the Plenary Council, as well as the Diocesan, Deanery and Parish councils, while some also work or volunteer in Catholic schools and parishes, and in the Chancery's Mission Enhancement Team.

One of these preachers from the Parramatta Diocese, Padmi Pathinather, the inaugural Chair of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, said the podcast had given a "powerful platform" to women's voices, which had long been underrepresented in the church.

"By showcasing diverse female perspectives on scripture, it has not only inspired women but also encouraged men to reflect on the richness of inclusive preaching," she said.

Another preacher from the Diocese, Alison Ryan, a facilitator with the Mission Enhancement Team, said having so many women from "across Australia sharing story and wisdom about their life and faith journey reveals the many ways that God is moving among us".

"Over the four years of preaching, we have heard the Gospel speak through the lives of women who bring their lived experiences of culture, work, family, language, study and reflection," she said, "creating a tapestry of faith that reflects more fully the people of God."

Sue Martin, a member of the Diocese's *Laudato Si* Team and the Hills Deanery Pastoral Council, said as a preacher it was a "blessing to contribute through the gifts received from the Holy Spirit".

"Our Catholic school communities are full of strong women voices, it has been good to show that strong women are in our parishes too," she said.

In 2023, a collection of sermons from the podcast series was published as a book by Garratt Publishing, entitled *In Her Voice: Raising Women's Voices in Preaching the Gospel*. And since early 2024 *Madonna Magazine* has published three sermons from the podcast in each print issue.

Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv, the Bishop of Parramatta, who was a regular listener of the podcast, paid tribute the impact it has made.

“Though it is sad to see this project come to an end, it has trailblazed the new path forward,” Bishop Vincent said in a letter to the podcast team.

“Therefore, we should celebrate its impact. Well done to the many women who are involved in it.”

With the podcast ending, the Australian Women Preach team is looking for new ways to be “a prophetic voice on the inclusion of women”.

The team is in a process of discernment, and hosted a web forum on Sunday, 9 March, for interested people to reflect on what comes next for Australian Women Preach.

One thing they have said is that there will be a catalogue of all the episodes available on their website, [australianwomenpreach.com.au](http://australianwomenpreach.com.au)

“This is an exciting time for the AWP. We are thrilled that the weekly episodes have had such an impact and are anticipating a future filled with possibilities, modelling the church we want to be. Prayerful collaboration with the team, our supporters, and our preachers is paramount,” the team said in a statement.

**The final episode of the Australian Women Preach Podcast was released on Spotify on Saturday, 8 March.**

*Antony Lawes*

This article first appeared on the *Diocese of Parramatta website Catholic Outlook*.

## **FROM VISION TO MISSION TO COMPLETION**

As I reflect on Australian Women Preach over the past four and a half years, I can’t quite believe that we did it! It just goes to show what is possible when the time is ripe and the Spirit is blowing. It began with a period of stagnation during the Plenary Council and a desire to model one small part of the cultural change that Australians were calling for. A voice heard in the night – why don’t we women just preach, just do it – led to a tentative suggestion to some of my friends in both the Grail and WATAC, and before I knew it Tracy McEwan was running with it with an energy that proved contagious.

After six months of discernment and preparation, followed a launch on International Women’s Day in March 2021, a book we launched at the Sydney Grail House in March 2023, a WATAC online celebration in March 2024, four and a half years of the team meeting weekly on Zoom, and over 200 podcasts of women preaching. And all during this time, first in Australia and then globally, many Catholics were hoping that the Plenary Council and the Synod would initiate a new era in which unordained men and women could finally preach at the ambo during a Sunday mass. We did everything we could to keep this hope alive and active, and while we still hope for change, we know it is time to turn our attention elsewhere.

Yes, we are tired. But we are also exhilarated by what we have achieved and the first thing we will do during our self-proclaimed sabbath will be to ensure that our legacy will endure. Of all the joys with which we have been blessed during the course of this project, the greatest is the depth of the bonds of friendship that we have forged. We have wept with each other’s woes and rejoiced in each other’s happiness, and encouraged and supported one another ceaselessly, all while sharing the challenging task of making women’s voices heard in proclaiming the Gospel. For many it has been a liberating experience to preach on the

podcast; for many others it has been a joy to listen. I will be forever grateful that I have been a part of the Australian Women Preach podcast.

Whatever we have done, we have always done it with you, our audience, in mind, and we are so grateful for the love and support and feedback that you have provided over the years. We are grateful too for the generous financial support of both WATAC and the Grail, and we



Tracy McEwan and Patricia Gemmell

hope that you too are proud of what you have made possible. We may not have changed the institutional church – yet! – but we have certainly changed lives, not least our own.

Now it is time to come down from the mountain. Our work here on the podcast is almost done. We give thanks for all the love and grace that have accompanied it. We look forward to continuing the friendships and keeping those Zoom meetings going, while waiting patiently for the voice of the Spirit to surprise one of us, one day, with something new.

**Patricia Gemmell**

## MANAGING THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE

The natural landscape is best served by an emotive human connection to God’s creation.

*“If we could just show people the splendid and seemingly miraculous workings of the natural world,  
it would become so obvious that nature needed protecting  
that there would be no need for conflict.”*

*“Science denies our soul,  
Art too busy being provocative, devalues our feelings.  
The result is a relentless widening of the chasm between people and nature...”*

These quotations are from: *A Feeling for Nature*, a book written by our neighbour Stan Breeden, a natural history writer, and presenter of nature through photography.

It is over 20 years since Paul and I purchased our Atherton Tablelands rainforest property, bordering the Wooroonoonan National Park, west of Choorechillum (Mt. Bartle Frere) and over ten years since we moved here to live and nurture a spirituality that draws sustenance from nature. Activities have been repairing and enhancing the integrity of our Wairambar Rainforest property, getting involved in local rainforest revegetation community work as members of TREAT (Trees for the Revegetation of the Atherton and Evelyn Tablelands), Malanda Landcare and the Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group.

In 2005 we contracted with the Queensland government to be a legislated Nature Refuge but did not take that up as a perpetual arrangement in 2015. The Queensland Newman government 2012-2015 cancelled the scheme and under a new government, it re-emerged through private enterprise. The ultimate control of land practice is in the hands of the government which is essentially interested in land acquisition rather than management. It also demonstrated that ‘perpetual’ legislation can change from one government’s term of office to the next.



*Wooroonoonan National Park – The tin roof marks Roberta and Paul's home*

**Our focus has been on regenerating forest habitat.** Maintaining habitat provides home for wildlife. Many insects and mammals are under threat. A severe heatwave in 2019 was very detrimental – and scientists and landholders are not seeing a resurgence. The little environmental funding there is goes into needless academic study to quantify what landowners and citizen sciences have already observed, or expensive breeding programs established at zoos. Often all that is needed is to reduce speed limits through wooded areas – as is done in Canada - or reduce feral predator through the use of cat-proof fencing – as is done in New Zealand. Translocation of both plants and creatures from one area to another has been consistently banned by Departments of the Environment but there is a growing sense that this is essential with rising temperatures. There are moves to make land above 800 meters protected areas so creatures requiring cooler habitats have somewhere to go.



**Since the early 1980's volunteers in our small regional community of around 20-30,000 people have planted about 3 million trees as wildlife corridors to connect remnant fragments of the once great tropical rainforests, and to revegetate drainages for better water quality.** It takes a minimum of about 3,000 trees to revegetate one hectare (10,000sqm) of land. While intentions are well meaning, to have a measurable impact the process needs to be

upscaled several orders of magnitude. **In the Evelyn Tablelands, closer to Ravenshoe and on the coast, efforts are being put into plantings of up to 60,000 trees a year (doubling current practice)** to rehabilitate unproductive land cleared as a requisite for land tenure in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Broadening the scale of plantings necessitates the employment of

permanent workers. Volunteer planters will not meet the needs. Local Ngadjon-Jii have recently been appointed Aboriginal National Park Rangers to manage land and forests – an excellent idea but only funded for twelve months. Partnerships with government and entrepreneurs could be explored. Environmental practices need to be open to diverse ideas and new initiatives encouraged. Environmental regeneration needs to be funded initially with the cost returned through carbon sequestration, reduced erosion, improved soil quality, cleaner water and a return of beauty. The natural world is an essential service like electricity or water.

**Land management requires cooperation with landholders, particularly farmers who are exploring ways of better managing their soil and land resources.** It also has a big role to play in management of **the Great Barrier Reef**. No longer the “Great” reef that Paul scuba dived to remove crown of thorns starfish off Townsville in the 1980s but many still view it with awe. A figure given at a seminar recently stated that the planting of 30 million trees over a five-year period along the streams that flow to the coast from our mountains would mitigate the runoff (chemicals and soil) which is as damaging to the Reef as the warming ocean. Technically the state owns the edge of streams, but in practice land is cleared to the very edge of the water resulting in hot dirty run-off. The politics of that is driven by adjoining private landowners and nothing meaningful is happening.

People are now more aware of the natural world as integral to human life on our planet, yet human action to rectify the situation is lacking. The gratuitous use of the banner phrase of “sustainability” needs to be replaced with a new banner - “regeneration”. We need to remediate the deteriorating natural environment and act to “pay forward” to generate a balanced and flourishing world community.

Rod Cameron OSA introduced his book *Opala* with these words of hope from an Elder while they were sitting on the ground in the wilderness of Cape York Peninsular:

“For many years”, he said “the Rainbow Snake has been asleep in the cave.  
We are living in a spiritual desert  
But right now the Snake is waking up.  
Soon the clouds and rain will come again.  
Rivers will flow and pools will be filled.  
The land will be made new.”

### ***Roberta Michna***

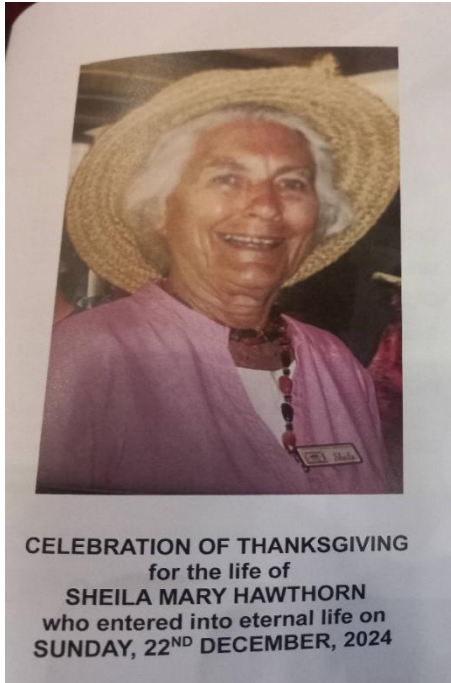
Roberta Michna was Principal of St. Raphael’s College, Townsville 1995-1996.



*Roberta and Paul Michna*

## **FAREWELLING OUR HUMBLE AND FAITHFUL GRAIL WOMAN, SHEILA HAWTHORN**

### *Philmah Waken for Grail In Papua New Guinea*



The Grail community in Papua New Guinea (PNG) mourns the passing of a beloved pioneer, Sheila Mary Hawthorn, fondly known as ‘Bubu’ Sheila. As the founder of the Grail movement in PNG, Sheila dedicated over 25 years of her life to serving as a teacher in the East Sepik Province from 1956 to 1982. Her passion for education and empowerment led her to introduce the Grail to young women in the 1980s, a legacy that continues to thrive in the country today.

Even after leaving PNG to return to Australia, Sheila remained deeply committed to the Grail’s mission. She kept in touch with Grail members in PNG, providing guidance and leadership through various formation programs. Her unwavering support and love for the PNG Grail community were felt across the years and miles.

Sadly, Sheila passed away on December 23, 2024. The news of her passing was met with an outpouring of sympathy and condolence messages from Grail Women in PNG to their counterparts in Australia and to Sheila’s family. Her impact and contributions were deeply cherished by all who had the privilege of knowing her.

On January 16, 2025, I travelled to Sydney, Australia, to attend Sheila’s funeral service. It was a profound honor to represent PNG Grail at this solemn occasion. The Grail Women in Australia and Sheila’s family were grateful for this representation, as Sheila had always held PNG close to her heart.

The funeral service was live-streamed, allowing Grail members, family, and friends from Australia, PNG, and other parts of the world to pay their respects. It was a beautiful celebration of Sheila’s life, reflecting her compassionate, humble, and loving nature. She was a beacon of service and kindness, always willing to extend her hand to those in need.

During the service, I had the honour of placing a ‘billum’ on Sheila’s coffin, symbolizing her deep connection to PNG. Additionally, I was privileged to take the second reading of the Mass and serve as a pallbearer, a truly humbling experience in remembrance of our dear Sheila.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the supportive Grail Women in Australia, particularly Ruth Crowe, Helen Jeffcoat, Ann Aboud, Alison Healey and Jill and Patrick Vidler, whose generosity and kindness made this farewell possible. My appreciation also extends to the Grail Women in PNG – Christine Saiwal, Mary Kuweh, Rose and Sharon Maule, Grace Wohuiangu, Philomena and Regina Samar and William Waken – who contributed in various ways to ensuring that PNG Grail was represented at Sheila’s final farewell.

Late Sheila Mary Hawthorn was laid to rest at Macquarie Catholic Cemetery. Her spirit and legacy will continue to inspire the Grail community in PNG and beyond.

May Your Beautiful Soul Rest In Love And Peace In The Arms Of Our Maker.  
Farewell, Dear Sheila.



*Philmah Waken*

## **WALKING FROM DILI TO LETEFOHO**

*Geoffrey Gemmell* (Patricia Gemmell's husband)



I am a member of the Catholic Parish of Lower North Shore, my principal place of worship being St. Leonard's Church, Naremburn. I am also a bell ringer and an avid walker, having completed two Caminos, one of 900 kilometres, the other 320 kilometres. Our Parish is twinned with a Parish in Timor Leste, called Letefoho. We have a group in our Parish called LETS (Letefoho East Timor Support), which has been going for over 10 years. More than 12 months ago, after the last LETS' fundraiser, I kept getting nudged by the Spirit. I suppose the combination of being a keen walker, a desire to do something for the people of Letefoho and being slightly crazy, led me to discern that I would walk from Dili to Letefoho, a distance of 72 kilometres, to raise money for Letefoho. 80% of the money raised will go towards paying the wages of the children's school teachers as the parents and Parish of Letefoho simply do not have the money to pay them. 20% will help fund a bell tower to be

built beside the new chapel (more like a cathedral!) at Eraulo in the parish of Letefoho. I am paying all my expenses including air fares, insurance, medical expenses (vaccinations etc), accommodation and meals. If you'd like to sponsor me in this endeavour, please click on the link below and follow the prompts or scan the QR on the attached PDF document. If for whatever reason I don't make it to Letefoho, you can ask for your money back, if you so wish. Thanks for taking the time to read this.

<https://www.mycause.com.au/p/370174/dili-to-letefoho-walk>

For more information, please see next page.



# Walking from Dili to Letefoho



*Geoff is walking 72 kms  
starting June 19  
from **Dili to Letefoho,***



*to raise funds for the community of  
**LETEFOHO, Timor Leste!***



*Roads are busy, hot  
and humid, uphill into  
the mountains*



**Funds raised will support**

- 1) Education – students’ fees and teachers’ wages
- 2) Construction of a bell tower for the Eraulo chapel



**To sponsor Geoff please go to:**

<https://www.mycase.com.au/p/370174/dili-to-letefoho-walk> or



**Let's support Geoff's great walk as much as we can!!!**