



Australian Network for Spiritual Direction Inc.

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For people engaged in godly listening

Website: <http://www.ansd.org.au>

Newsletter February 2009

Greetings to you all.

As I prepare this newsletter for distribution, my thoughts constantly revert back to the chaotic weather conditions and the pain and suffering so many are experiencing – some of whom will belong to our network. My thoughts and prayers are with those in need and all those providing assistance and care.

This newsletter will be the last one written before the Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction's National Conference in April. Details can be found on page 6 of this newsletter or visit <http://spiritualdirection.org.au/Upcoming-Events/An-Other-Voice-National-Gathering.html> Notice of our Annual General Meeting is also given in this newsletter and will be held during the AECSD's Conference.

We have some interesting reading ahead with John Stuart's President's Letter, a homily by John Stewart and an article by Roger Sharr.

Subscriptions for 2009 are now due. Liz Palmer informs us of new methods of payment to provide us with more payment options. A membership form is enclosed.

Regional Activities for 2009 are listed on the last pages. ANSD and non-ANSD activities have been included. Keep your eye on the website though, to catch any new activities within the regions and contact the regional representatives or the people specified if you need more information.

Joanne Windeyer (Editor)

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Australian Network For Spiritual Direction Inc will be held on Sunday 26th of April at the Mary MacKillop Centre during the AECSD National Gathering.

The agenda will comprise:

1. Ordinary business which shall be:
 - Confirmation of the minutes of the last AGM
 - receipt and consideration of the report of the Executive and financial report
 - election of regional representatives
 - election of the membership sub-committee
2. Specific business as indicated below
 - brief regional reports
 - Conference 2010 report

Nominations will be accepted from the floor of the meeting, but prior consent to nomination must have been obtained from anyone nominated but not present at the meeting

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President's Letter

Justice Michael Kirby as he comes to the end of his illustrious career as a lawyer and judge recently delivered a powerful address at Griffiths University in Queensland. After all of his work he states quite simply that

*“Love is the driver of all good things and
the basis of our human rights”*

While he is very eloquent he is also very simple in the most honoured sense of the word. So much of our lives are infiltrated by the doctors of spin that when someone like Michael Kirby comes along we could miss the strength of his words because they are not surrounded by hype and spin.

In the last few months we have been called, as never before, to attend to the simplicity of life that Michael Kirby points to. With the meltdown of the financial system and the dysfunction of that entity called “the market” we have been called to attend to and address the question “What Really Matters?” Is it that important that I am able to get the latest LCD screen; does it matter that I can't get to my favourite destination? I know I would like all of these “things” and much more. But WHAT REALLY MATTERS?

About the same time Baz Luhrmann's film “Australia” came out. It was met by a luke warm critical response but by a blistering attack from Germaine Greer. Vitriol and contempt poured out from her towards Baz Luhrmann. This was followed by a thoughtful and well measured response to her, in the Age, by Marcia Langton, professor of indigenous studies at Melbourne University. What struck me about Marcia Langton's response was its reflective nature. There was none of the vitriol that Germaine Greer had poured on Luhrmann and also on Langton herself. She wove facts and personal history in an attempt to counter Greer. She seems to draw on what Michael Kirby was talking about in his address. At the end of the address he says

*“When we take time to think about what our lives actually mean, we surely know
how lucky we are if we still enjoy consciousness, rationally and love. But the greatest of these is love.”*

How lucky we are in this country to have figures like Michael Kirby and Marcia Langton who have the capacity to depth life and point to “what really matters.”

When we reflect on the ministry of spiritual direction isn't one of the main thrusts to walk side by side with our directees to help them discern “what really matters.” This discovery of “what really matters” comes in the still small voice experienced by Elijah on the mountain or in the epiphany experienced by Merton on the intersection in Louisville, Kentucky where he “knew” that he was one with all people.

Mark Patrick Hederman, the newly elected Abbott of Glenstal Abbey in Limerick, commented at a course I attended in August that religions commit suicide when they look for inspiration from dogma. Surely the challenge for us in spiritual direction is to be very aware of where we find our inspiration. Paul in Corinthians does not point to dogma but to love. Jesus holds to love as our motivating force, not rules or regulations. We have seen how the dogma of the “market” has failed us miserably in our economic endeavours, so why would it be the inspiration in our Spiritual life?

The Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh in his poem “Having Confessed” gives us a hint where our inspiration might lie

*At the heart of the emotion, time
Has its own work to do. We must not anticipate
Or awaken for a moment. God cannot catch us
Unless we stay in the unconscious room
Of our hearts. We must be nothing,
Nothing that God may make us something.*

God must be allowed to surprise us.

Where can God surprise us? In Michael Kirby's reflections on life, in Marcia Langton's measured response, in Baz Luhrmann's attempt to get us to think with compassion about Aboriginal history, in Kavanagh's poetry. In the depth of Religious Imagination that is innate to us all.

And if you get the chance go and see Billy Elliott the Musical and Wicked. You may be surprised there as well!

**John Stuart
(President)**

Spiritual Direction Formation Program

Homily at Graduation Eucharist - 27 November 2008

The Australian writer on spirituality, David Tacey, published a book several years ago called *The Spirituality Revolution*. He commenced with a reflection about the River Todd in Alice Springs during his childhood. For many years the river bed was dry and sandy. Then, after heavy rains it would flow like any other river. Tacey wrote:

We were told by our geography teachers that the Todd River was actually flowing all the time, but that we could not see it. Just below the ground and beyond our sight, there were bodies of moving water or underground streams, and in times of flood the water-table would rise from its subterranean depths and become a visible river. Students and workers alike would cheer, whistle and applaud when the wall of water appeared. To the people of the town this was something of a mystical experience, a kind of apparition, and a dramatic event that brought excitement, interest and unity to the district.

It struck me when I first read it that this is a powerful image for the ministry of spiritual direction. There is this deep, hidden flow of water in each of us which from time to time gushes up and demands our attention. Spiritual direction is a way of paying attention to this inner spring of water – welcome it, explore it and learn to live in its life-giving qualities.

It's a helpful way of understanding the story we had in the gospel just now. Here is Jesus, the spiritual director, bringing his thirst to a place where people have come for water for centuries. His arrival coincides with a woman who is not someone he should speak with. As the story unfolds it gives us insights into how spiritual direction works. The woman moves from a literal understanding of the meaning of water to the symbolic; she gets the point that Jesus is himself the source of water; this leads her to deeper faith; she in turn embraces her mission to share her experience with her village and she brings them to faith.

Along the way she explores her longing for intimacy. She has tried, oh how she has tried, to have that need met in a series of relationships. And she is offered not a sense of judgment about her moral behaviour but a deep sadness that no person has satisfied her deepest thirst. Now she glimpses why. Jesus takes her seriously, she is accepted and listened to deeply, and she is drawn to leave behind her old choices and welcome some new ones. In all this faith is awakened in her and arises like the underground waters of the Todd River.

John's Gospel has water as one of its major themes carrying with it many layers of meaning. The Melbourne New Testament scholar Dorothy Lee says that John commonly speaks of water as quenching physical thirst, as cleansing the body and as part of childbirth. (Dorothy Lee 65) In this story each of these meanings is evident: Jesus and the woman have their thirst quenched; the woman experiences cleansing and freeing of her past actions and a new sense of who she is; and there is a new birth in her awakening to Jesus' identity and her faith in him. By the end the woman and those of us hearing her story know that what starts out as physical thirst turns out to be a metaphor for spiritual thirst. And the woman discovers, as Jesus says:

...the water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

What the woman seeks and finds is the water of wisdom – wisdom about who she is and who God is – wisdom flowing from the well of the Spirit, implanted in the heart by Jesus. No barrier of race or gender can stand in the way of such a gift.

It is a breathtaking, thrilling story just as spiritual direction is a breathtaking, thrilling adventure. Today we celebrate the journey we have shared with these dear people: Cath Connelly, Rob Culhane, Sandra Joyce, Catherine Mahedy, Philip Trowse, Jenny Whitlock, Margaret Houen, Barbara King and Jean Murray. They have all learned about thirst and they have explored the life giving water gushing inside them. They have deepened their knowledge of God as revealed in Jesus and in his Spirit, the true Director of us all. And now they leave to share in God's mission in the world – which is helping thirsty people discover the inner flow of God's water for themselves.

And that mission finds its best expression in the first reading we had just now. According to St John, the revelation of the glory of God on earth will be occasioned by rising waters of spiritual life:

...then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, rising from the throne of God and of the Lamb, and flowing crystal clear down the middle of the city street. (Revelation 22.1)

Once again, this is the language of image, of metaphor and how full of meaning it is. In this country we find ourselves sinking deeper into the effects of a long drought. Parched land, gasping rivers, failing crops, shorter showers, drip

systems in the garden – it all speaks of huge adjustments we are having to make to live with this new reality. In my prayers I often find myself thinking about this drought as a metaphor for our national life – in much the way John’s gospel does. It’s not just the land which is parched – it is the souls of many of my neighbours and friends. I listen to many, many stories in my spiritual direction ministry and I hear repeatedly people looking for direction, for healing, for refreshment. Like the Samaritan woman they have found their way to the well and they trust something will happen. And when it does it is truly miraculous. I find myself pondering what it would be like if that were to be our national experience: thirsty people enduring spiritual drought finding the source of water gushing up within them.

Is it too bold a claim that this might be the gift of spiritual direction to this nation? If we have discovered the sources of subterranean spiritual water – why would we want people to stay thirsty? Wouldn’t we want to tell the people of our streets about this good news? The image of the water flowing from the temple down the street of the city continues:

On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

So this water we are splashing around in in our spiritual direction conversations, turns out to be God’s offer of healing for the nations of the world.

What a calling! What a gift! What a privilege is ours to be at this well, with this God, in this Spirit and sent as agents of the healing of the nations. Are you up to it?

These friends we send out today are truly up to it, even if they carry some apprehension. We send them out with our deep gratitude to God for all they have learned and experienced during our journey together these years. We send them out assured of our continuing encouragement and support, trusting that God will continue to bless and direct them.

In addition to the voices of the Apostle John, David Tacey, Dorothy Lee and the many others who surround us on this wonderful occasion, listen to Judith Wright, the Australian poet:

*Silence is the rock where I shall stand
O when I strike it with my hand
may the artesian water spring
from that dark source I long to find.*

John Stewart

Subscriptions

It is now possible to pay your subscription to the ANSD by direct deposit and internet banking as well as by cheque!

I have discovered that some smaller institutions only allow the identification of a deposit by a reference number, so I have created a membership number for all of our members. If you are able to add your name that would be helpful, but please would everyone quote their membership number when making a deposit, as this is a unique identifier. Dropping me an email (palmerea@fastmail.fm) to tell me you have made a deposit would be an added precaution to make sure I know whose the money is!

Those who receive their Newsletter via Australia Post will have their membership number and subscription due date printed at the bottom of their address label.

I am adding membership number and due date to the name of those who will be receiving their Newsletter via email – I hope this works! (If not, email me for your membership number)

Details needed for making a direct deposit are as follows:

Commonwealth Bank

BSB: 062 902

Account number: 00903865

Please quote your membership number (and name or initials if possible) ***Liz Palmer (treasurer)***

LAUGHTER AND PRAYER

Most human thought on the meaning and significance of laughter is immensely serious, and Henri Bergson's book on the subject must be in the running for the world's dullest monograph. The formal studies of our capacity to laugh are usually of a psychoanalytical nature and the theses are well known; we laugh in order to protect ourselves against the realities of pain and death (jokes of the banana skin variety) to ward off the self we cannot accept (the cruel jokes against other people that invariably say something central about our own personalities). Some would say that laughter makes temporary sense of a chaotic world and makes experience manageable; Hobbes speaks of it as a 'sudden glory' that reminds us of our infirmity.

But when we come to consider the place of laughter in our life with God there is something in the Christian mind that makes us feel a little uncomfortable. Perhaps it is the fault of the Bible. Laughter is a rare occurrence in Holy Writ and usually has sinister overtones. Sarah shakes with disbelief at the angels' promise, and the author of Hebrews joins in the joke by quietly observing that Abraham was as good as dead. (Please note that this is not good biblical criticism.) The psalmist sees God laughing his enemies to scorn, but we feel immediately chilled by the image and even embarrassed by it. There are jokes in the Old Testament but they are of the ominous and serious kind. (Surely the Samson saga is a joke? Delilah's recurring cry, 'Samson, the Philistines are upon you!' is a sort of antique vaudeville or farce.)

The well-meaning attempts to speak of Our Lord as a great humorist founder on the realization that the stories, in themselves, aren't really very funny. The idea of a camel clambering, humps and all, through a needle's eye, is absurd - but is it a joke? It does, after all, suggest a manner of life in which it remains impossible to see God.

We are now allowed to laugh in church; it's part of the new orthodoxy of being freed-up and non-stuffy. But why is it that we don't actually laugh as much as we used to do when it was bad religious manners? Has our new found freedom in religion been an exchange of one kind of solemnity for another? Over a century ago, Matthew Arnold warned of "...the earnest, prosaic, practical, austere literal future when we shall all yawn in one another's faces with the dismallest, the most unimpeachable gravity".

Laughter is the ultimate weapon for either good or ill, and when it is used for good it points us to the truth that will always make us free. In a famous exchange between Eccles and Bloodnok in *The Goon Show*, the joke enables us to see the difference between time and eternity. Our laughter is a kind of short cut to a truth with which the Christian mind is very familiar; eternal life is not endless time but a way of talking about a relationship –

Bloodnok: You can't live forever, you know.

Eccles: Oh no? You just watch me.

(long silence)

Bloodnok: Well come on, I'm waiting!

Eccles: I'm living forever as fast as I can.

Such absurdity (the idea of living quickly) recalls the satire in much of Jesus' teaching; the lumbering camel, the unjust judge hounded by the widow, and his comment on the story of the much married woman who eventually died and had to face the prospect of eternal polygamy - all these absurd images make us consider if we are asking the right questions or looking at things in the right way. The ironic juxtaposition between the Father and the grump who would not get out of bed to help his friend until the noise became deafening, should make us laugh at the poverty of our vision.

The human capacity to laugh is an allegory of God's laughter, putting us in touch, for a moment, with the perfect perspective with which he sees the world continuously. When we laugh and keep the commandments we know, in little, what God's life is like. Laughter is a way of seeing.

It might also be a way of praying. Jesus' holy satire is an exuberant dance round the knowledge of his Father's love ("Do you give stones instead of bread? If only you knew what the Father would give you"). We share this exuberance when we share Christ's intercession before the Father and allow the Spirit to pray in us. At its deepest level we call it Joy, and many have been struck by its surprising nature, forever amazed at God's stealth. Joy is the experience of being on the receiving end of a Divine prank, being discovered in the places where we never looked. But on the fringes of this Joy there is laughter which always comes to our aid in the spiritual religious life (imaged perfectly by Peter Cook and Dudley Moore in the film *Bedazzled*, in their bizarre vision of nuns 'leaping to the Lord' on trampolines) and has saved many a true vocation. Not only has it prevented a person taking himself or herself too seriously; it has put that person in touch with the life of God to discover there a strengthening and sustaining joy, a laughter deeper than could possibly have been imagined.

As such it has been a kind of prayer enabling the soul to recapture the sense of wonder which is the basis both of laughter and of spirituality. The truly hilarious joke is always one about the human condition - living forever as fast as we can. It offers a new way of seeing what we know already and breaks through the screaming familiarities of life, encouraging us to come out into the light to know again that the imago Dei is also a fallen creature. The fractional delay that comes between the telling of a story and the laughter that follows it perhaps indicates the lovely shock we receive when we realize we are back on old, familiar and holy ground. T.S. Eliot puts it more seriously –

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And to know the place for the first time.*

This is always the function of comedy - to re-establish the relationship between our dust and God's glory and to discover that all the time we have been known with the deepest intimacy.

We hear the echoes of this 'way of return' in good laughter and we also know it in deep prayer. The habitual recollection where prayer grows is very much a business of living with what we know already and allowing ourselves to be drawn more deeply into it. The gnostic demand for the esoteric and spectacular in spiritual matters often reveals a lack of patience with God and an unwillingness to accept the changes in ourselves that 'knowing the place for the first time' entails. The best jokes are the ones that endure and the ones we find we are always wanting to tell. The best prayer always leads us to see that 'all manner of thing shall be well' in spite of and sometimes because of the present circumstances.

Laughter admits us again to the central and abiding mystery of Resurrection, which is never God's way of playing a joke on people, but always with them, leading them further into the unlikely and finding it to be true. St Athanasius reminds us that Christ's work of reconciliation is done *in* people and not *to* them and who, but a god, could imagine such a piece of satire? Only God could think of the pattern that makes the angels sing for joy.

Is it irreverent to speak of laughter as a way of praying? Or the Resurrection as a Divine joke? Meister Eckhart says in a rare moment of clarity, *God laughs and plays in good deeds.* We find he does the same in good prayers.

Roger Sharr

An Other Voice

A National Gathering of the Spiritual Direction Community of Australia

This second gathering of the Spiritual Direction Community of Australia offers an opportunity for spiritual directors of all traditions to come together to listen deeply to some of the contemporary voices impacting our ministry today:

- *Listening to the Earth*
- *Listening to a universally shared religious Spirit*
- *Listening to the challenge of Nonviolence*

The National Gathering -

*Friday evening 24 - Sunday afternoon 26 April 2009
will be preceded by a*

Formators' Day

Thursday evening 23 - Friday afternoon 24 April 2009

VENUE

*Mary MacKillop Place Hospitality and Conference Centre
Mount St North Sydney 2059*

For further information contact: Anne Lane PBVM

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(02) 9701 0215

Email: annelane@ozemail.com.au

<http://spiritualdirection.org.au>

What's On in 2009

Sydney

This year the Sydney group have decided to trial Friday afternoon meetings as some member found the Saturday times clashed with their own Church/family commitments. We will review after a few gatherings to see if this works! Our dates for meetings are as follows -

February 20th

April 3rd (Conference at Nth Sydney also in April)

May 8th

June 19th

July 31st

September 11th

October 23rd

December 4th

The group meets on Friday at 1pm at St Joseph's Centre for Reflective Living, 64 MacKillop Drive, Baulkham Hills. Please contact Mary Hagan PO Box 288, Quakers Hill, NSW 2763 P: 02 9626 2899

E: mhbethany@bigpond.com.au for more details.

Newcastle

Central Coast Course in Spiritual Direction held at St Joseph Retreat Centre, Kincumber.

February 27 March 1, Eileen Glass will be speaking on L'Arche.

May 15-17 Sue Dunbar will be speaking on Connection Physicality and Spirituality

August 21-23 Ian Palmer speaking on Male Spirituality

November 13-15 will be on the topic of Icons

ANSD Days held at St James Morpeth 10 am - 3.30pm

February 14 Liz Callen on Wonder and Awe

June 13 John Devereux on Confronting death...a discussion

August 1 Jo Windeyer on Sophia, Fount of Wisdom

October 24 Gwen Vale on Women Mystics

Quiet Weekends for Women held at Stoud Monastery and at Hartzer Park, Bowral with presenters Elizabeth Palmer and Gwen Vale

February 21-22 at Bowral Women Mystics

May 29-31 at Stroud Towards Freedom

September 18-20 at Bowral In the Image Of the Creator

Oct 30 - Nov 1 at Stroud Wisdom's Daughters

Please contact Sheila Bourne, 71 Porter Ave, East Maitland NSW 2323 P: 02 4933 4696

E: smb31@adaust.org.au for more details for any of these events.

Queensland

ANSD Events

February 14 Kathryn Houston on Christian Meditation at St Peter's Anglican Church, Charlotte Street, WYNNUM.
March 17 (evening) Patrick Oliver Dreams and Spiritual Direction Venue: St Clements-on-the-Hill, Anglican Church, Eudunda St, STAFFORD.

April 18 - Lucy Tierney Enneagram Wisdom Frameworks as a tool for deep life-enriching reflection. Venue: The Sisters of the Sacred Advent (SSA), Community House 34 Lapraik Street, ALBION.

July 21 (evening) Lynne Cain and Alison Dorman will introduce the main principles of Theological Reflection. Upstairs Room, St John's Lutheran Church, Cnr Oxley Rd & Clewly St, /CORINDA

August 15 - Lyn Dunn and Denise Brosnan on Spirituality and Living with a Life Threatening Illness Venue: Holy Rood Anglican Church Oxenford-Tamborine Rd, OXENFORD.

October 13 (evening) - Aubrey Podlich A Spirituality of Place. Venue: Upstairs room. St John's Lutheran Church Cnr Oxley Rd & Clewly St, CORINDA

November 21 - A reflection on the journey of this year and planning for 2010. Bring your ideas and suggestions for topics and presenters (with contact details please) for the 2010 Program. Venue: Upstairs room. St John's Lutheran Church, Cnr Oxley Rd & Clewly St, CORINDA

Other Matters of Interest

Formation for Spiritual Directors. A four year part-time course over four years. and is offered according to the guidelines established by the Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction. Further information can be obtained from: Spiritual Direction Training Program, Ministry Education Commission, PO Box 1261, MILTON Qld 4064

Christian Dream Companions Course. This 20 hour course, available in both Brisbane and Toowoomba, is for people who may wish to lead dream groups, therapists, ministers in parishes and other ministries, or any individual who may wish to help others in exploring and reverently listening to what their dreams might be saying to them. For more information: <http://mywebsite.bigpond.com/patrickoliver>, Email: p.oliver@mcauley.acu.edu.au , Phone: (07) 3356 4218

Christian Meditation Community. Saturday 21 Feb, Fr John Chalmers will be speaking on "Life in Christ". Holy Spirit School Hall, 36 Villiers St, New Farm. For information on more events: www.wccm.org

Melbourne

Our theme for the year is: 'How Can We Keep Hope Alive in a Disintegrating World?'

- 12 February Desert Spirituality with facilitator: Adrian Jones
- March 19 The Prophetic Voice with facilitator: Wendy Hudson
- April 16 Walking and Reflecting on the Labyrinth at St Faith's Anglican Church, 4 Charles Street, Burwood.
With facilitator Cath Connelly
- April 24-26 AECSD Conference, Sydney.
- May 21 AECSD Conference reflection
- June 18 The Economy in Crisis with facilitator Charles Williams
- July 16 The New / Ancient Cosmology with facilitator Anne Boyd
- August 20 John Stewart will lead a day looking Mark's Gospel
- September 17 Darkness in the Light/ Light on the Darkness with facilitator John Stuart
- October 15 The Role of Spiritual Direction in Fostering Hope with facilitator John Stewart
- November 19 A reflection on the journey of the year and planning for 2010.

Canberra

March 17th at 7.30pm at Bill Huff Johnston's home, 19 Empire Circuit Forest 'Art and Spiritual Direction'

June 20 Venue TBA - 10am - 4pm Sister Catherine Slattery - The spirituality of St Benedict for today.

Email pat.kerr@optusnet.com.au or phone 02 6254 2213 for more information.

Non ANSD Events

14 February, 9am - 4pm Aspects of Love - A Quiet Day. St Mark's National Theological Centre, Blackall St, Barton
Cost: \$10-\$20 donation. For information contact Susanna Pain. Phone: 6248 6465 Email susanna.pain@gmail.com

18th January 2009 (11.30am to 4.30pm) Interplay Workshop - Susan Main

Holy Covenant Anglican Church Jamison (Car park entry from Dexter St Cook) Costs \$50/\$35 conc. Bring lunch to share, snacks provided Please Register by 14th January. For information contact Gillian Hunt Phone: 6253 0113
Email gillieh@bigpond.net.au

February 28 1.30pm - 4.30pm Vocal Play interplay! - Trish Watts. Holy Covenant Anglican Church Jamison, (car park entry from Dexter St Cook) Costs \$30/ \$20 conc. Please register by 25th February. Contact Gillian Hunt - phone 6253 0113 or email gillieh@bigpond.net.au

