



Australian Network for Spiritual Direction Inc.

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For people engaged in godly listening

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

Newsletter August 2011

Greetings to you all.

As I look at the photos taken by Elizabeth Palmer and see familiar friendly, smiling faces, and as I hear the reports of how wonderful the conference and workshop were I am able to sympathise with others who, like me were unable to go to the conference. I would like to give a special thanks to those who have put so much effort into providing the material for this edition of the newsletter.

Leading the way is the Executive Report for 2011. **President John Stuart** reminds us that the message and inspiration of Jesus Christ, and the ministry of Spiritual Direction is just as pertinent today as it ever was.

Gerard Guiton has provided us with a report on the workshop held before the conference and **Jane Simon** has reported on the conference itself.

Information is provided about a three day workshop to be held in Sydney in September, led by **Margaret Silf** and coming up in November is The Australia and New Zealand Association of Theological Field Educator's biannual Conference in Victoria.

Desley Greenhalgh from Queensland has contributed a poem "When I am among the trees".

Congratulations to **Cath Connelly** who has been invited by Spiritual Directors International to perform at a concert in Boston. Well done Cath.

Our thoughts and prayers are with **Caroline Pearce** as she recovers from recent surgery.

Jo Windeyer (Editor)

All contributions to our newsletter are appreciated and should be sent to jowindeyer@bigpond.com



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If ever we needed a reminder that the ministry of spiritual direction does not exist as a separate esoteric entity the Wiki-Leaks revelations have brought that home to us. Julian Assange has helped us realize that the world is indeed interconnected and that the concerns of the world of spiritual direction are indeed the concerns that impact on all the world. The Catholic Church produced one of the great documents that points to this reality. In the Document *Gaudium et Spes* that came from Vatican 2, the opening lines point us squarely to where the followers of Jesus the Christ stand

“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, those too are the joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of human beings.”

The rest of this document explores what this means. Kenneth Leech in his book *Soul Friends* makes a particular point of this deeply human dimension.

“Within classical Christian understanding, spiritual direction is a personal ministry which takes place within a corporate framework, a framework of sacrament, discipleship and social action. It takes place within a context of theological reflection and social struggle. Only within such a context can it make sense and progress.”
(*Soul Friend*, page xviii)

It seems like we are no different to any other age; called to live out personal vocation, of whatever type, in the world of other people. Our personal journey is always shared with other people in a community where justice, peace and liberation mark the growth to maturity.

Last year's conference marked an important point in our corporate life as ANSD. Brendan McKeague led us brilliantly in both personal and corporate exploration of what it means to be peacemakers and the on-going work that is required to be peacemakers.

The last year has also revealed just how much such a non-violent approach to peace is lacking with the on going destruction in Afghanistan and Iraq and the continued uprisings in middle eastern countries that were thought to be contained under the heel of totalitarian regimes. A question arises of course as to how Brendan's work has impacted on our prayer and personal and community life. It is never finished. It reminds me of the Irish prayer that the devil will know we are dead 10 minutes after we are gone. We will finish this work of growth long into the future, perhaps after we are dead, as part of the communion of saints.

The last year has seen a significant move on the part of the AECSD to look to the future of spiritual direction in Australia. As President of ANSD I was invited to have conversation

with the council in September as they started to move into a new phase of their existence. Many formation programs have now been accredited with the last few to be assessed in the near future. The council saw this as the end of the first phase of their charter and invited the spiritual direction networks to discuss what they saw as the future. While nothing has been resolved and the conversations are in their early days it appears that we will be able to really speak with a more unified voice in the future. One aspect that becomes more and more clear is the need to continually look to the place of the spiritual direction ministry. We are not an isolated ministry in our own little preserve but are situated in a community of faith and as Kenneth Leech says that is the only thing that gives us legitimacy.

As we look to what that community is, it is not just of a Church variety or just a Christian one. The community that we are situated in is the global community. This community as we are only too aware at the moment is fractured and vulnerable. We see the signs of disintegration all around us. The world financial community has not exactly covered itself in glory in the last 2 years and we see the engineers of the global financial crisis up to their old tricks of getting more and more bonuses while the people who fell through cracks at their expense are still suffering. While we escaped the worst of the financial meltdown many in this country are struggling to survive. And as we see people getting spooked by rising utility costs and increasing mortgage costs our politicians show little of the compassion that the Vat II document said was at the heart of being human and therefore Christian.

Philosopher and social commentator Robert Manne in his new book “Making Trouble” says that in his view and in the view of many responsible social commentators that the corporate world is now dominating democracy in the West. He gives three examples. Firstly in the States, where Barack Obama when he first came into office had a clear policy on climate change. No sooner had he taken office than the fossil fuel industry took aim at him resulting in a very watered down version. The second is also in the States where he cites the fact that the Wall Street mob effectively stopped any really good regulations to prevent a further meltdown and are demanding bigger bonuses than before and getting them. The third example he cites is the way the mining industry went after Kevin Rudd over the tax on the super profits they were making. Men and women who are worth 4, 5 or more billion dollars spending \$160 million to advertise against it. Financial experts cited by Kevin Henry in his report said this tax would underpin much needed public infrastructure into the future. Greed won out. Robert Manne also says that the corporate world is supported by the Murdoch press to secure this domination and so to get their way and to protect the super rich. At the heart of his work is a core of compassion. He also believes that it has been Julian Assange at the moment who has given us a way forward.

The above may seem to some to be too political and indeed it may be. But it is hard to argue that the people of Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal and many in the United States are suffering, not because of their mistakes but because of the financial vultures that preyed on them.

In Australia we see the Government engaged in a cynical exercise over the Malaysian solution for refugees that would have done the Howard era proud.

The world in which we are exercising this ministry of compassion, in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth, is the world of the above. Here surely is our challenge; to take heed of Jesus of Nazareth and the way he inspired the Bishops of Vatican II and Kenneth Leech and Teresa of Avila and Thomas Merton and Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King and Caroline Chisholm and Mary McKillop and Rowan Williams. Then in attending to the world in which we live, to take seriously the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age and to make sure that our ministry is always situated in this milieu.

Kenneth Leech is firmly situated in the process of theological reflection and at the heart of this process is a contemplative stance and it is out of this stance that our work takes root and grows.

John Stuart



ANSD Executive and Regional Representatives with Dr Alexander J Shaia

Dianne Bradley, Pirrial Clift, John Stuart (President), Elizabeth Palmer (Treasurer), Dr Alexander Shaia, Heather Northwood (Secretary), Cath Connelly, Vicki Cullen, Denise Stephenson and Denise Brosnan.

Spiritual Direction: a Beauteous Benediction

PHILIP CARTER, ANGLICAN priest from Adelaide, led a most enjoyable and informative workshop in Melbourne under the aegis of the ANSD (27th-30th June). Spread over four days, *A Wise Heart: spiritual direction as a transformative way of being with others* introduced us to the themes of faith, hope and love with Philip skilfully lacing each theme with comprehensively chosen and apposite quotations, poetry, time for reflection and discussion in triads. What follows is a small taste only of the spiritual culinary delights Philip served us.

We began with the topography of spiritual direction—the person of the director and the context in which she/he practices. It was important here to reflect theologically at the deepest level: ‘Who am I?’ asked Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ‘This or the other? . . . Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am thine!’ We explored ideas such as those raised by the poet Denise Lertov: ‘God is surely trying to immerse us in a different language . . . Our own words are for us to speak, a way to ask and to answer.’ Whatever is behind language,

whether spoken or bodily, there is an emergent quality about our companionship; we sculpture the form freeing it of the hard rock (R. S. Thomas).

We came to see faith ‘as the seeking of a face’—‘God is the only one who truly knows a human face, Jane Williams wrote: ‘[and] Jesus’ face [was] the ‘genuine embodiment of the human face of God’. We learn to share that human face, she continues, learn to recognise it in ourselves and others, learn to see with God’s eyes which makes us human. With the gift of our face we can be present to the other and be present in God. With our pilgrims we can put a ‘face’ to that reality, to that faith. Indeed, we can believe in, and behold, the underlying truth of all reality just as we explore that residing within our pilgrims.

Philip helped us see that the faith and love we carry into our spiritual accompaniment may be appreciated ‘as a journey or exodus from a ‘closed, inward looking self’ toward another, and [towards] the fostering of a climate where communion takes place.’ This meeting is one of the heart; we carry each other’s heart (e.e. cummings) and hold one another in the Light for we are one of another. At this point, I couldn’t help thinking of the ultimate love, that of self-sacrifice, even of one’s life. I thought of Jesus to be sure but also others like Martin Luther King Jr., Bonhoeffer himself, Dorothy Stang the nun who was murdered in the Amazon as she ministered to its indigenous peoples, and Maximilian Kolbe who offered his life for another in Auschwitz. But also of all those low-profile ‘lovers’ who perform the ‘ordinary’ tasks of life (you’ll know some), and of the ministry of spiritual direction itself. Love carries its own grace-filled memory; we can, we were reminded, be in love with Love.

Once we truly love ‘there is no going back’ (Wendell Berry) for we are on a trajectory into God. I wondered whether we had free will. I guess an underlying theme of Philip’s talks was authenticity. Now, if we are authentically *in* God, *in* the Christ—even for a nano second—we are perfect and cannot err in that moment. If this is true, we do not need free will but will be content to surrender, to be in the God-groove as it were from which there will be no deviation. Just as the needle on those old records followed its groove into the centre, so, too, our authentic prayer-life will lead us into the Centre of centres where we encounter God and dwell in the *mysterium*. Is this the true path of spiritual direction? Of course, we know it’s not an easy journey for it is often painful, a ‘waking from illusion, of knowing our nakedness and confusion. (Monica Furlong).

Nevertheless, there is hope. Once, in Brazil, I heard a saying: ‘hope is the last thing to die.’ But hope never dies. Hope is found in our inmost recesses. It’s in our DNA. ‘Return, return to the deep source’, cries the poet May Sarton. It’s a plea to know ourselves so we may love ourselves, return home to our Divine potential, the Kingdom (the Covenant of Love/Peace) that is within (Lk. 17: 20-21). This *mysterium* is ever-revealing. By being exodus and resurrection people we will be incarnational and apocalyptic; we will reveal who we truly are and meant to be. We will give birth to Love in ourselves and the other. We will welcome the ever-present and ever-coming Christ and address that of God in the other; that is, we will draw out his/her blessedness and live the Covenant of Peace as if it is already present. We will give birth to the ‘Second Coming’ and be as hope itself, the ‘native land of the Spirit’, as it graces the beautiful benediction that is spiritual direction.

Gerard Guiton (Melbourne)

Report on the ANSD Conference in July

I recently attended my third ANSD conference, which was held at the Edmund Rice Centre, Amberley in Melbourne. The centre, set amongst beautiful gardens overlooks Westerfolds Park to the Dandenong Ranges. The Yarra River flows at the bottom of the centre and the river walk provided me with much fresh air and time for reflection.



I was expecting the weather in Melbourne to be unfavourable this time of year but for the majority of the time there was only a little rain and glorious fresh sunny days. I loved the daffodils, as I don't see much of these in Brisbane. There was also a little debate over the white flowers which decorated the dinner tables – were they Snowdrops? – Apparently not - they were Snowflakes.

The atmosphere at the conference was one conducive to intellectual debate and I overheard many discussions of value. What I particularly love about my association with ANSD is the freedom to ask questions and to engage in discussing issues relating to faith, spirituality and religion. Well you might say it was a conference on these very issues but as Dr Shaia stated not everyone is open to exploring new avenues of understanding. And being a new graduate (I completed the spiritual direction program in Brisbane 2010) with a thirst for knowledge I love discussions of this nature.

Dr Shaia helped me in understanding the Gospel by placing each chapter within the socio-historical context of the time. Shaia views each of the individually named books of the New Testament together as chapters in one single gospel. Hence the singular use of his term Gospel rather than Gospels. The four chapters, according to Shaia provide a manual for four key aspects for practical Christian living. In Matthew, the question is asked *How do we face change?* In Mark, *How do we move through suffering?* In John, *How do we receive Joy?* And in Luke *How do we mature in service?* I was reminded of my thesis topic which was related to the *Paschal Mystery* which I had found so illuminating in describing the pattern of life we all face.

Small group sessions allowed one to consolidate the teachings from previous sessions. Questions were raised and confusions voiced - all of which provided fruitful thoughts for later reflection and dreams. Dinner table discussions also enabled one to clarify with another something that had been placed on their heart. Meals were scrumptious and pre-dinner drinks offered a time to relax and socialise.



The question for me then becomes how do I incorporate this path within my own spiritual life and the life of the directees I meet along the way. For myself, it is about awareness and being present to my own needs at all levels of my being. And the same would suit within the spiritual direction process with another. Sitting with someone while they attempt to make sense of the struggles within their own lives. Struggles which Shaia claims we all face just like the early Christians especially when questions of injustice arise. Our culture is not

accustomed to pain and there is a tendency to either avoid pain or to move through it as quickly as possible. The spiritual direction session becomes the container to hold the directee while they sit with their pain, and even joy.

I am very much looking forward to the next gathering of spiritual directors.

Jane Simon

You are invited to attend

Movement and Change in Theological Field Education

The Australia and New Zealand Association of Theological Field Educators
The Biannual Conference

at

Whitley College, 271 Royal Parade, Parkville, Victoria, Australia

on

28-30 November, 2011

Keynote Speakers

Rev Colin Hunter

Rev Matthew Floding DMin

Rev Merrill Kitchen OAM BAppSc DTheol TheolM

The Right Revered Victoria Matthews

More information, including the available electives and booking form are available on

<http://whitley.unimelb.edu.au/ANZATFE2011>



"The Other side of Chaos"

How do we accompany others in this chaotic world? In this three-day workshop for Spiritual Directors and Retreat Givers, **Margaret Silf** will lead an exploration of spiritual accompaniment through times of unprecedented change and transition. The workshop is to be held at Canisius College in Pymble on Tuesday 13th September to Thursday 15th September, from 9.30 am to 3 pm. Live in cost is \$465 including meals and accommodation. Live out cost is \$285.

For more information contact Christine by phone (02) 9488 4524 or Email: canisius@cis.jesuit.org.au

When I am Among the Trees

When I am among the trees
especially the large gums and the strong blackbutt
and the very special brush box
that fill the gully at the rear of our home,
they show me their strength, oh, so large and grand;
and they show me their weakness – the marks of the drought.

The weakness of the drought-affected blackbutt is seen
in abundance of green,
that quick growth that follows some rain.

It grows only from the external surface of the tree;
it does not have the core life of the tree as its life
and is easy prey when strong winds blow.

The drought's affect in our beautiful tall gums
is a layer of thinness in its upper story that
only the trained eye can observe.

When I am among the trees
I hear the morning song of the birds
as they rejoice in a new day.
And I hear the evening song of the birds
as they eat and know their fill.
And I hear the squawking of the white cockatoos
as they seek to express their supremacy.
And in the quiet that follows, the melody of the magpie
and all his companions fill the air again.

*When I am among the trees
they tell me, "You are like us;
strong . . . and weak;"
And the trees warn me against superficiality;
the warning is stern;
don't be fooled by life that does not draw deeply from Life itself.
And the trees remind me of my times of thinness
when lean times have robbed me of Life,
and I have thought 'I can do it'.
And the trees tell me, "You are a home to others who find
sustenance and joy,
and who see the Source of your strength,
God Himself."*

Desley Greenhalgh (Written after receiving a poem with this title that concerned northern hemisphere trees.)