

Celebration of a new commitment

Induction of Ven Sue Jacka at St Mary's Morwell

Carolyn Raymond

Bishop Richard formally installed and inducted the Venerable Sue Jacka as Rector of St Mary's Morwell on the evening of Wednesday, 10 March. There was a feeling of excitement and anticipation throughout the church.

The St Mary's congregation was joined by many clergy from around the Diocese and many from Sue's previous parish, Trafalgar. Family, including two of Sue's sisters from Melbourne and their husbands and one of her adult children, and friends also came to support Sue and her husband Ross in their new commitment. What an amazing celebration: a dedication of Sue to the church of St Mary's and a commitment of the people to travel with Sue and Ross to the foot of Christ's cross and beyond.

There was rejoicing in the promise of the journey ahead, but also a sense of loss for the people of the Parish of Trafalgar. Happily, the service involved and united family, and people from the congregations of both Morwell and Trafalgar (which includes Yarragon and Thorpdale).

In his sermon, Bishop Richard said, "Sue's role as Archdeacon of the Western Region is a great asset ... she is not starting from scratch

in terms of her connection with you; nor are her wisdom and leadership lost to other parishes and colleagues in the region."

He also reflected on the journey of the Morwell township as a whole, recalling the decommissioning of Hazelwood power station, which has presented "challenges and opportunities", and the consolidation of community services, including the regional offices of Anglicare Victoria.

The presentation of the Symbols of Ministry acknowledged the breadth of parish ministry to include sacramental and liturgical roles within the church family, pastoral care of the people and an active role in the wider community. The symbols are also a reminder of the supports we must rely upon in our Christian journey – scripture, prayer and worship.

The reading of the Bishop's Licence by the Registrar, Mr Richard Connelly, gave formal acknowledgement of Sue's new position as Rector of St Mary's Morwell; a proclamation of her new role as the spiritual leader of the St Mary's congregations. All present applauded in celebration.

St Mary's welcomes Sue and Ross with joy and we look forward to this new chapter for our parish.



Photo: Carolyn Raymond



Photo: Richard Connelly

Sue Jacka with Bishop Richard

The congregation at St Mary's Morwell for the Ven Sue Jacka's induction in March

GIPPSLAND DIOCESE VACANCIES

Drouin
Trafalgar
Traralgon

Our ‘original blessing’: Christ is risen!

When the bishops of the Anglican Church of Australia met in March we lamented the fact that what was to be a face-to-face meeting over five days was reduced to just two days via Zoom, due to uncertainties over border closures during the critical planning stages. We felt acutely the inability to be together physically to ‘embody’ our words and to undergird them with table fellowship and gathered worship, especially as we needed to have some difficult conversations.

In the course of our deliberations we opened up the question of what we understand is happening in the liturgical act of blessing. Are we pronouncing God’s approval of that which we bless, thus affirming and promoting the divine order? Are we asking God to do something, invoking the ongoing work of the holy Trinity to transform and sanctify that which we bless? Or are both of these aspects – present and future

– operative as effective means of grace when we bless in God’s name?

This discussion is an ongoing one, and is to be continued in person later this year.

The gift of blessing has sat with me since, especially as it relates to this ‘queen of seasons’, Easter, and to that foretaste of the resurrection we receive every time Eucharist is celebrated.

In his 1960 work *Liturgy Coming to Life*, John AT Robinson (former Bishop of Woolwich and Dean of Clare College Cambridge) describes the Eucharist as having ‘matter’, and the sharing of matter, at its centre.

Perhaps this is why Zoom doesn’t quite ‘cut it’ for the really important things, including sacramental ones: it is ‘disembodied’; a virtual rather than a material medium.

In the Church we pronounce blessing in response to God’s blessing of us. There are many instances of divine blessing in the Scriptures, though none more significant



Bishop Richard Treloar

perhaps than God’s blessing of humankind in the first creation story (Gen 1:28) as part of the good creation.

This concept of our ‘original blessing’ – culminating with the first fruits of new creation in the risen Christ – is often passed over theologically in favour of a preoccupation with what Augustine called ‘original sin’, which is frequently (if tenuously) associated with the Adam and Eve narrative of the second creation story.

Referring to the fourfold action of ‘taking, blessing, breaking and distributing’ at the Last Supper, Robinson says of that act of blessing (reappropriated at every Eucharist):

When Jesus took the bread and cup, he blessed, or gave thanks. By this action, by setting them in their true relation to God in which he himself stood, he restores them to become what all matter was meant to be, and, renewed in Christ must one day become – the direct means of contact between God and [humanity]. Identified with Jesus ... these forestalments, as it were, of his finished work can even now give us a share in his new creation. They are charged afresh with the grandeur of God and the quickening powers of resurrection life. (64)

Having received these elements we go out into the world as those “in whom the resurrection begun make the resurrection credible”. (Robinson 65, and here citing FW Robertson). And there’s the rub: effective witness to the resurrection lies in the renewal of our lives.

So Robinson asks, “Do we really want a new and better world? [The Eucharist] is the great solvent of the old, transforming it by divine alchemy into the new. Here, rather than at death, is where the resurrection of the body begins ... as week by week we are fashioned anew into the Body of Christ, which is both the pledge and instrument of all creation’s destiny.” (65)

What is begun in us now – in this Easter season, and at every Eucharist – will be God’s work in us always. So too the act of blessing cannot be confined to what is; it must also bear on what will be.

A wise priest I once knew would say the following prayer after the sanctuary party had processed out of church at the end of the Eucharist: “The mystery of thy dispensation, O Christ, has been fulfilled so far as in us lies. We have made the memory of thy death, we have seen the type of thy resurrection, we have been filled with thy endless life, of which we pray make us more worthy hereafter.”

May we lay hold of our original blessing this Eastertide at the table from which our Risen Lord feeds us and blesses us, as once he blessed bread saying “this (of yours) is my body”, my life in you.

+RM

Prayer Diary: around the parishes

“That we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith...” (ROMANS 1:12)

COOPERATING PARISH OF CROAJINGOLONG

We give thanks for a peaceful and safe summer

Pray for the continued recovery from fire and COVID, particularly for the exhausted care providers

Pray that those who listened to radio church in 2020 may explore face-to-face church

Pray for all affected by the trauma of 2020, and for whom any

current events cause their anxieties and fears to heighten. May people be sensitive and compassionate to each

other. We thank God that the NSW flooding rains watered our Gippsland environment without major damage



One of the COVID-safe Christmas services held last year at Mallacoota

PNG's Newton College seeks bursary support for students

Gippsland parishes have been asked to get behind a student bursary scheme for students studying for the ministry at Newton College in Papua New Guinea.

Newton Theological College is the Anglican Church of PNG's one training college for clergy. The college is located about 10 kilometres outside of Popondetta in the north of the country, across the Owen Stanley Ranges from Port Moresby. Newton College relies on the support of partners in Australia (Anglican Board of Mission) New Zealand (the NZ Board of Missions) and the UK to support the day-to-day running of the college.

The Anglican Church of PNG is under huge financial pressure and in recent times has been unable to make a grant to the college. Most Dioceses have been unable to pay the fees for their students, or provide a small living allowance. Thanks to support from overseas partners, student fees have been held at 2000 kina per annum (\$850–1000 depending on the exchange rate).

Although the college allocates areas where students and their families can cultivate gardens, most struggle for the things that we take for granted: a visit to the doctor, some soap or rice, tins of tuna for protein. Prices in Popondetta are about 25% higher than

Australia, largely as a result of transport costs.

Last year, individual donors assisted students with a small allowance of 100 kina (\$50) a month. For some of the students, this was all they lived on, apart from the produce of their gardens. At times the circumstances of students and their families were very distressing.

This year, the college looks to a new intake and will have 20 students. Australian individuals or parish communities can partner with these students for their future by paying half of the student fees as well as assisting with a small allowance. The cost is \$1000 to do both, or \$500 to pay the fees of a student or to partner with another

parish in providing a full bursary.

Sponsoring Dioceses or individual students apply for this bursary and undertake to meet the other half of the fees (1000 kina). The college is committed to developing a culture of accountability, so where a Diocese or student fails to pay their contribution, the college will give consideration to the circumstances, and may recommend that a student is ineligible for further support until the amount owing is paid.

Parishes or individuals supporting a student will get to know something about them and their families, may write to them and pray for them. Communication will be through the college,

so supporters can be assured that they do not receive additional unwanted requests from students.

The Anglican Church of Australia was instrumental in establishing an Anglican presence in PNG, and many Australian individuals, including from the Diocese of Gippsland, have contributed to its development. Today mission assumes a partnership model. Newton College's Acting Principal and missionary of the Gippsland Diocese, Bishop Jeffrey Driver, said, "One of the most important ways that Anglicans in Australia can partner to assist our brothers and sisters in our near neighbour church of Papua New Guinea is by supporting the education and formation of future leaders."

Within the Diocese of Gippsland, payments can be made through the Anglican Development Fund by cheque, or by online banking to Newton College (BSB 705 077, Acc 00041107).



Photo: Godfreeman Kaptigau

Barnabas Orere with the medals he has been awarded for a lifetime of service to the community

Wisdom: Barnabas Orere, journalist, 67

Carmel Pilotti

Barnabas Orere, known as Barney to his friends, is a veteran journalist at the *Post Courier* newspaper in Port Moresby. He has just

released a 10-volume history of Papua New Guinea that is available at the University of PNG library.

He is a recipient of the Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) for

his services to journalism and the Anglican Church, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal, PNG's 30th Independence Anniversary Medal, and the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary Centenary Medal.

He was born in the inland district of Ijivitari in Oro Province, to missionary parents, on 13 November 1953.

First memory My parents were mission workers and we moved around a lot. The memories I have from childhood are mainly of being hungry all the time. We got monthly rations and although the Christian community was kind enough to bring us food, they had their own priorities and a lot of the time I was sleeping on an empty stomach.

Important lesson in life On my birthday I give gifts, I don't receive them. My mother was called Grace; she told me, "you came into this world empty handed and you will leave the same way, so it is more important to give than to receive."

Biggest influence I spent a lot of time with my mother in the garden. She gave me a lot of advice that influenced my attitude. She came from a family with very high integrity, which showed

in the way she conducted herself; she showed me how to behave in a dignified way.

Advice for life Listen first. Prioritise – do what is important. If you don't know what is important, ask someone who will know. And if you think you're better off on your own, you will develop an attitude that is going to stop you from progressing. My father told me: "Wisdom comes in the dead of night – if it sees that your lights are on, it will come to you." I realised this once when burning the midnight candle, contemplating finances and priorities; going to sleep on the decisions reached, they turned out to be the right ones.

Anything you would change I don't think so. I was a poor mission worker's child and I have always remembered my background.

Courtesy PNG Now (<http://businessadvantageinternational.com/png-now>)

Canon Jeff Richardson retires

Glenda Edebohls

Canon Jeff Richardson's final service and the commencement of retirement was held on the second Sunday in Lent, 28 February 2021, at St James' Traralgon following more than 35 years of ministry.

A sign of the love and regard of the many people Jeff met through the course of his ministry was seen in the large number of people who travelled from Melbourne and interstate to be with Jeff during his last service.

Bishop Richard Treloar welcomed more than 100 people to the service. Jeff's daughter the Rev'd Kate Jacob read the New Testament reading, then the Rev'd Marilyn Obersby (Associate Priest) delivered the sermon, touching on the brokenness of Jesus.

Jeff's love of community has seen him often reaching out to the wider community in his ministry. He was instrumental in setting up our parish op shop along

with the building of a large storage shed for many uses. He also encouraged us to put up a basketball ring and concrete area, which is used daily by many young people and families from the surrounding community.

In conjunction with his love for community outreach, Jeff held weekly Bible studies, as well as running Alpha and other courses challenging parishioners to a deeper relationship with our Lord. Some other areas of his pastoral care included that to children and youth

and their families, and to a number of parishioners who lived isolated lives and often were disconnected from the church.

Before becoming a Priest, Jeff was a chef. He encouraged a number of people in the parish to assist him in providing a monthly community lunch at which more than 80 people attended. Students from St Paul's Anglican School contributed greatly to the lunches by helping to set up, and serving meals to the people.



(L-R) Rev'd Marilyn Obersby, Canon Jeff Richardson, Kerry Webb and Bishop Richard at Jeff's final service in February

Thanksgiving service at St Mary's Morwell



(L-R) Archdeacon Clem Watts, the Rev'd Bruce Charles and the Rev'd Kathy Dalton greeting the congregation at the end of the thanksgiving service

Carolyn Raymond

St Mary's congregation have been so blessed to have the Rev'd Bruce Charles, Archdeacon Clem Watt and the Rev'd Kathy Dalton as local priests in Morwell throughout this period of interregnum, since

the Rev'd Canon David Head's retirement last November. We know them all so well as they are all much-loved members of our church family. Bruce was the main priest, supported by Clem and Kathy. We thank them all for this particular ministry, which they have

shared so generously with us.

The last few months have been difficult, with the constant changes in COVID restrictions. Bruce kept us all informed about the restrictions so that worship could continue safely. We thank them for ongoing pastoral care for us all. Bruce has supported several of us at times of great challenge and sorrow. We thank them for their sermons as they shared their faith with us.

Music for our services has been another challenge as our long-time organist, Ruth Vanderzaalm, retired at Christmas time. Thank you, Bruce, for playing your viola with Alison Dunn and for encouraging Jo Perry to reactivate her considerable piano-playing skills.

At this time when we look forward to the induction of the Ven Sue Jacka as our new priest, we look back at this period of the interregnum as a valued time of our Christian journey.

During his ministry in Melbourne and Gippsland, Jeff had roles of Area Dean of Port Phillip, Area Dean Bayside, Chair St Kilda Ecumenical Council, Area Co-ordinator Victoria Council of Churches Emergency Recovery Area and Diocesan Spiritual Director

of Cursillo.

Jeff has always experienced the love and support of his children Kate, Peta, Scott, Jesse and Emma and their partners.

The Traralgon Parish family hope and pray for God's blessing on Jeff as he enters into his retirement.

Prayer praise and proclamation at St Philip's Cowes

Richard Prideaux

The worship committee of St Philip's Cowes have been presenting a series on the fruits of the Spirit with a monthly prayer praise and proclamation service. In March, the theme was 'patience'. The preacher was Andy Prideaux, senior staff worker for Melbourne University's Christian Union Simeon group for postgraduate students and son of parishioners Richard and Ann Prideaux. Andy took the congregation through the sorts of things that test our patience, including traffic jams and queues. This was followed by a host of biblical teachings on patience, including several proverbs but focusing especially on 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28.

One lesson that stood out was Andy's reminder that church is not a club like a golf club or a bridge club. Church is for allcomers and built upon the axiom of 'love one another'. So, we can't pick and choose our fellow worshippers and we need the spiritual fruit of patience as we meet together regularly, interact with each other and seek to bear fruit in our church community and outside the church. Andy used Bonhoeffer's idea of a family from his excellent and hard-hitting book, *Life Together*, to illustrate this.

A highlight of the service was guest artist Eric van Cuylenburg, who introduced the congregation to a new hymn, *I Am Carried*, which related closely to Andy's address. Eric closed the



Andy Prideaux leading the prayer praise and proclamation service at St Philip's in March

service with a powerful rendition of the moving Michael Maybrick hymn *The Holy City*. Supporting Eric musically were his son James on the keyboard and Dave Prideaux on guitar. The windows of the little church were open wide and so the sound of music drew passers-by into the church to listen to the sounds of praise to God.

Lessons were read by Sally Matthews, and Claudia Prescott led us in some thoughtful prayers, while Kath Kent contributed her sensitive organ work, especially with the hymns *Come As You Are*, *Have Faith in God* and the beautiful Robin Mann hymn *Deep Stillness*. St Philip's density quotient of 40 was put to the test, as folk kept coming. It was a delight to be able to lift up our voices and sing without masks for the first time in over a year. There was a deep sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our gathering as the Rev'd Jo White led us quietly and smoothly through the service. As we shared in morning tea together, there was a real buzz around the tables as people shared their joy and inspiration from the day.

Zoom participants learn art of collect writing

Cynthia Grove

What do we mean when we talk about a collect as part of our liturgy? According to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* it is “a short prayer usually concerned with one topic.” Fair enough, but why *collect*? Is it collecting the thoughts of our people and condensing them into one prayer? Does it call every person present to collect their attention, their hearts and minds, to that

prayer rather than musing on the previous hymn, or what is going on in their lives? A point of focus in the liturgy? Probably all of these things.

On 21 February, 20 people were part of a Zoom class on writing a collect. Julie Perrin, author of *A Prayer, a Plea, a Bird* (MediaCom Education, 2019) taught us to write our own collects on the subjects most in our hearts. And, believe me, we ended up with prayers covering some very diverse subjects. Julie gave us a structure based on

Loving God,
who calls each
person to
His family,
Help us to
break down
barriers of
pain and anger
So that all
may know you.
Jesus, our
teacher
and guide,
we pray.
Amen.

five simple points. Simple perhaps to explain but how do you address God, and do it in a very special way that is related to the prayer plea you wish to offer? And that was only the first point: ‘How do we name God?’

About half of the participants were attendees of the Cathedral in Sale; others were in Canberra, Traralgon, Yarram and the Riverina. Julie lives in Melbourne.

Julie explained very clearly the purpose of each of the five points and gave us six short, timed breaks to write just one thing, one element of our collect. “I was writing so much the time went too quickly” – this was the expressed feeling of several of us. The sixth break was to edit what we had written.

Most of us had previously written prayers, whether

for personal use or for use in a service, but here the discipline of the structure was important. As with all living things, they grow, they show their beauty but to be effective they need pruning and training into the form that best suits. A rambling prayer that expresses thought and emotions is good in personal prayer, but if others are to give their “Amen” to it, it is better to be succinct.

No one was asked to share; we were all invited to share as we felt comfortable. I am sharing my attempt here. Some shared, some stayed silent. But the enthusiasm was there. We left the session smiling and chatting. It had been a wonderful session and one we hope will be repeated.

Thanks to Dean Susanna for organising it and to Julie for leading us through it.

A hand to draw closer to God

Nikolai Blaskow

The story of walking the labyrinth is rich with history. While its origins go back to ancient Greek times, its Christian origins are clear. In 325 AD, Christians placed a labyrinth on the floor of their church in Turkey. Although Christians must have been using the labyrinth earlier, this is the first historical record of the Christian use of the labyrinth. Since that time, labyrinths have been traced, drawn, studied, prayed in and danced on as Christians sought to use this spiritual tool to draw closer to God.

Why walk the labyrinth? People may do this for many reasons, including out of curiosity. You may begin walking and discover your reasons along the way. Worldwide church Community of Christ organisation suggests the following possible uses of the labyrinth:

- prayer and discernment
- searching for meaning
- self-reflection
- processing grief
- reducing stress
- healing and wholeness
- mindfulness meditation
- connection of mind, heart and body.



The hand labyrinth outside St Paul's Cathedral in Sale

The chalk-drawn path outside St Paul's Cathedral in Sale is open to all. Why not try it yourself? Two of my students in Canberra who had never had much interest in church or spiritual matters walked such a labyrinth at a year 12 retreat to prepare them for their demanding matriculation year. When they

returned from the centre to the exit, they were in tears and reported that they had never had such a profound experience.

Nikolai Blaskow is Associate Chaplain and Head of RAVE (Religious and Values Education) at Gippsland Grammar and Honorary Associate Priest at St Paul's Cathedral in Sale.



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Parishioners with the 'Creation during a time of COVID' exhibition

Community growth continues at Korumburra and Poowong

Marty Shaw

Adapt and replan' seems to have been the modus operandi for the Parish of Korumburra-Poowong over the past year. Our services are now back 'in-house' with, thankfully, a healthy Rev'd Fran. Our Zoom services during

times of lockdown were well supported. Also, our outside activities have been progressing enthusiastically.

During lockdown, it was decided to take photos of the activities our parish and church friends were doing to keep themselves occupied. A new, large notice board was erected in the hall and all the photos were displayed for our 'Creation

during a time of COVID' exhibition. Gardening and building activities were popular – pergolas were popping up, gates being built, meditation gardens developed. Craftwork of all kinds was produced as many of our talented parishioners focused on projects that had long been thought about. It was all pretty impressive. Undoubtedly, this reflected

a hardy and resilient group who were not going to let a not-so-little lockdown get the better of them. We recently had a barbecue to celebrate being able to get together again, and we enjoyed sharing the stories behind the photos displayed.

The community garden being built in the grounds of All Saints Anglican Church in Poowong now has paths and garden beds, plans for a rotunda, water tanks and more. It's been a significant task, and the committee and their group of volunteers have done a wonderful job. There is still a lot to do but the 'bones' are now there and the finish line can be seen. It is encouraging to see Poowong locals getting right behind the project, and there is no doubt that, when complete, it will be much enjoyed by the whole community.

Our *mainly music* group, based at St Paul's Korumburra, offers a time and place where families with pre-school children find delight in shared musical experiences, learning a variety of skills. It is an hour

of great action songs where parents and grandparents enjoy time interacting with their children and developing friendships through play and chat. We even managed to keep going via Zoom while in lockdown with short, themed sessions that included songs, actions and a story. With the gradual lifting of restrictions, sessions moved to our local parks, and were enjoyed by all. Our three Christmas sessions were particularly enjoyed.

We have a register of 16 local families and a strong following on our *mainly music* Korumburra Facebook page, where parents can follow news and links to the Mainly Ministries news and posts. The team of volunteers are now looking forward to sharing three Easter sessions back in our parish hall, learning about the love of God and the treasures he shares with us.

We are so pleased to see our outreach programs continuing so successfully and being enjoyed by our community.

Harvest festival at Bunyip

Tim Green

Celebrations, traditions and rituals are important parts of Christian worship. At the suggestion of the Rev'd Ken Parker, on the fourth Sunday in Lent St Thomas' Bunyip celebrated Harvest Festival. More than 40 people gathered in the garden in front of the Christus Rex to celebrate the festival. The service was opened with all singing an old favourite hymn, *We Plough the Fields and Scatter*.

A large amount of produce was on display in front of the altar, much of which was grown in home gardens. As well as the vegetables and fruit on display was a wonderful loaf of bread in the shape of a plaited cross, placed upon the altar during the celebration of the Eucharist. Wine used

in the Eucharist was from grapes grown and crushed in Bunyip. Georgie Stubbs read *The Stone Soup*, a European folk story about sharing, and we were told of the involvement of people in the Garfield Community Garden.

At the close of the

service, a simnel cake, baked especially by a member of the parish, was blessed, cut and distributed to all present to celebrate Mothering Sunday. Posies of flowers were given to all women in the gathering, in recognition of their place in the community.



Following the service, a wonderful ploughman's lunch was enjoyed by all present, with locally produced wine to supplement the delicious food. A big thankyou to all who made this event such a great one.

Left: The plaited loaf on the altar at St Thomas' Bunyip



The community gathered at the Bunyip Harvest Festival

On the buses in Latrobe

Jane Anderson

After a 12-month hiatus due to COVID restrictions, I boarded Latrobe Valley Bus Lines services between Morwell, Moe, Traralgon and Churchill as part of the Human Connections project to talk with members of the community about the value of social connection and what it looks like for them. The On the Buses initiative serves as an opportunity for me to speak with people who may otherwise not have a voice.

For many, COVID-19 has shone a spotlight on the importance of social connection and a sense of belonging in overall health and wellbeing. During my discussions, I heard from people who described the simple act of a friend asking “How are you?” as a powerful conversation starter for mental health, wellbeing and connectedness.

I have heard from people about the importance of offering better and more comprehensive end-of-life experiences for communities across Latrobe. In looking at evidence of systems change in my most recent quarterly report, we are seeing an increased commitment from organisations to improved service delivery. Latrobe Regional Hospital has made minor upgrades to a sub-acute ward and created a small dedicated space for end-of-life care, with access to a garden, family room and reflection area.

My office continues to hear from people who share their aspirations, concerns and experiences and how to best engage and involve them when it comes to service design and delivery. I recently met with some remarkable community members and I am buoyed by the insights provided, and can’t wait to share these with service providers,

government and the broader community soon.

For the full update, visit www.lhadvocate.vic.gov.au/publication/quarterly-updateoctober-to-december-2020. If you would like to share your experiences with me, please contact 1800 319 255.

Jane Anderson’s role as Latrobe Health Advocate is to provide independent advice to the Victorian Minister for Health on behalf of Latrobe Valley communities on system and policy issues affecting their health and wellbeing.



The Gippsland Anglican

Q: Is there a faith question you’re afraid to ask?



A: Chances are others have that question too!

Send your question to the editor at gippsanglican.org.au or 0407 614 661 and we will publish an answer. (Your details won’t be shared or published.)

*“How can I become closer to God?”
(from a student at St Paul’s Anglican Grammar School)*

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”
(James 4:8a)

How do we draw near to God? Well, if you read the rest of the verse from the book of James you will see the author provides a succinct answer. Some might take those words without further thought; for the rest of us, let’s explore this question.

First, take comfort that the Being you want to draw near to wants to draw near to you. Not all the people who have come near to me have been welcome. Some have come with strange smells, noises, and appearances. I have been judgemental.

I can tell you now that there are times when I have felt very alone when attending church. Sometimes there is only the obligatory passing of notices by the welcomers and shuffling of smiles during the passing of the peace, and the final exchange with the minister at the door. The sense of aloneness aches when no one sits with you or chooses to talk with you.

What if I pause (by my own or divine action) before feeling sorry about being alone? Because I’m not really alone. The aloneness feels real, but I am in a relationship with my church family. I need to participate too. I can be the person who says hello to others; I can make a cup of tea or take up a tea towel. God asks us to enter a relationship and exchange. God is endlessly faithful in the pursuit of our hearts and lives. God has a never-ending desire to be in a relationship with us.

So don’t leave God alone in the pew or dismiss those who greet you or serve you as people just doing their job. For God is in our community, and God is in our attitudes; let’s come clean and stop the excuses, make the time to listen to God and see God. I think you will see that He is always near.

Jackie Belot is a Chaplain at Gippsland Grammar.

Bridges out of poverty

Cathrine Muston

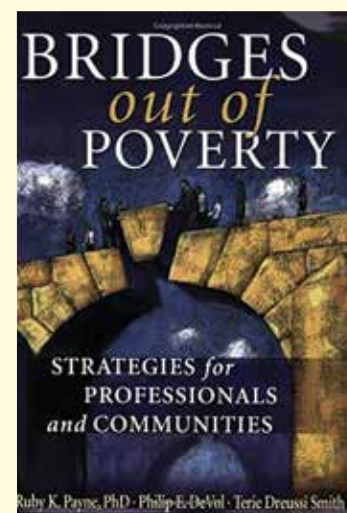
With the JobSeeker supplement about to be phased out, it is worth considering how this will impact people in our local communities.

Would you be surprised to learn that the average Newstart recipient is neither young nor male? Or that they usually live in regional areas, not big cities?

An article in The Conversation reported recent Grattan Institute statistics that 45% of Newstart recipients are over 45 and a quarter are over 55, and likely to have been on Newstart for more than 12 months. Women make up 51% of older job-seekers compared with 42% of men. So Newstart is far from a temporary benefit, and older women in regional areas are more likely to be living in poverty than men or young people. This means that those of us living in regional towns are more likely to know someone who is under- or unemployed and living in poverty.

The reality of the Newstart allowance is that it is virtually impossible to live on with any sort of dignity. No matter how well you budget, there is just not enough money in it to pay rent, bills and transport as well as provide food for three meals a day. The daily pressure of having to choose what you can afford to pay this week, and what needs to be put off until next week, can be overwhelming. Emergency relief providers are bracing for an increase in demand as JobSeeker disappears.

I recently attended the



The Bridges out of Poverty training is based on the model and book of the same name

highly respected Bridges out of Poverty training, which aims to equip our communities to better understand the face of poverty and respond to the needs of those struggling to make ends meet in a more empowering way. The training enables me to offer workshops to parishes that would like to better understand how to support those living in poverty in their neighbourhoods.

The Bridges out of Poverty program enables participants to see poverty through the triple lenses of the individual, the community and institutions. It also aims to build understanding of the impact of both situational poverty and generational poverty and the different resources that people develop in order to survive.

Bridges out of Poverty helps us to more strategically support those in poverty and to build their strengths and resources. By understanding the face of poverty in our own areas more deeply, we are more able to recognise it and address its consequences so that our communities are strengthened and more inclusive.

For further information on the Bridges Out of Poverty program for your parish, please contact Cathrine Muston on 0458 450 370.

Spirit of the Deaf Community

The John Pierce Centre

Teresa Paulet

The John Pierce Centre was established in 1980 after a need was established for the Deaf Community to participate in church services in their own language of Auslan (Australian Sign Language). We believe that Deaf people have the right to celebrate their faith in their own language, to participate in liturgical celebrations, develop and celebrate their own spirituality and discover meaning in life:

Inspired by the life of Jesus Christ and the traditions of the Catholic Church, the John Pierce Centre seeks to empower all Deaf people and their families within Victoria to live their lives to the full.

Last year, we celebrated 40 years of service to the Deaf Community, who over the years have continued to attend the centre for Mass and group activities. JPC provide a seniors group, which is highly popular, each fortnight, often having close to 100 participants attending. We also provide a playgroup (Signee-Tots), an arts and crafts group, a men's group and a ladies' get-together. The main motivation for people attending the centre is having the opportunity to communicate in Auslan with other Deaf people or staff. The centre also provides pastoral support to families and individuals throughout their lives.

We have all learned about the impacts of isolation during 2020 and perhaps this allows us to understand, more fully, the isolating life for Deaf people. Even when they are out working, studying, enjoying time in the wider community, they often feel isolated due to a lack of communication. Lip reading is tiring and it can be challenging to repeatedly ask people

to alter their communication in order for the Deaf person to understand and participate.

JPC feels like home for many, where they can communicate with ease and have a shared lived experience with those around them. Using Auslan to communicate allows individuals to build a deeper understanding of their faith and spirituality. Being the only Catholic Deaf Centre in Victoria means that people travel from all over greater Melbourne and beyond to participate in Mass and religious discussions. It also means that our pastoral team travel extensively to provide outreach to individuals or families in

need. Last year saw our team working harder than ever to provide relevant information and church services in Auslan. The JPC team filmed a monthly Mass and streamed it to Facebook and our website. We also provided weekly prayer or reflection videos in Auslan about the Mass readings and what was happening in Victoria and around the world. Staying connected was crucial for many individuals and families.

JPC partnered with the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne in 2020 to provide Auslan interpreters for their weekly televised Mass service at St Patrick's Cathedral and recently we have evolved to provide Deaf interpreters for these

services. To have the Eucharist interpreted by Deaf interpreters means that

the Deaf person watching receives the information in their own language from someone who shares the cultural and linguistic connections.

To have access to my faith in Auslan means everything to me.

Deaf Community member

Losing hearing, finding faith

Michelle Stevens



It is amazing to realise that I have been a Christian since I was about 14 years of age.

Growing up at a boarding school we had religious instructions, which I loved. We also had Sunday School at a Baptist church connected to my school.

When I was about 14, I played the organ at St Philip's on the Hill in Morwell. The parish priest, the Rev'd Graeme Oliver, asked if I had been baptised – that was the start of a magical journey for me in the Anglican Church. At that stage, I still had enough residual hearing to follow what was being said.

Years later, I attended St Peter's in Hereford when I was studying in the UK. In my mid 30s I was diagnosed with a serious chronic ear infection. I had to lose most of my ear bones and everything that assisted my hearing, which was dropping very quickly. This certainly pushed my faith to its limits and really questioned my relationship with God.

Now I use a very strong hearing aid in my right ear, and a cochlear implant. I find it very difficult to follow the service, and the support from my Christian family at St James' Traralgon is a real blessing.

Sometimes I have tactile sign language interpreters come for parish meetings and services. This is covered by my disability services package, for which I am very thankful.

I feel so blessed to be a member of St James' Traralgon. I love playing piano for them, and I sometimes rock the house for Jesus.

I could not have survived if I did not have faith in Christ our God. As one door to happiness closes, another door opens to God.

Michelle is a trained classical pianist and plays regularly for morning services at St James' Traralgon. She has been blind since birth.

John Pierce Centre:

www.jpc.org.au

or Facebook/JohnPierceCentre

Audio book club in east Gippsland:

Bairnsdale Bookworms Audio Book Club meet on the second Thursday of each month from 1 pm to 2.30 pm at Vision Australia Bairnsdale office, Community Hub, 27 Dalmahoy Street, Bairnsdale and we welcome new members. Contact debbiecarruthers2@gmail.com or 0448 809 798.

Vision Australia:

If you or someone you know is having issues with their sight that cannot be corrected by spectacles, you may wish to call Vision Australia (1300 84 74 66) to register for services.

Luke 14:

CBM Australia's Luke 14 program aims to "ensure churches are places of welcome and belonging for people and families living with disabilities." www.cbm.org.au/luke14



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Bishop Paul Barker

Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Melbourne

Bishop Paul Barker, Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, is one of several faith leaders speaking in the first of the Unity in Diversity videos

Unity in Diversity videos

The year 2020 presented faith communities with unique challenges due to the COVID pandemic. It highlighted the increasing need to put aside differences and work together in unity and recognise the interconnected nature of the global and local community.

In collaboration with Channel 31 Melbourne, the Victorian Multicultural Commission has filmed two videos asking representatives from the commission's Multifaith Advisory Group how COVID affected their communities, and how they assisted others struggling with issues including

mental health, support to women, youth, children and vulnerable groups, emergency food relief, and virtual gatherings and celebrations. The videos showcase unity in diversity, where faiths focus on the commonalities and unity of all faiths while appreciating their diversity.

The commission's Multi-faith Advisory Group comprises approximately 27 religious leaders and representatives from various Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and Bahá'í communities. The group is chaired by the Chairperson of the Victorian Multicultural Commission.

In a message released for Australian Harmony Day and on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Bishop Philip Huggins, President of the National Council of Churches in Australia, said:

In Victoria we are profoundly grateful for our affectionate level of multifaith understanding and harmony. This has been shaped by our careful and shared responses to the issues of our day.

This [second] video gives a glimpse into these qualities of our civilised living. The context is both the pandemic and the continuing threats to our harmony.

... In this video, the sustaining wisdom of our faith traditions

is conveyed in a very personal way by Victorian faith leaders. Their purpose is to help us to live well the life we are now given.

... What is vivid is the unity in this message from faith leaders: our one human family is drawn and called to love one another; drawn to be compassionate towards those in need and to live in gratitude for each new day.

Our faith leaders help us to reorientate on solid ground as they convey, with vivid sincerity, the wisdom of these living traditions for a more harmonious life.

... We are given courage and confidence that we can build in Victoria a state which conveys our highest human possibility.

The videos are now available at www.multiculturalcommission.vic.gov.au/world-interfaith-harmony-week-multifaith-advisory-group-statement

Courtesy Victorian Multicultural Commission



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Looking back at a Lenten year

Rev'd Jude Benton

If I ever write a book about leading a church through a disaster, it will be called *Purple Is the Colour of Recovery*.

Purple was the colour of the first flowers that poked their brave and beautiful faces through the ash-black landscape after the Black Summer bushfires and, 12 months later in east Gippsland, purple is the colour of the last of the flowers that now disappear into the overgrowth of green.

Purple, a colour of wealth and royalty, a colour of anticipation and waiting, of Lent and Advent. A colour of focus, prayer and preparation for the great Christian festival that is emerging.

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. In 2020, in Mallacoota, we had an Ash Wednesday service ... but without the ashes. I had the jar of palm-cross ashes from the year before, but no one in the room wanted me to open them. None of us could cope with the smell of ash so close after the fire, when everything at home still smelt of smoke and gardens were still filled with ash. We didn't need a symbol. We were done with ash at that point last year. We knew it symbolised pain, tears, fear and pleading with God. It symbolised loss, change and devastation.

By Easter, we were deep into the first throes of COVID restrictions. We had an Easter Sunday radio-church service, but it wasn't the same. The joy of the resurrection was lost in the anxiety and unknown of

another wave of trauma.

As I see it, we have been in Lent now for 12 months. Twelve months of self-reflection, of prayer, of journeying – with ashes on our heads and our hands and an unknown future. With prayers for things to change, and for God's presence through it all. Of giving up what we took for granted, our concept of control, simplifying our lives and learning to do without when border closures meant not travelling for the regular shopping trip.

For many, it seems, the COVID shutdowns, and lack of fellowship and gathering in church, forced people into a faith wilderness, where the choice to take the opportunity to develop their own way of praying or worshipping was there.

Twelve months of Lent has also opened us up to the biblical story in a new way – particularly the post-resurrection stories, which I had never realised were written into the context of a traumatised community.

† The truth of different accounts in trauma.

Sometimes people disregard the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection because of the differences in versions. In trauma, people remember what was important to them at the time, not the extra details.

† The need to see and touch, to believe a new reality is normal.

I pity Thomas, forever slapped with the title 'doubting', yet the most normal and human of reactions is to

want to see and touch; remember Peter and John who didn't believe Mary and needed to run to the tomb to see with their own eyes. After the fires, everyone needed to see for themselves what was lost or remained. It didn't matter how many others had said their house was there (or gone) – people needed to stand on the site and witness for themselves before they believed.

† The need to talk about and share experiences.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus were "so deep in conversation that they didn't see Jesus walking with them." The disciples were traumatised, anxious, overwhelmed and completely confused – and they needed to talk it through with someone who understood. We will never know how much additional trauma the COVID restrictions – which stopped people meeting, talking, sharing their experiences of the fires when they needed to the most – have caused.

† The need to forgive ourselves and others.

A brain doesn't work properly when it's filled with adrenalin and responding to the flight/fight/freeze response of trauma. Peter was traumatised after seeing Jesus dragged off; his denial was a 'freeze response'. In the fear, anxiety, and relief of survival, people said and did strange things, which they may not even remember, or that



Carpets of the purple donkey orchid (Diuris punctata) grew in east Gippsland this year

others may not remember properly. Just as Jesus forgave Peter, so too a challenge is to move past what was said/not said, done/not done.

† The tendency to fight when you are exhausted.

In my calculations, the first fight of the early church was Acts 6: the arguments about food distribution. I can tell you, the first real arguments after the fires were about food distribution. The reality is that everyone in trauma gets tired, adrenalin turns to cortisol, which makes us exhausted, mentally and physically. When people in a community are tired, they argue – and this peaks about six months after a trauma, but the exhaustion can be real for over a year afterwards.

When we see the post-Resurrection stories as those of real people in situations of deep trauma and anxiety, we can read them with a new revelation that can help speak to our own times of struggle. For this is the purpose of Lent – the journey of finding ourselves in the wilderness of faith, not alone, but with a Christ who understands.

Whether your Lent has been the traditional 40 days, or 12 months, or longer, may this coming Easter be one of great celebration and resurrection for us all.

And in it may you find purple flowers of wonder pushing through the ash of destruction.

The Rev'd Jude Benton is Priest at the Cooperating Parish of Croajingolong.



Our commitment to a Safe Church

The Anglican Diocese of Gippsland does not tolerate abuse, misconduct and harm in its Christian community.

We are committed to ensuring all people in contact with the Church can participate in a safe and responsible environment.

If you have been harmed by a church worker, or you know someone who has, please contact Cheryl Russell, Director of Professional Standards, for a confidential discussion.

Contact: 03 5633 1573, 0407 563 313, cherylrussell1@bigpond.com

To find out more about Safe Church, and about Safe Ministry resources, visit www.gippsanglican.org.au/safe-church.

ABC Radio National's Religion Programs

Frequencies: Bairnsdale – 106.3 FM (3ABC RN) Melbourne – 621 AM (3RN)

Religion and Ethics Report

Andrew West

Wednesday 5:30 pm – repeated: Thursday 5:30 am and Friday 11:00 am

Soul Search

Dr Meredith Lake

Sunday 6:00 pm – repeated: Wednesday 11:00 pm and Thursday 12 noon

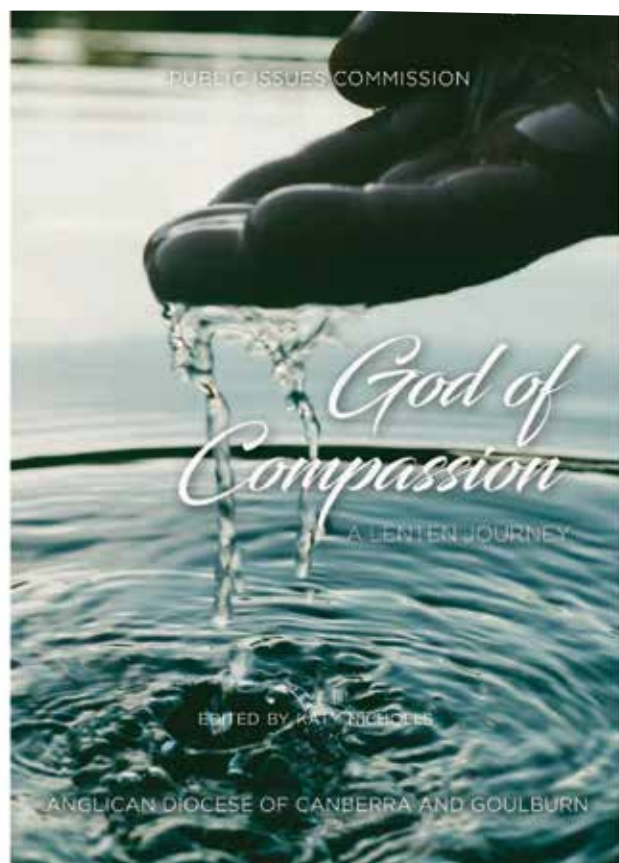
God Forbid

James Carleton

Sunday 6:00 am – repeated Sunday 10:00 pm and Monday 9:00 pm

For more details: www.abc.net.au





Lenten studies – *God of Compassion*

Rev'd Jo White

This year's Lenten studies proved very popular indeed – so popular that more books were ordered. *God of Compassion: A Lenten Journey* is a publication produced by the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn in 2020.

Four groups have been meeting across the Parish of Bass-Phillip Island at various times and on various days. Others are using the material for private study as part of

their Lenten discipline. The Lay Readers of the parish are active in choosing the study and leading the various groups.

Each week, the study introduces participants to another part of the community, drawing us more deeply into godly compassion for the refugee, the aged, First Australians, the marginalised and the earth.

Compassion, the act of walking alongside in suffering, is something that perhaps we would rather minimise. We might find ourselves

looking the other way, making up excuses, filling up our lives with busyness and good things as we try to distract ourselves from the pain of suffering of those around us.

Lent invites us on a journey with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. Lent is a time for reflection and self-examination. This study asks the hard questions and gently prods us into a deeper examination of our heart for the suffering people of the world and for the suffering earth itself.

Let's not wallow in self-centred guilt. Instead let us open ourselves to the questions presented by the *God of Compassion* Lenten study.

The first question raised is 'What does compassion look like?' In week 2 there is an exhaustive list to help answer it. We can pray; direct our energy to one cause; listen to the stories of others; find the gaps and make a plan; join organisations that support people face to face; become informed with a view to being an advocate.

These things are not about ourselves and what suits us in our daily life. These are things that take us out of ourselves to share in the suffering of the world and to be compassionate.

What does the Lord require of you? asks the prophet (Micah 6:6-8): to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

God of Compassion: A Lenten Journey is available from anglicancg.org.au/news-and-events/publications.

EDITORIAL

Unique paths, but not alone

I've been exploring some new walking paths in my area, but due to some joint problems I can't walk far. Uneven or unstable surfaces are particularly challenging, so stony tracks and beaches are largely off limits for now.

What if I couldn't walk in these places again? For me, that's hard to think about.

What we can and can't do is highly individual and has different meanings for everyone. Can I see, can I walk, can I speak? Have I ever been able to do some of these things? Does it matter to me?

Having celebrated its 40th anniversary last year, the John Pierce Centre in Melbourne understands the isolation that many people in the deaf community feel, even when they are with other people. The centre "seeks to empower all Deaf people and their families within Victoria to live their lives to the full." (p. 8) Enabling people to celebrate their faith in Auslan is a significant way that the centre can offer an opportunity for empowerment.

A parishioner in West Gippsland was excited to let me know recently that a Victorian bible college is now offering audio-enhanced texts and readings to students with vision impairment. Some parishes in the Gippsland Diocese are making similar modifications, such as enlarging hymn sheets.

Michelle Stevens, who attends St James' Traralgon and is blind as well as having hearing impairment, says the support from her Christian family at the church is "a real blessing" (p. 8). She is an active member of the DeafBlind Association and aims to bring Christ to the community through sign language. Consider sharing what your parish is doing in inclusive ministry as a letter to the editor or on the Diocese Facebook page.

This month's faith question – "How can I become closer to God?" (p. 7) – was asked by a student at St Paul's Anglican Grammar School. In her response, Jackie Belot, Chaplain at Gippsland Grammar, shares some experiences of feeling alone, and says, "... take comfort that the Being you want to draw near to wants to draw near to you."

The labyrinth at St Paul's (p. 5), for some a spiritual tool to draw closer to God, looks as though it will accommodate people of all abilities. It's a comfort that some paths will always be open.

Sally Woollett

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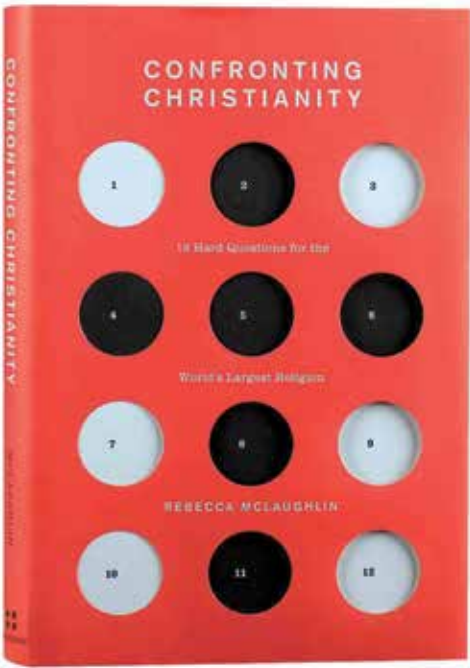
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Confronting Christianity

12 Hard Questions for the
World's Largest Religion
by Rebecca McLaughlin
Crossway, 2019

Richard Prideaux

I have read many books on Christian apologetics, but Rebecca McLaughlin has trumped them all with this incisive, delightfully and personally written, searingly honest exploration of some of the hardest questions the 21st century constantly throws at Christianity. Many of McLaughlin's responses will surprise and challenge readers. Unlike many writers, she treats us to what appears to be an open book into her most personal thoughts about life, love and faith. Here are the '12 hard questions':

- Aren't we better off without religion?
- Doesn't Christianity crush diversity?
- How can you say there is only one faith?
- Doesn't religion hinder morality?
- Doesn't religion cause violence?
- How can you take the Bible literally?
- Hasn't science disproved Christianity?

- *Doesn't Christianity denigrate women?*
 - *Isn't Christianity homophobic?*
 - *Doesn't the Bible condone slavery?*
 - *How could a loving God allow so much suffering?*
 - *How could a loving God send people to hell?*
- I doubt whether any thoughtful Christian, active in the world and listening to Western media, has not had to face up to each of these questions. Here is a book to challenge and help. McLaughlin does not deny the truths and the force behind these questions. Nevertheless, her respectful response meets the powerful critique supplied by Western thought leaders with equal and even more effective rebuttal. Her responses are based on up-to-date and well-documented evidence and a disarming way of unpicking the seemingly irrefutable arguments of some of the finest faith deniers in the land.
- McLaughlin is same-sex attracted yet happily married to a husband, with three children. She holds a Cambridge doctorate in

Renaissance literature and a degree in theology from Oak Hill College in the USA. Her responses to the 12 questions engage with a wide range of sociological research documents, many international literary works both recent and older, interaction with many current atheist philosophers, film and television presentations, an array of scientific thought leaders, and circumstances and individuals from her daily life and experience.

There is nothing simplistic about this presentation and it is not a book for young or inexperienced Christians. It could be a useful book for devotees of Western media outlets who appear to value any authority in the land apart from well thought out, highly qualified and articulate Christian leaders. It will not suit Christian leaders who simply deny the truths in these questions without working carefully through the issues involved from all sides.

Some thought tasters from McLaughlin include:

Too many churches enable a self-focussed Christianity that ignores New Testament ethics. (p. 23)

For many the idea that Christianity is a white, Western religion, intrinsically tied to cultural imperialism, stands as a major barrier to considering Christ. (p.33) ... *most of the world's Christians are neither white nor Western, and Christianity is getting less white Western every day.* (p. 43)

If science is all we have, our sense of self is just an illusion – morality is no more than preference. (p. 70)

Paul does not say that the husband's needs come first, or that women are less gifted in leadership than men, or that women should not work outside the home (p. 142) ... *the early church was majority female.* (p. 144)

McLaughlin has written a book that would make an ideal series of weekly studies for a thoughtful parish. Her enthusiasm for life and her raw honesty are infectious and challenging. I warmly commend this book.

101 Seasonal Reflections for Spiritual Growth

by Graham Knott
Inhouse Publishing, 2020

Maryann Ashton

I returned to attending St Peter's Leongatha about five years ago. A regular communicant at the eight o'clock church service, I soon noticed the whispers of anticipation behind me. Then silence. Heads were bowed, but not in prayer – everyone was reading the weekly pew sheet.

The source of everyone's steady interest was the page where they found the weekly article known as Graham's Gems: 'the best bit'.

It is these 'gems' that have formed the contents of this wonderful book, *101 Seasonal Reflections for Spiritual Growth*.

This is not a book to read, like a novel, from beginning to end. Neither is it, as its title may suggest, a self-help book. It is something to sit with, to dip into throughout the year. Divided into the seasons of the church's calendar, these 'gems' connect us to the rhythms of the year. They connect us to much more: to the ebb and flow of life, the joys and the sorrows, the sadness and humour of life around us.

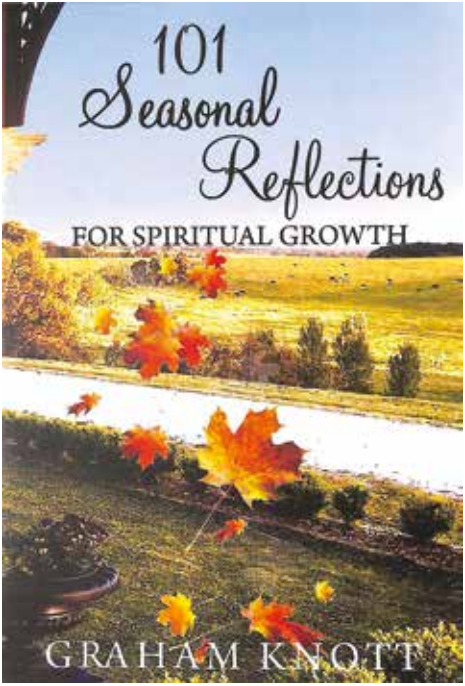
Sometimes there will be a jolt to complacency or apathy as a point is gently driven home. Sometimes a tear will creep into the corner of your eye. Sometimes there will be laughter. There will be

encouragement, reminders, challenges and perhaps a new way to think about something.

Graham, in his many years as an Anglican clergyman, has taken notice of the people he has sat with, cried and laughed with, and ministered to. His faith is living and active. Throughout these individual stories we see that combination of observing human beings and knowing a living and active God interacting. Each tale brings a hidden truth and shows us that God is involved in all aspects of life.

There are lessons in Bible characters, famous people, ordinary everyday people and even Brer Fox and Brer Rabbit ... no, you will have to find it yourself.

I heartily recommend this book to you. It would make a wonderful gift, but do not forget to purchase a copy for yourself too.





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