

Living in harmony with difference

Each year the bishops and the heads of Anglican schools in southern Queensland spend two days together to reflect, converse and pray. We did so again last month. Each year we choose a book to read beforehand as a kind of catalyst or thought provoker for our time together. This year's book was *Other*, by Kester Brewin, an English maths teacher and theologian.

Brewin is fascinated by the question 'what kind of selves do we need to be in order to live in harmony with others?' Brewin thinks the key is found in Jesus' summary of the law: love God and love your neighbour as yourself. So he explores how you can love yourself, even 'the other' within yourself (the bits we don't like and try to hide or even bits we don't know about); how can you love your neighbour, even those whom you find strange and off-putting; and how can you love God who is totally other and strangest of all.

Our world desperately needs answers to these questions if we are to avoid descending into chaotic violence where the strongest rule by annihilating the weaker. Violence can be physical violence with firearms and other weapons. It can be verbal, shouting louder and longer than opponents. More and more violence is digital: bullying, campaigns of outrage, manipulation. We see it everywhere. Our TV's and smartphones are full of it.

The national bishops meeting also occurred in March. It had a similar theme: living with theological difference. Our conversations this year centred on same-sex relationships and marriage. There are considerable differences in theological views, yes even among the bishops. How can we live in harmony as one church when we have deep convictions that seem to be directly opposed to each other?

In families, in schools, in workplaces, in churches there is increasing diversity of all sorts: diversity of identity and sense of self, gender diversity, diversity in sexual orientation, different interpretations of the bible, different perceptions of God and what God expects of us. In wider society and internationally this diversity is multiplied and amplified many times over: different faiths, different ideologies, different political theories, different values, different economic frameworks.

Love God and love your neighbour as yourself. It sounds straight forward. But, as Kester Brewin reminds us:

"It is easy to love what is lovely, but we are called to love what is other.

It is easy to love what is familiar, but we are called to love what is strange.

It is easy to love what is comforting, but we are called to love what is disturbing..."

'What kind of selves do we need to be in order to live in harmony with others?'

With every blessing for the Easter season,

Archbishop Phillip Aspinall

Jesus was a Refugee

Andrew McDonough is an Adelaide-based Baptist minister who is part of the WestCare inner-city mission working amongst the homeless, supporting people struggling with addictions and advocating for refugees. He is best known through his illustrated children's book series, *Lost Sheep*, in schools and churches around Australia and internationally. It all began for Andrew out of a children's talk he was asked to present to a large congregation when he was a Bible college student in 1989. Andrew used his one talent for drawing sheep and began a path to an ever-increasing series of books and resources that are now available from lostsheep.com.au. I had the privilege of sharing a couple of days with Andrew in early March when he spoke to me about his passion for his latest book, *Jesus was a Refugee*.

I have found over my time working towards intergenerational faith development that it is often a simple story aimed at children that can open up adults and children alike to some deep reflection, conversation and transformation. *Jesus was a Refugee* is such a narrative. It tells the story of an infant Jesus and his family who flee to Egypt from Bethlehem, after being warned by an angel that King Herod is looking for Jesus and wants to kill him.

The story is told very simply, while unmistakably depicting the reality of a family who is afraid, who must hide and who travel long distances seeking safety. The page of the book that I find most confronting is where Joseph, Mary and Jesus are interviewed by a more modern-day border security. At the Egyptian border, questions over the family's identity and geographical origin create suspicion and makes them vulnerable to the greed of the authorities.

Andrew is very clear what the intention of the book is, as he states in its very last sentence: "Do not forget, never forget, Jesus was a refugee." One of the strengths of Andrew's story telling is the way he draws together imagination and scholarship, while remaining consistent to the biblical story. In this case he sets forth the story in Matthew that is clearly consistent with the UNHCR definition of a refugee as "A person forced to flee their country because of violence or persecution." The effect of this is to challenge the reader with the idea that Jesus has identified himself with those who seek refuge in our country, that we might see Christ's own life reflected in theirs.

Andrew hopes that this book might find its way into schools and libraries all over Australia before Refugee Week in June this year. This task is a massive and expensive undertaking, with more than 11,000 schools and libraries across Australia.

Andrew is keen to hear from those who may be willing to support him in undertaking this task and can be contacted at info@lostsheep.com.au.

Andrew McDonough, 2018. *Jesus was a Refugee*. Lost Sheep Resources Pty Ltd.

This month, Parishes and Other Mission Agencies (PMC) is encouraging people to respond to Archbishop Phillip Aspinall's Year of Generous Hospitality [call "to engage constructively with whom we differ"](#). In the wake of the Christchurch tragedy, we have seen communities of different people reaching out and caring for each other in new and somewhat unprecedented ways. To help keep this spirit of good will alive, this week we are launching the '#AprilAngel' Facebook campaign.

'Angel' comes from the Greek word 'angelos', meaning 'messenger'. So, every week this month we will be inviting people to be messengers of a different virtue. We are kicking off the campaign this week by asking people to 'be a messenger of welcome', by inviting people to register to attend (or host, if they are really keen) a Welcome Dinner with the hugely popular [The Welcome Dinner Project](#), which helps build inclusive communities nationally by connecting newly arrived people (including refugees) with established Australians over shared meals in homes and community venues.