

Reflections • Tuesday 21 2019 • By Bishop Cam Venables

Closing churches, but continuing Commission...



If there's one thing we can be confident about in life, it is that things will change. Our physical bodies change through time such that when we are older we are not as physically strong and our memory is not as sharp as when we were younger! Communication technologies have changed in our lifetime to such a degree that we now have in our mobile phones the capacity to access huge volumes of information and entertainment, as well as the capacity to talk to another person. And, it's interesting to bring to mind the changes that have happened in transport, healthcare, education, and agriculture over the years.

Sometimes changes are easy to come to terms with – such as improved ways of treating injury and disease – and sometimes they are difficult. One of the difficult things for many communities in the Western Region of our Diocese is the progressive shift in population away from rural and remote areas. The Mayor of Quilpie, Councillor Stuart Mackenzie, observed recently that fifty percent of the Quilpie Shire population had moved away over the last twenty years.

With a shrinking critical mass of people living in the community there is a knock-on effect on local businesses, schools, community organisations...and churches. We do not close churches easily in our Diocese, but when a Parish Council decides for a variety of reasons that it is time to close a church, then the request will go to the Archbishop. The Regional Bishop will then meet with the local community to get feedback, and in the light of this make a recommendation to Diocesan Council.

There is much insight to draw from the Bible as we wrestle with this reality, and I am drawn particularly to the wisdom found in [Ecclesiastes 3:1-8](#) which pragmatically affirms: "For everything there is season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a

time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted..." It does not say explicitly, "A time to open a church, and a time to close..." but I think it is there implicitly!

It's not easy because we naturally get attached to church buildings, for they have been spaces where people have gathered through the years to be challenged and nurtured in faith. They have been places of 'holy ground' in which prayers have been offered and hymns have been sung. And, they have been places in which bread and wine have been blessed, and shared in memory of Jesus.

It's in the words of Jesus at the end of Matthew's Gospel that there is both comfort and challenge when it comes time to close a church. In what is often called 'The Great Commission' Jesus is remembered saying 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...' ([Matthew 28:19](#)). Jesus did not say "Go and build churches!" He said "Go and make disciples..."

So, when we close a church building, we generally do so with a great sense of thankfulness for what has been. But, we also recognise that the church building in that place no longer helps us gather community and make disciples in the way that it had previously.

Many people now travel significant distances to gather with others and grow in their faith. Many also gather online to grow as disciples through study and prayer. I think it is an exciting and challenging time to be part of the Church, and to be making disciples in a rapidly changing world...

What do you reckon?

News • Friday 17 May 2019 • By Ian Eckersley

Free press campaigner headlines Loaves and Fishes fundraiser



Spending 400 days in an Egyptian jail is enough to make anyone appreciate the simple pleasures in life – such as a feed of fresh fish and chips – and journalist/academic Professor Peter Greste was happy to tuck into the modest meal under the cavernous roof of the St John’s Anglican Cathedral for the annual Loaves and Fishes lunch.

Professor Greste was guest speaker for the event before a sell-out crowd of over 700 guests, with ABC TV Queensland’s main news presenter Matt Wordsworth doing a fine job as Master of Ceremonies.

Professor Greste set a record before the lunch even began, becoming the first guest speaker to arrive for a Loaves and Fishes lunch on a BMW sports motorbike, resplendent in leather jacket (although he quickly changed into a sports coat for the lunch!)

Professor Greste opened his 20-minute speech by telling the audience what a “bold move it was for the church to have a convicted terrorist as its guest speaker!”*

He held the audience captive as he recounted his own story of unjust captivity from the time he was arrested in his Cairo hotel room in December 2013 after a brief two-week stint working as a foreign correspondent for Al Jazeera reporting on Egyptian politics and the power struggle between the democratically elected, but banned, Muslim Brotherhood and the new regime.

“I hadn’t been there very long and I didn’t think my reports were controversial or subversive – it was what I’d call ‘vanilla journalism’,” said Greste, who also revealed a deep, dark secret – that he was dancing in his room with music from Australian station Triple J playing on his laptop when police knocked at his door!

Guests at the lunch included Archbishop The Most Rev’d Dr Phillip Aspinall, new Deputy Lord Mayor Cr Krista Adams, Supreme Court Justice Debra Mullins and husband Pat Mullins (Partner at Mullins Lawyers), Hutchinson Builders chairman Scott Hutchinson, long-time inland rail campaigner Everald Compton and *Leadership HQ* CEO Sonia McDonald.

The Loaves and Fishes lunch is now in its 26th year and event host Anglican Dean of Brisbane The Very Rev’d Dr Peter Catt chooses a different charity partner each year. This year’s beneficiary was Hummingbird House, Queensland’s only children’s hospice which provides end-of-life care for children with life-limiting conditions.

Hummingbird House was the vision of Brisbane philanthropists Gabrielle and Paul Quilliam, who, after fostering a child affected by a life-limiting condition, made it their mission to build Hummingbird House, on Brisbane’s north side.

It has since grown and evolved to become the shared vision of thousands of families and supporters across Queensland. Hummingbird House General Manager Dr Fiona Hawthorne shared stories of sadness and joy with the lunchtime guests and how her dedicated team provided short break stays, family support services, creative therapies and end-of-life care – along with lasting memories for families of the ill children.



(L-R) Hummingbird House General Manager Dr Fiona Hawthorne and Chair Kym Warner, Professor Peter Greste and ACSQ Policy and Advocacy Advisor and veteran ABC reporter Ian Eckersley

Professor Greste recounted how a global community harnessed its outrage and support for the common cause of his release and urged the lunch attendees to use their community mindedness to support the Hummingbird House charity to help sick children. His message seemed to resonate with around \$65,000 raised at the luncheon.

He continues to keep a close watch on political and human rights events in Egypt – recently campaigning actively for the release of Brisbane father Hazem Hamouda who spent 433 days incarcerated in the same jail – Tora Prison – where Greste himself was jailed. Hamouda was arrested upon arrival in Egypt in 2018 and returned home on 5 April this year.

Greste has also played a part in the recent release of other foreign correspondents and is a director of the newly-formed [Alliance for Journalists' Freedom](#).

*** Peter Greste was accused by the Egyptian Government of aiding the banned Muslim Brotherhood (which had been elected to power and was later ousted in a military coup by the government which labelled them a terrorist organisation).**

National Reconciliation Week 2019



ACSQ RAP Coordinator Chrissy Ellis and news and political journalist Stan Grant at a 2018 Reconciliation event

National Reconciliation Week (NRW) provides an opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to celebrate and share their unique cultures and histories with all Australians. In 1993 Australian churches established the Week of Prayer for Reconciliation and under the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation this evolved into National Reconciliation Week three years later. The week celebrates two significant milestones in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history: the 1967 Referendum and the 1992 Mabo Decision.

On 27 May 1967, the Australian Government held a 'Referendum' to amend the Australian Constitution. It resulted in a landslide victory where 90.77% of Australians voted 'Yes' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be counted in the census and enacted a legislative mandate for the Australian Government to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

On 3 June 1992, the High Court of Australia handed down the *Mabo and others v Queensland (No 2)* (1992) decision, which extinguished 'Terra Nullius' or 'land belonging to no-one' doctrine. In effect, this doctrine was the fictional and legal justification for the theft of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land since British occupation and rule in 1788. Eddie Mabo and others represented their people from Murray Island in the Torres Strait and successfully challenged the Australian legal system for the recognition of their rights as traditional owners of their land.

This year's National Reconciliation Week will be held between Monday 27 May and Monday 3 June and this year's theme is 'Grounded in Truth – Walk Together with Courage'. This theme highlights the importance of 'historical acceptance' and encourages all Australians to unlearn and relearn Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait histories through 'truth-telling' processes, to foster positive race relations and to build national unity 'Grounded in Truth.'

As stated in the [The State of Reconciliation in Australia](#) report:

“Reconciliation can only truly evolve when the Australian community and our major institutions acknowledge and repair the wrongs of the past, understand their effects – and make sure the wrongs, or similarly damaging actions, are not occurring today, and are never repeated in the future.”

[Reconciliation Australia](#) reports that 80 percent of non-Indigenous Australians and 91 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples believe it’s important to undertake formal truth-telling processes. And, 86 percent of non-Indigenous Australians and 90% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples believe it’s important to learn about past issues. This research demonstrates that as a nation we are ready to deal with our past and walk together with courage into a unified future.

During National Reconciliation Week all Australians will have an opportunity to learn the truth about Australian history, the injustices caused by colonialism, how they can develop respectful relationships and journey towards healing and reconciling our national story.

As [2 Corinthians 5:18](#) says:

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”

As ambassadors for Christ, we are entrusted with the message of reconciliation to ourselves and others, especially to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Anglican Church Southern Queensland encourages you to consider events and initiatives in which you, your church and your community can become involved with during National Reconciliation Week celebrations.

A number of exciting NRW events are happening across our Diocese between Monday 27 May and Monday 3 June. Please [find out more](#) about these wonderful events and join in the NRW celebrations.

Requiem for a 'little one': in thanksgiving for the life and legacy of Jean Vanier



"I am struck by how sharing our weakness and difficulties is more nourishing to others than sharing our qualities and successes."

– so said theologian and disability advocate Jean Vanier, who died recently at the age of 90. This, for him, was at the heart of the gospel. Jean himself not only proclaimed this in his words, but lived it.

Son of a Canadian Governor-General, a naval veteran, a successful priest in a worldly sense, and a brilliant intellectual, his life's turning point came in 1964, when he met Raphael Simi and Philippe Seux, two men with intellectual disabilities, trapped in a large institution. Giving up his old life, Jean set up a home named L'Arche, meaning 'Ark', with them in a small French village, thereby discovering a deeper way of the heart and living into the beatitudes of Jesus. By following Jesus, in placing relationship with the 'little ones' at the centre of life, Jean embraced radical hospitality and encountered a profound transformation to which others responded.

Indeed, from these simple beginnings, L'Arche has grown into an international federation of 147 communities in 37 countries, including Australia (with a community locally in Brisbane). Operating on a not-for-profit 'community model' of care, people with disabilities remain at the core of L'Arche, affirming the centrality of relationships, the dignity of the image of God in everyone, and the values of compassion, inclusion and diversity.

Such spirituality and practically embodied communion are not for us to merely admire, but to welcome in our own lives and church communities. We ourselves were hugely blessed in our ministries in both Gosford and Toowoomba parishes by our L'Arche friends and involvements, including during parish camps, by the transformative leadership effects of L'Arche core members

with intellectual disabilities, by the musical gifts of L'Arche Australia leaders such as John Coleman and Cindy Treanor, and the writings of Jean Vanier himself. Placing Christ's 'little ones' at the centre, the oft perceived 'wounds' and weaknesses of our parish members instead became sources of grace, not embarrassments to be hidden.

For as Jean Vanier learned and shared, true life and healing come with hospitality to imperfection and difference. This profound joy can only be found by losing power: in relationships not above or below others, but in communion where no one is regarded as less than another.

As Jean put it:

"When I discover that I am accepted and loved as a person, with my strengths and weaknesses, when I discover that I carry within myself a secret, the secret of my uniqueness, then I can begin to open up to others and respect their secret. Each human being, however small or weak, has something to bring to humanity. As we start to really get to know others, as we begin to listen to each other's stories, things begin to change. We begin the movement from exclusion to inclusion, from fear to trust, from closedness to openness, from judgment and prejudice to forgiveness and understanding. It is a movement of the heart."

To find out more about Jean Vanier and L'Arche, visit:

[L'Arche Australia](#)

[John Coleman music](#)

YouTube: [How to LOSE power](#)

YouTube: [Eradicate the seeds of fear, the seeds of hate](#)

News • Friday 10 May 2019 • By Ian Eckersley

Reality TV stars reunite for parish Anglicare fundraiser



Christians Like Us housemates Steve Smith, The Rev'd Tiffany Sparks, Chris Csabs, Hannah Campbell, event MC Ian Eckersley, Jo Kenderes and Carol Portmann

Reality television came to the Brisbane Diocese – or at least the stars of it – with housemates from the recent SBS series *Christians Like Us* reuniting for a community charity event in Brisbane recently.

Rector of St Paul's Parish, Ithaca-Ashgrove, The Rev'd Tiffany Sparks, was one of the stars of the two-part series which aired last month. She invited the nine other housemates with whom she spent a week in a Sydney house last November for a 'reunion' of sorts – and five of them attended the recent Saturday night panel discussion for the parish wine and cheese night.

Brisbane-based Christians Hannah Campbell, Carol Portmann and Tiffany were joined by Sydney-based stars Chris Csabs and Jo Kenderes and Steve Smith from Newcastle before a crowd of around 100 parishioners and friends.

On their own admission, they're unassuming and unlikely TV stars (and yes, they can still all go grocery shopping in their local suburbs without getting stopped for endless selfies) and all jumped at the chance to reassemble five months after they wrapped up filming and a few weeks after the show aired.

What was a revelation for most people was the great bond and friendship that flourished between the six housemates during the show and which has endured in the aftermath. Perhaps the most remarkable is the strong friendship between Tiffany and Steve Smith, who was sexually abused over 250 times as a young altar boy in the Newcastle Anglican Diocese in the 1970s and 80s.

"Steve and I became buddies within the first few hours of meeting in the *Christians Like Us* house," Tiffany said.

"He was initially shocked and wary when he saw me enter the house wearing my collar, but we just formed a connection and it's a great testament to his resilience and his compassion that we became friends and have remained friends."

Despite his traumatic past with the Anglican Church and the fact he's no longer a practising Christian, Steve has nothing but admiration for Tiffany, who will leave St Paul's next month to serve in the role of Archdeacon of Grafton.

Of Tiffany, Steve said on the reality show: "Just watching and listening to Tiff about what she thinks and does and how she conducts herself – I think the Anglican Church, if they're bringing people like Tiffany into their church in leadership roles, they're going to find themselves in a pretty healthy place."

The wine and cheese Q&A delved into some of the behind-the-scenes tensions with some of the more conservative housemates, plus the very moving personal stories of housemates including Chris' campaign to have gay conversion therapy banned after years of traumatic immersion in it; and the stress that Carol (a Uniting Church parishioner and gynaecologist/obstetrician) experienced after she revealed on the show that she had performed numerous abortions.

"It was fantastic for the six of us to get together again. The reality show was emotionally intense and during the filming, but especially in the aftermath, the six of us have been an enormous source of support, comfort and friendship to each other and I hope that continues for a very long time," Tiffany said.

Donations from the event raised \$638 for the Anglicare Home Away From Homelessness Women's Shelter at Toowong.

News • Friday 17 May 2019 • By Di Norton

Supporting Christian refugees in Bangkok



St Mark's Anglican Church, the Gap parishioners at one of the church's book sale fundraisers in March 2019

We hear, read and see in the media so many heart-wrenching stories of people fleeing their homelands in search of safety.

It often seems that there are so many demands on our compassion that it can become overwhelming for us to know where to start in helping people in this situation. Can we make a difference anyway?

The longest journey begins with the first step. One of the best ways is to get to know a particular individual or family who are seeking safety and to concentrate on how to help them.

Through community connections, St Mark's Anglican Church, The Gap heard of one particular Christian family who fled Pakistan because of death threats and who sought safety in Bangkok, where they have now lived for six long years. They are desperate to find a country that will accept them permanently and have tried many avenues without success. They are far from alone in this plight, as there are countless Christian Pakistani families in a similar situation in Thailand. Once their visas have expired, they are often unable to renew them. As a result, many of them are in hiding, afraid of being rounded up, put into a detention centre and sent back to their country of origin.

The Pakistani family that our church is assisting, who can't be identified in any way so as to avoid putting them at risk, is being supported by their local Bangkok church while they still wait for a positive outcome. In the meantime, they suffer from stress and hopelessness and their daughter from lack of access to education.

A concerned group of Christians worldwide has come together to work on this case.

There is recent very promising news from Canada where a trustworthy and well-organised Canadian Christian organisation has arranged to link up this refugee family with a church in Ontario. The church is ready and willing to welcome them.

The system operates by using funding offered in advance by individual 'sponsors' for the initial year of the family's residence in Canada. The current situation is extremely hopeful and 75% of the funds required to support them for their first year in Canada has already been promised by international sponsors. Once 100% of the sponsorship funding is reached, the family's application documentation can be submitted to the Canadian government.

The St Mark's community has been following this family's situation and has already contributed to the fund and the family directly through two second-hand book sale fundraisers. This is just one example of what a parish can do to help those seeking safety. Perhaps other parishes in our Diocese would be prepared to help support and help this family – or to help other persecuted Christians in similar circumstances.

If you would like to know more or be part of this endeavour please [email](#) Di Norton.

News • Friday 10 May 2019 • By Tamani Nair

The Good Grub Club – food van with a difference



The original members of the Good Grub Club, (L-R) Lilli (17), Anita (17), Ethan (17), Raymond (16), Youth Worker, Lauren and Anglicare Insync's Rees Maddren at the launch and reveal of the Good Grub Club food van at St John's Cathedral in Brisbane on Friday, 10 May 2019

Educating homeless youths on good food nutrition, food preparation and presentation will be one of the main goals of Anglicare Southern Queensland's newly launched *Good Grub Club* food van.

The *Good Grub Club* food van, unveiled today at St John's Cathedral in Brisbane, is part of Anglicare's Arts&Minds 2019 campaign, which shines a light on the raw reality of youth homelessness and tackles mental health challenges through nutrition.

Anglicare's Insync Youth Homelessness Service, which provides one of the few crisis accommodation options for under 18s across Brisbane's southern suburbs, Logan and Redlands, will be the main driver of this project.

Manager Rees Maddren, with 25 years of experience working in the sector, believes this new, innovative and collaborative project will enhance confidence, self-worth and long-term resilience for vulnerable and homeless youths.

"When just finding a meal occupies most of your day, nutrition and quality of foods for a person going through homelessness is the last thing on their mind," Mr Maddren said.

"When you are experiencing homelessness and you are able to afford food, it's often food loaded with fat, salt and sugar as some of the cheapest food available is also some of the unhealthiest.

"The *Good Grub Club* food van takes a multi-faceted approach to teaching practical cooking and nutrition, given the poor diet experienced by many homeless people."

Mr Maddren said the link between homelessness and mental illness is well established and academic research consistently finds that high numbers of people who experience homelessness also experience symptoms of mental illness. Frontline youth workers can also attest to this.

"The *Good Grub Club*, through this outreach program, hopes to develop and engage, to boost confidence and open up new opportunities for homeless youth by building friendships and connections with fellow young people and the community," he said.

"We want to give homeless youth a sense of belonging and acceptance into wider society.

"A youth worker will take the van to homelessness services in Logan and Brisbane, educating young people in nutrition and assisting them in meal preparation.

"We will also identify homeless young people in need of employment and training in this area, providing food van employment, selling nutritious food, drinks and coffee to the public at events and bookings.

"The day-to-day kitchen activities will be overseen by a qualified youth worker with extensive food supervision experience.

"This all would not have been possible without the support of the Queensland Government's Dignity First Fund."

About Insync Youth Homelessness service

The service provides one of the few crisis accommodation options for under 18s across Brisbane's southern suburbs, Logan and Redlands. Last year it provided 2,600 nights of crisis accommodation and 5,400 nights of transitional accommodation. It currently has crisis and transitional accommodation at Mount Gravatt, Greenslopes, Beenleigh and Cleveland and on any given night could have 24 young people living in their homes.

Q&A with veteran teacher and committed missionary, The Rev'd Ken Spreadborough



The Rev'd Ken Spreadborough with clergy and family at Fiu, Maliata, Solomon Islands in 2013

The Rev'd Ken Spreadborough recently retired as Chair of the Diocese's Anglican Board of Mission Committee after eight years in the role and 11 years in total on the committee. He is a former school teacher, teaching for over 35 years, and is a beloved locum priest and parishioner at St James, Jimboomba.

How long have you been involved in the Anglican Church?

I am a 'cradle Anglican', having been involved in youth activities (including Anglican Board of Mission's Comrades of St George), active in many parishes during my teaching career and Synod Rep for many years. I was made a deacon in 1992, ordained a priest in 1997 and have served at Beaudesert, Wynnum, Southern Gold Coast and Jimboomba, as well as Area Dean of the Gold Coast, Member of the Professional Standards Board, Archbishop's Examining Chaplain, and Chair of the Diocesan ABM Committee.

What is the name of your most recent role and what did your role involve?

I was Chair of the Diocese Committee of [Anglican Board of Mission](#) (ABM) since 2011, liaising between the ABM head office in Sydney and promoting ABM in Southern Queensland through parish visits and dissemination of ABM information.

How has the ABM contributed to the mission of the Church?

ABM works with other churches around the world through partnerships with each church who forward requests for assistance based on their current requirements. These projects must reflect one or more of The Five Marks of Mission and are assessed by ABM staff to ensure that they fulfil these goals, as well as one or more of the Global Development Goals. These requests are funded

through donations with some government funding and are financed so that local personnel and local resources are used wherever possible. ABM staff regularly visit the project sites to assist if needed and to ensure that these goals are met.

What have been the highlights of your role so far?

A visit to the church in Melanesia in 2013, to [Wontulp-Bi-Buya College](#) (Cairns) and [Nungalinya Theological College](#) (Darwin), working with an excellent Committee, excellent support from the Diocese and knowing that the needs of so many of our Partners have been met through the generosity of so many.



The Rev'd Ken Spreadborough in Transport to church on Malaita, Solomon Islands in 2013

What advice do you have for Anglicans who want to get involved in ABM's work?

The easiest way is to access the [ABM website](#), and then look at the various list of projects to which one can donate and so you can receive regular updates of the progress of that project. Another section of that site deals with resources, such as appeals (notably the Lenten Appeal, The Archbishop's November Appeal, Emergency Appeals), as well as other resources that may be used personally or as part of parish life – all helping to promote the work of ABM.

What are your plans and goals for the next few years?

As of 30 April, I retired from my role in ABM, with Bishop Bill Ray taking over that role. I intend to continue supporting ABM as best as I can, to undertake locums at local parishes, working on our five-acre property and travelling both within Australia and overseas.

Why is it important for us as Christians to serve the broader community?

Jesus said to go into all the world and it is through organisations such as ABM that we can participate in this command.

Can you tell us a little about your faith journey?

I have always been a regular Anglican worshipper, with my time in Comrades of St George strengthening my faith, as did our four years in PNG from 1967 to 1970. Even during my teaching career of 37 years, I always felt the calling to the priesthood in the background, but ignored it until I was prompted by my parish priest in 1989 to test my vocation, which I did, and was made deacon in 1992.

What advice do you have for people discerning a vocation to the priesthood?

One must be totally immersed in the Anglican tradition in all of its various aspects, be willing to undergo training and have total spouse/family support. One must be sure that the call is from God and take time both privately, with close associates and within the formation structure, to discern through prayer and Biblical and theological reading and reflection if this is the way that God is calling you.

What is your favourite scripture and why?

[John 20.24-28](#). There is so much in this passage for each of us – Thomas as an enquirer as we should be; Thomas wholeheartedly stating his belief in Jesus as Lord; and, the reminder that we who have not seen, yet believe, are blessed.

What person of faith inspires you the most and why?

The late The Right Rev'd Eric Hawkey, Queensland Provincial Secretary of ABM in the 60s and later Bishop of Carpentaria. Bishop Hawkey was such a calm, knowledgeable man, who gave great advice and whose spirituality was so totally visible and inspiring.

What are the primary strengths of the church and what is the best way to make the most of these for the benefit of our communities?

Strong fellowship and acceptance, broad theological basis, organisational structure, tradition, Christ-centred worship, outreach to those in need (such as via The Five Marks of Mission), witness in daily life, and support of the Church and its mission.

What are the challenges currently faced by the Church and what can be done to overcome these?

The societal concept of self-indulgent immediacy – wanting what one wants for self, and wanting it now, rather than accepting the gifts and abilities given by God and using them for his work. This won't change while they are still promoted so heavily in the media.

What do you do in your free time to recharge and relax?

Reading, working on our five-acre property, travelling, time with family.

What is your favourite movie and why?

I don't have a favourite – I like drama and a good comedy.

What is your favourite book and why?

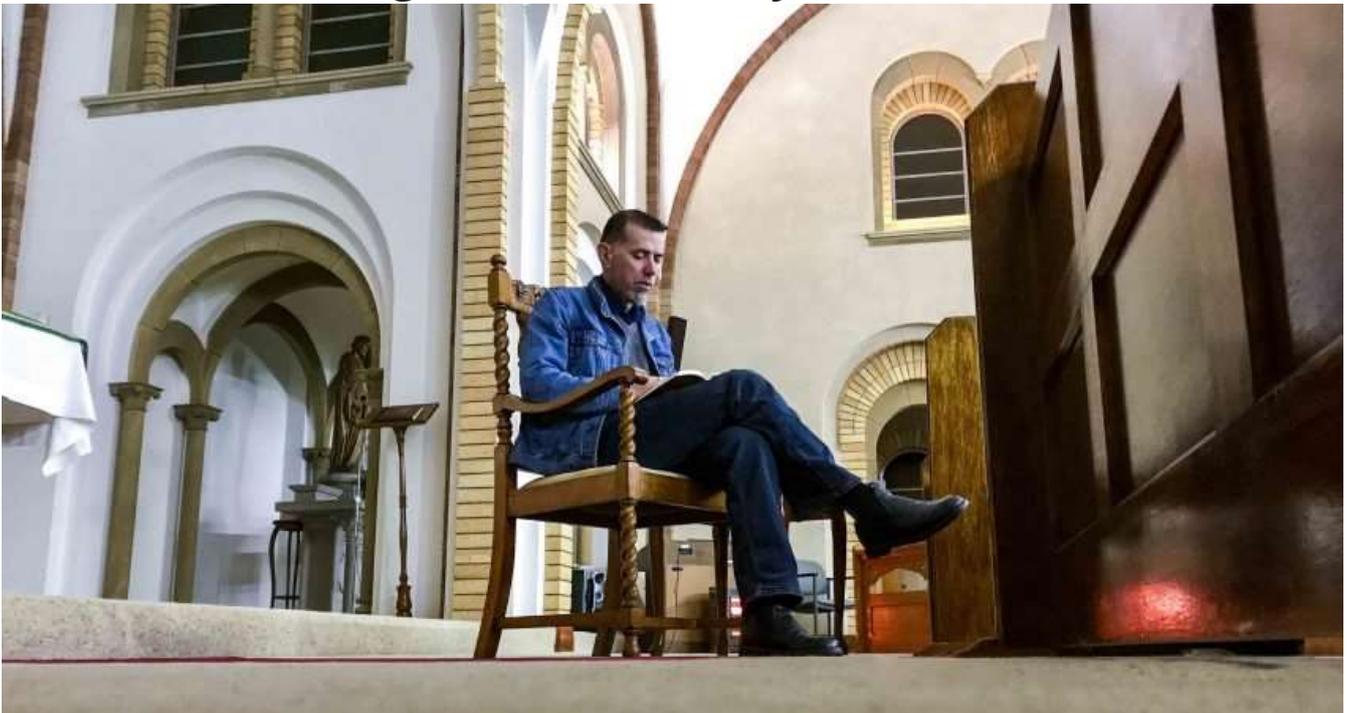
Again, I don't have a favourite, but some favourite authors of mysteries stand out, including Dick Francis, Jonathan Kellerman, Faye Kellerman, James Patterson, Kathy Reichs, and Mary Higgins Clark.

Where have you travelled to?

Around Australia, PNG, Vanuatu, Noumea, New Zealand, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Norfolk Island, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan, Hong Kong, Taipei, Cambodia, Vietnam, Scandinavia and The Baltic region, British Isles, The Holy Lands, Egypt, Italy and Turkey.

Books • Monday 13 May 2019 • By Dr Stephen Harrison

Wise: Transforming Pastoral Ministry



Bishop Matt Brain at a clergy retreat

The Right Rev'd Matt Brain, Bishop of Bendigo, says early in his new book *Wise* that: "The idea of 'life-long learning' has become a truism. However, if those called and deployed into pastoral ministry do not embrace the need to be continually learning, they will find their effectiveness dulled."

This book makes a significant contribution to how those in pastoral ministry may continue learning, renew themselves, stay focused and make wise decisions.

Wise is both scholarly and practical, drawing upon Bishop Brain's rich experience in ministry and academia. Grounded firmly in the changing complexities of contemporary ministry, it provides a sound balance of encouragement and challenge. It is both helpful and hopeful, not shying away

from the realities that many ministers confront including reduced resources, changed patterns of community engagement and the risk of stagnation.

Wise has two parts. The first explores the challenges confronted in the practice of ministry. It lays the groundwork for part two, where a methodology is provided for wise decision making that takes account of those challenges and the many nuanced contexts in which often sensitive decisions need to be made.

Part one: Challenges in the practice of ministry

Bishop Brain grounds pastoral ministry in the current realities of church life in Australia. He acknowledges that the place where the church finds itself adds challenge to the already complex work of pastoral ministry. He also highlights the additional challenge of maintaining focus in ministry mid-career. Part of the usefulness of *Wise* is that it encourages those in pastoral ministry to remain sharp and focused, and resistant to stagnation, complacency or paralysis. It provides an approach for reawakening attention to context and decision making and ensuring that the work of pastoral ministry is distinctly Christian.

Bishop Brain draws on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to provide a language for thinking about how a minister's immersion in the life of Christ might help them reflect and act in any context.

Part two: How to be a wise pastor

Having laid the groundwork in part one, Bishop Brain begins to build a framework for being a wise pastor. Initially, he focuses on the work of discerning a given context correctly through the practical aspects of asking good questions, collecting information and weighing the value of that information. This includes an encouragement to draw upon the insights gained from many fields including those of the social sciences. Using the metaphor of the prism, Bishop Brain explores how all those sources of information might be focused through the lens of the pastor's Christian life, shaped by scripture, tradition and reason, into a wise and distinctly Christian response. Bishop Brain provides a clear and practical process for how this might be achieved. The important emphasis in this work is that the ongoing formation of the pastor's life in Christ is critical to how they respond in pastoral ministry. In the final chapter, Bishop Brain provides some wisdom for those seeking to develop a wise pastoral hermeneutic. This includes some ideas about how to respond effectively and faithfully to some of the challenges and roadblocks that might arise on the journey.

There is a lot to like about this book. Bishop Brain draws and reflects upon his own experience in a frank and honest way, which is both refreshing and enlightening. Throughout *Wise*, there are a number of useful summaries on different areas of knowledge, including perspectives on pastoral ministry and an interesting excursus on the many ways of doing research.

Wise is a deceptively small book – it contains a lot to consider, reflect upon and integrate into practice. Bishop Brain has a great ability to take academic knowledge and show how it informs pastoral practice in a hands-on way. It would certainly lend itself to robust study and discussion within a clergy learning group.

Matt Brain, 2019. [*Wise: Transforming Pastoral Ministry*](#). Morning Star Publishing, Reservoir, Victoria.

Dialogue and grace



Walking the Larapinta Trail in Central Australia

It's an odd thing to train most of your life for something, in a way of being, only to realise when you hit the real world how very limited it can be.

I grew up a keen watcher of politics. I was the kind of kid who joined the debating club at school, and went onto university to study law and international relations. It was a great education in critical thinking, structured thinking, and in some respects, analysis.

But as I headed out into the world of work, I found myself drawn to areas outside of the policy and legal realm for which I had spent years training. It was here this formal training rubbed up against the real world in odd and unexpected ways.

Straight up, I stumbled into some corporate work in a refugee centre in Darwin, where I worked alongside people with experience in social work, community engagement and counselling. Whilst I had the skills to do the book-keeping, boring compliance and complicated reporting, I was at sea when it came to the core business – making people feel safe and welcome. I was not trained for helping people, who had been traumatised through war, persecution and conflict, to settle into our communities. Nor was I trained for working alongside those growing ethnic and social groups to both build their own vibrant, healthy communities, and integrate into wider society in the Top End.

Later, working in Victoria in the State Government, I had the opportunity in a single year to do a stint at Treasury during a budgeting cycle, whilst my regular job was with the Department of Communities and Planning. Treasury was full of sharp and clever people, with fine words, good hearts and great skills with spreadsheets. Treasury could balance budgets and make sure money was allocated a place. But it couldn't help a local community overcome its poverty, it's lack of safe space for kids to play and thrive, and it couldn't give young people hope or employment. Heaps

of money was being spent on these things, in lots of communities across the state, often with futile or short lived results.

All the evidence the Department of Communities had – all their research from Australia and around the world – was starting to show they couldn't do it alone.

There was legislation and money and ideas from on high. And these were useful. But, when it came to *real* change – that had to be 'owned', at least in part, by the community. And for that to happen, people who were affected had to have a real stake in getting together – to think, talk about, and discern together what was best for their own backyard. They needed to be involved in creating, changing, building, or letting go, and work out how they could best work alongside their government to achieve this.

My third relevant experience was when I moved up around the Cairns region. As a development manager in Far North Queensland, I chanced upon an amazing role working with some Traditional Owners of beautiful sea and rainforest country. For the first few months, I was busy managing, as any young lawyer might. Focussed on compliance and the towering pile of obligations set out in their many agreements and contracts, I would set agendas, run meetings and try to drive activity to 'get things done'. Eventually, I realised how tired and alone I felt.

I realised I had been talking at people, not with them. I had been listening waiting for a chance to hop in with my facts and opinions, rather than trying to listen deeply for the nuances and intentions and the hopes and fears that lay beneath the surfaces of what people often spoke about.

When I thought I was debating the next item to progress, I realised that my big lawyerly words and the power I held meant I wasn't winning arguments with others, I was winning their silence. At its worst, I was trying to coerce people into action on compliance, not collaborating with people on their deepest desires for Country and culture. The latter is what really mattered.

And, at the start at least, we were not walking together on *that* journey.

The wisdom of hindsight! These were all formative experiences and I have had some years to reflect. I realise now there was an almost Providential thread that ran through all these early experiences.

I had to learn a new paradigm of being: from debate to shared dialogue¹, from leading by controlling the room to leading by hosting a shared space, from starting with the desired outcome in my mind, to letting dialogue flow where it needed to go, that is, engaging emergence.² I learnt that I had to make space for the spirit!

Our Parliament still fulfils a vital role. As do other similarly structured institutions, like our own church Synod. It is where legislation is negotiated, debated and passed; and this is important. They are structures and policies that hold us as a society or an organisation. And adversarial style debate is still one important way to advance these, to further governance and promote accountability.

Yet now more than ever as our social organisation and the shared challenges we face become ever more complex, the need for dialogue only grows. You can see it now, not just in the 'community building' manuals, but making its way into the management literature and business

schools.³ This is because shared dialogue is a way to unleash a powerful shared vision, and concerted, collective action. It is a time-proven method for working through our most complex problems.

It is the old skill and way of being that we have known in the Church for hundreds of years. It is part of what is needed now, a rediscovery of something old, helping us to find our way together, into our unfolding future.

¹ The Church of England has a nice little booklet, [Grace and Dialogue](#), which includes a description the differences between 'debate' and 'dialogue'

² Peggy Holman has written [Engaging Emergence](#)

³ See for instance the Harvard Business Review piece on [A Leader's Framework for Decision Making](#)