



Australian Network for Spiritual Direction Inc.

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For people engaged in godly listening

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

Newsletter May 2011

Greetings to you all.

Each year as the Annual Conference approaches and I discover who the presenter is and what the theme will be I realise this is just what I am needing to hear. We have had some wonderful conferences and this year is looking as good as ever.

To discover a little more about our speaker, Dr Alexander J Shaia, I visited his website. His passion and skills are very evident. The insights he will be sharing with us promise a fresh look at the Gospels and their transforming power. Details of the **Annual Conference** and the **Pre-Conference workshop** are included in the newsletter, and registration forms can be printed from our website <http://www.ansd.org.au>

Notice is given in this newsletter about the **ANSD Annual General Meeting** to be held at the conference Centre on Monday 4th July. You will notice on the agenda that a motion has been put forward to amend the ANSD constitution. Regional Reports will be available on the website soon.

ANSD President **John Stuart** provides us with a message of hope in his letter 25,000 gumboots.

Many were saddened to hear of the passing of Sister Marnie Kennedy. Admired and loved by many, **Sister Esmey Hercovitch** has written a tribute to her.

Eileen Glass has provided us with an understanding of the important role of women in Spiritual Direction in a world where the ministry of Spiritual Direction has changed dramatically.

Melbourne ANSD members are not only organizing the conference this year, but have also been the group responsible for the contributions to this edition of the newsletter. Many thanks to you all, and we look forward to seeing you at the conference.

Jo Windeyer (Editor) jowindeyer@bigpond.com

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President's Letter

25,000 Pairs of Gumboots

After the devastation of the Queensland floods two stories emerged that give proof, if it is ever needed, of the depth of generosity and compassion that lie deep in the human heart. The first story is of the selfless act of young Jordan Rice who literally sacrificed his life for his younger brother, Blake, telling the rescuers to help his little brother first. In doing so he was swept to his death by the raging torrent of water. The selfless act at the heart of this tragedy speaks of a generosity of heart and spirit that is truly inspiring.

The second story is of the 25,000 pairs of gumboots that splashed through the Brisbane suburbs after the floods. Brisbane actually sold out of gumboots as the clean up started, following the devastating floods that had swamped the city. In the days after the floods had subsided thousands of people descended on the affected suburbs to help in the clean up. 25,000 pairs of gumboots were sold to people who had volunteered to help their neighbours. Brisbane sold out of gumboots. This was all the more remarkable as these volunteers, by and large, did not know the people they were helping. A compassion in the form of 25,000 pairs of gumboots attested to a collective generosity of spirit that was equally as inspiring.

Yes there were disturbing stories of people looting and thieves preying on their devastated neighbours, but these were in the minority when looking at the bigger picture of generosity and compassion.

As I write this letter there is another story unfolding of the giant tobacco companies waging a war against new Government legislation aimed at restricting the harm done by cigarettes. These companies still refuse to really acknowledge the damage their products do to people. Their ploy now is to play the victim card. Smokers are portrayed as victims of harsh government policies designed to limit their freedom and to show that we are all being treated by heartless government restrictions. Certainly for any of us who have been smokers or still are, we know how difficult it is to quit. But to portray people addicted to cigarettes as victims of harsh government restrictions is a bit much.

The generosity of spirit shown by young Jordan Rice and the compassion of the gumboot brigade are in stark contrast to the desire of the tobacco companies to foster a victim mentality in smokers who need the compassion of the Quit campaign not the rantings of corporate greed.

So much of our work in spiritual direction is to help create a sacred space where people can discover the grace of compassion deep within them. Paula D'Arcy, a spiritual writer in the States, well known to many of us, highlights the need to find this grace within us so as to be able to really appreciate the presence of God. She is part of a group of writers who present daily reflections for Advent and Christmas and for Lent and Easter. In a reflection in her Lent and Easter booklet she writes

“ Every day I am creating who I am. My circumstances are not the architect of my life. I am. I can be courageous, if I choose to be. I can be self-disciplined. I can be responsible.

*I can refuse the grip of blame and hate. I can stand before
my weaknesses, and fight.
What is possible, if I am willing to live in a new way?"*

In another piece she tells the story of an old woman in a village in Lithuania, who even in the midst of her poverty served a meal of love. Knowing that it would have cost the old woman dearly, Paula was aware *"at the same moment that the meal was incidental. The force of love reaching out through her was the true meal."*

There is no hint of victimhood here, no "poor, poor pitiful me". There is the grace of being in a sacred space where compassion, in the form of a meal of love, shines out. The selfless act of love by a young boy and the gumboots on the march in Brisbane all attest to the heights and the depth of love that we can all go to. Of course we can all too easily take on the victim role where it is someone else's fault if life does not go the way we want or plan.

As I write this it is Palm Sunday when Jesus was glorified by the crowds as a truly holy man. As we know it did not take too long for the sentiment to change. Within a week the crowd had turned against him. He was harshly judged and executed.

We live in a culture where the nobility of the human spirit shines out. At the same time we live in a very individualistic society where greed and a "me first" attitude typify a lifestyle at the nasty end of a consumer society. In the latest edition of *'Presence'* there is a timely article by David Fouche. It is called *'Being Present to Toxic Culture: A Wake-up Call'*. In it he presents a clear case for how our consumer society has and is continually influencing us—both director and directee. We have to be always alert as to how this influence is at work so that the toxic effect of our surroundings do not distract us from our journey into mystery, ourselves and God.

25,000 pairs of gumboots, the example of a young boy sacrificing his life for his brother, the love of an old woman preparing a meal of love all point to us at our best. The tobacco industry and now the gambling industry who are also playing the victim card, the greed of the financial institutions demanding bonuses again even though they were at the heart of the heartbreak of so many millions of people during and after the global financial crisis, point to us at our worst.

At this Easter time we stand in the power of what it means to be truly human when we reflect on the power of the cross. A power that is pure folly to those who do not want to see and a power of absolute freedom for those who choose to LIVE as freely as Jesus The Christ did. As Paula D'Arcy says *"What is possible, if I am willing to live in a new way?"*

Paula D'Arcy is a contributor to a series called *Daybreaks*. There are two series, one for Advent and Christmas and one for Lent and Easter. They are subtitled *Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter and for Advent and Christmas*

John Stuart - ANSD President.

Regional Reports will be available on the ANSD website from 1 June.
Would participants at the AGM please read and bring copies with them.
Some copies will be available at the AGM for those without internet access.

AUSTRALIAN NETWORK FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTION Inc.
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
AMBERLEY CONFERENCE CENTRE
MELBOURNE
Monday 4 July, 2011

Ordinary business:

- Welcome
- Present
- Apologies
- Minutes of last AGM
- Executive Report (President's Report)
- Financial Report
- Election of
 - Treasurer
 - Secretary
 - Regional Representatives (at least 5)
 - Membership Committee (3 members not on Executive)

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

Specific business as indicated below:

- Notice of motion
 - Amendment of Constitution
 - That section 10 c)

ACCOUNTS AND AUDITS. The financial year of the Association is from 1st of January until 31st of December each year The Executive shall ensure that proper books of accounts are kept with respect to the financial affairs of the Association. The Executive shall ensure that such books of account are independently audited each year by an individual or firm being a member of the Australian Society of Accountants or of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia.

Be amended to read:

*ACCOUNTS AND AUDITS. The financial year of the Association is from **1st May until April 30th of the following year** The Executive shall ensure that proper books of accounts are kept with respect to the financial affairs of the Association. The Executive shall ensure that such books of account are independently audited each year by an individual or firm being a member of the Australian Society of Accountants or of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia.*

- Brief regional reports
- ANSD conference 2012

**ANSD NATIONAL CONFERENCE
1ST -4TH JULY 2011
MELBOURNE
Amberley Conference and Retreat Centre**

**The Hidden Power of the Gospels
with Dr Alexander J. Shaia PhD**

Alexander is the author of “The hidden Power of the Gospels” in which he shows how the four Gospels “clearly set out a pattern of transformation.” He states “There is an important history about the early gospels which has been overlooked. It is an understanding that will completely refresh Christianity and possibly revolutionise the discussion amongst all world religions.”

Preceding the conference on Monday 27th June – Thursday 30th June is a Professional Development Workshop facilitated by Philip Carter and held at St George’s Anglican Church, Malvern.



Women as Spiritual Guides

The ministry of spiritual direction has a long and valued place in Catholic tradition and there are increasing numbers of people from all walks of life seeking guidance on their spiritual journey.

Although the ministry has often been associated with the role of the priest and even until recent times it was generally thought that only clergy and religious would have a spiritual director, today that situation has changed markedly.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

The diversity of people seeking direction is reflected in the diversity of people training to become spiritual directors. Despite the popular term, the ministry is less about “giving direction” and more about providing a place of deep listening, reflection and discernment on a person’s journey into an ever-deepening relationship with God. The term ‘spiritual guide’ or ‘spiritual companion’ probably better describes the nature of the relationship and I shall use the terms interchangeably with the more familiar ‘spiritual director’.

Throughout the history of the Church, women have exercised the ministry of spiritual direction. Some are better known than others and I give just a couple of examples here. Within the Church of Acts I think the presence of Mary the mother of Jesus at the heart of the community of disciples. Despite the silence of scripture on this point it is likely she was sought out by the disciples as one with a gift to listen, to encourage in times of trial, and with a capacity to support and affirm the faith life and spiritual growth of members of the fledgling Church. This dimension of prayerful listening and presence is an integral aspect of spiritual direction. Likewise, the Desert Mothers who made themselves available to those seekers who ventured into the desert in search of wisdom and guidance witness to the counter-cultural nature of giving prominence to the spiritual journey. They remind us,

somewhat starkly, of the necessity of radical personal engagement in the journey if we are to become guides for others.

As within mainstream culture within the Church the muted voices of women are not necessarily indicative of the role they have played as spiritual guides among the people of God. Consider Julian of Norwich or Teresa of Avila as examples of women who were noted spiritual guides of their times, and who made extraordinary contributions to theology and to the understanding of the relationship of the self with God. At the same time their experience may be understood as reflective of the spiritual journey and understandings of other women whose names we will never know but who were no less recognised as spiritual guides. They witness to the reality that woman, no less than men are graces to be drawn into the most sublime experiences of the mysterious presence and love of God.

The ministry of spiritual direction seeks to understand the presence of God in all of human experience. This challenging and completing vision affirms that in all the circumstances and choices of our lives God is present. Even in the moment of our deepest infidelity God waits, inviting us to choose otherwise, to accept the call to conversion, which will lead us towards life. The hope to which the spiritual director bears witness is that there is no aspect of human experience which is beyond the grace of God. This implies that the director requires particular attributes and carries particular responsibilities as a listener to the intimate spiritual journey of another in response to the mystery of God.

A PERSON OF PRAYER

The spiritual guide must be first and foremost a person of prayer engaged in her own encounter with mystery, her own relationship with God. She must be in essence a contemplative, growing in awareness of the presence of God in all of her life. She has to be a listener who can hear beyond the spoken word, one who is attuned to the whisperings of the Spirit manifested in the struggles, fears, hopes and joys of her own life and the lives of those she companions. Furthermore as the experience of increasing diversity impacts our communities social networks and workplaces and as dialogue between spiritual and religious traditions develops, the spiritual guide must be well grounded in an understanding of her own tradition. The way to truly honour diverse spiritualities and faith traditions is from the place of one's own experience of faith, informed by sound teaching, consistently prayerful reflection and deepening personal conviction. This is integral to the capacity for openness to whatever understandings the seeker brings to the direction encounter. The spiritual director has to develop the capacity to discern and affirm what is true and life giving in the experience of the seeker and to question falsehood in its various guises. She must herself receive guidance on her spiritual journey.

A FEMININE PERSPECTIVE

While the attributes outlined are integral to the direction relationship whether exercised by a woman or a man, there are particular gifts or perspectives which women bring to this ministry. The first and obvious perspective is that they bring the experience of one half of the human family and of more than half of the active members of the church. Women bring the experience of being other than masculine; they bring the complementary experience of the feminine. Without this dimension of human experience the Church itself cannot know wholeness. If we profess a belief that each person images God then we have to be alive to

that image revealed and understood in the experience of women. More than simply recognising it there is an imperative to seek it out so that the Church itself grows in holiness. Secondly, the historical reality of exclusion within the structures of society and the institutional Church shape the perspective which women bring to ministry. Their experience of life on the margins, of different forms of powerlessness and vulnerability, presents a fertile earth in which to ground an understanding of the human person in relationship with God. Typically what is brought to the spiritual direction encounter includes experiences of pain and struggle, of wounds and infidelity, interwoven with moments of joy and gratitude, of faith and insight, often gleaned in unlikely circumstances. Women know about these experiences. Many women who are spiritual guides have spent a significant part of their lives tending those who are weak within the human family. Whether birthing, nurturing or teaching children, nursing, caring for or offering pastoral support to people who are elderly, who live with disabilities or who suffer the trauma of being displaced, women are familiar with the multi-faceted cry of the human person. They bring a familiarity with the mess of human existence as a seed-bed of hope and a capacity to discern the presence of God in those aspects of human experience which the Beatitudes name; spiritual poverty, grief, the cry for justice, the search for peace.

LESS FORMAL

Thirdly, the context in which women practise the ministry of spiritual direction is often less formal and therefore potentially more accessible to a wider range of people than what may be available within institutional settings. Someone who has been wounded by relationships within the Church, for example, may find it less threatening to speak to a woman than to a priest or indeed to anyone in a position of power in the institution. It is often women who are in touch with people who because of their age, ethnicity, disability, illness, or approaching death, are living outside the mainstream of society for the Church. Because these people are receiving support from women it is usually to those women that the request for spiritual companionship will be addressed.

Finally there is a prophetic dimension which women bring to the ministry. The ministry itself claims an inherently prophetic dimension in the way it “calls attention to the presence of God in all of life” (Mission Statement of the Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction), and the presence of women as spiritual guides in our faith communities is a reminder of the spiritual gifts which are yet to be fully acknowledged and exercised within the Church at large. As we mark the tenth anniversary of the bishop’s response to the report *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus* and celebrate the positive developments that have taken place and that are unfolding, we remain aware that we are not yet the Church which Jesus calls us to be. In the face of this reality, women spiritual guides represent both a sign of hope and a call to deeper listening and reflection.

Today women of diverse backgrounds and life experiences are training for and practising the ministry of spiritual direction. They offer the companionship, prayerful presence, listening and discernment which enable individuals to enter into a deeper life of prayer and openness to the invitation of God in their lives. As well, women spiritual guides are animating retreats and prayer gatherings in many settings, for different groups of people. In exercising this ministry women continue to make an important and distinctive contribution to the life and mission of the Church.

Eileen Glass

Eileen Glass helped to found L'Arche in Australia in 1978 and has held leadership roles nationally and internationally in L'Arche. In 1991 Eileen trained as a Spiritual Director at the Heart of Life Centre in Melbourne. She works as a spiritual director and retreat facilitator within L'Arche International as well as with groups outside L'Arche, including clergy. For some years she has been engaged in the supervision of spiritual directors, principally through the MA Theology program at ACU in Canberra

Vale Sister Marnie Kennedy



On 16th March Sr Marnie Kennedy passed away following a long illness. She had been surrounded and supported by her family, Sisters of the Sacred Heart, and many friends during the weeks and months beforehand. In her departure we have lost a friend, guide, mentor, sister, friend, and wisdom figure.

On Monday 21st March a farewell ceremony at St Vincent's Church, Redfern preceded the funeral liturgy, which was held at Marrickville due to the expected very large crowd.

In her early years as a Sister of the Sacred Heart she was a much loved and appreciated teacher and leader. In the 1970s she began to be involved alongside her brother, Fr Ted Kennedy, at Redfern, and in 1987, together with Sr Patricia Ormesher. She came to live at Redfern becoming also a member of the St Vincent's church community. In these years she accompanied many people in their life-journeys and encouraged people in their commitment to those on the fringes of society. As a spiritual director she became involved in what has become known as inner city or street retreats where participants spend time becoming aware, in an attitude of reflection, of what is happening around them and using these experiences as a stimulus to prayer and a deeper understanding of the Christian gospel, thus leading to action for justice for which Marnie worked so hard.

“The poor are always there waiting to be our evangelizers, the mirror of our own brokenness and the face of a deeply involved and compassionate God. There we find the graced revelation of the God of liberation working where least expected. The marginalised are indeed the litmus paper showing up the true state of society. They also reveal to us the heart of God drawn irresistibly towards them in their struggles.”

From an article “Retreats on the Streets” written by Marnie

Tributes shared at Marnie's funeral can be accessed on the St Vincent's Church community website – church-mouse.lanuera.com

Sr Esmey Herscovitch

Dreaming Our Story 2011-05-04

A Red Centre Retreat

6th August - 15th August 2011

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