

Australian Network for Spiritual Direction Inc.

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for people engaged in Godly listening

From the Editor

Welcome to the Conference edition of the newsletter. Thank you to everyone who has contributed.

It was great to meet so many of you at conference and get your feedback about the newsletter.

I want to encourage everyone to consider sharing your reflections, poetry, photos, and articles with the ANSD membership by contributing to the newsletter.



Photo: Chapel—St. Joseph's Centre for Reflective Living

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Your contributions are very welcome.

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Being Salt and Light– the Role of the Spiritual Direction Community and ANSD

As we gather together today, when we are so aware of the pain and violence around the world, there may be a temptation by some to think the ministry of spiritual direction is peripheral to world peace-building. But I believe nothing could be further from the truth. And such a stance is behind my choice of focus in this report.

In scripture we are called to be letters of Christ to those around us; and to be the aroma of Christ to those we encounter. We are also called to be salt and light. We are urged to BE these; to embody Christ in such a way that we become letters (we are our best message/sermon); aroma, salt and light.

I see this journey of embodiment as essential for those of us involved in the ministry of spiritual direction. Just taking salt and light – two words whose depths of meaning have largely been lost in their clichéd use in western Christianity. Yet they have an encouragement and a challenge for us as we meet together as ANSD.

Salt so often is understood in Matthew's gospel as being a taste enhancer, an antiseptic, or a preservative. Many well-known theologians commenting on this passage are represented by this comment:

"Salt's business is not to provide health. It is to prevent putrefaction. The principal function of salt is to preserve and act as an antiseptic. Take for example a piece of meat..."

But Jesus wasn't referring to meat, but to 'ge'(Gk), which refers to soil or earth. The sower who sowed the seed scattered the seed on 'ge'. And Luke (14:34-35) states that ³⁴ "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out". No longer any use **for the soil** or for **the manure pile!** And further to this, Jesus' talk of salt comes at the end of the Sermon on the Mount which is all about turning the world's values on their head and describes the upside down Kin-dom of God in a radical reversal of values. So to talk of a preservative at the end of such a radical paradigm change does not make sense.

So what does it mean to be salt? I suggest the following.

1. Salt is not only a preservative, but can also be a fertilizer¹. A preservative would seek to *preserve* the status quo, to *keep things as they are*, to be nice people who don't rock the boat; to 'keep the peace' instead of entering into the chaos and messiness of seeking to *make peace*; a preservative would tend to avoid conflict as an unpleasant and ungodly thing to be involved in, rather than to embrace conflict as a creative opening for new beginnings. Prior to the development of fertilizers as we now know them, some of the ancient near eastern practices would use salt as a fertilizer in agriculture. And such a practice continued around the world for many centuries.

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So how are we meant to be fertilizers? Those of the Kin-dom of God – the Beatitudes People – are those who see the worth and value in people whom society rejects as worthless, an embarrassment, weak, an enemy-lover, an uncomfortable truth-teller, a crazy prophet... We are also called to seek peace and pursue it – and this may first mean entering into conflict, challenging *our own* interior scripts, values and assumptions, in order to emerge into a better wholeness, a greater shalom. And the Biblical concept of shalom is not so much an individualistic peace as a relational peace which is about right and just relationships within ourselves, between ourselves and our communities and with our world. It is to cry out in the wilderness of our inner beings and of our society that there is a better way to live, that there is the hope of an abundant life at hand, but it will be uncomfortable, and it will be counter-cultural.

As spiritual directors our salt-like presence can have the capacity to provide an environment, a sacred space, where new shoots of growth can be fertilized and safely emerge; where a true self can raise its head; and where the hope of new life of right and just relationships can be brought to life. As I am transformed, my relationships are transformed, and the way I live in this world is transformed. This sets up a powerful ripple effect. We become agents of change.

The challenge and the encouragement from this is: in order to be such an agent of change as a spiritual director I need to BE salt; to embody Christ.

2. We all have this wonderful (metaphorical) ingredient called a manure pile or excrement in our lives - dumped on us by others or that we somehow collect or it has stuck to us in our journey through life. The role of a spiritual director is to be salt for that person – to so have a quality of presencing, listening and holding the space for a directee, which makes possible the transformation of excrement into compost, of compost into humus, and out of the humus comes new shoots of growth, and even glorious colour.

When Jim and I were at the Mennonite Seminary, a presentation was given by a man who had been working in Northern Ireland for many years as a peace-builder – not a peace keeper! He came to the verse about being called to be salt. He spoke about how salt had been used by his family for generations in Ireland in their long drop. After completing certain business there, you would throw a handful of salt down to encourage the process of transformation from what it was into a better quality of manure or compost later used to spread on their fields. And he described his role of active peacemaking in Northern Ireland as something similar! He felt he was called to be the salt, to throw himself with abandon into the very midst of all the pain and what we could call excrement that was going on; to facilitate the transformation of the manure pile that Luke spoke of, into a better compost, a place where true shalom can begin to be born.

So the challenge to us may be this: to develop our capacity to not fear or shy away from the stench of our own – or other's – excrement. But to be able to rub up against such stuff, and be part of a transformative process. But this will only work if we are indeed being salt; if we are embodying Christ.

3. We are called to BE salt, not to hold a salt shaker in our hand. So as a spiritual direction community, we need to see as essential and a priority that we are we taking care through our own spiritual disciplines and rhythms to EMBODY more and more of Christ; to BE salt. The time, effort and investment to do this, is not self-indulgent. It is simply embracing our call.

So the encouragement and challenge to each of us perhaps is this: In the way I am organising my life, in the midst of all the things I am saying yes to, am I saying yes to the one necessary thing, that is, availing myself to God for this vital transformation to be taking place?; to become increasingly salty, to become increasingly Christ-like? Do we dare to be counter-cultural in the way we organise our diaries? Who we are is our best ministry – so will each of us choose the one necessary thing?

Salt is to be scattered, because in clumps it can damage the chemistry of the soil. And so this is the centrifugal trajectory of spiritual directors. We move outwards and into the broken world, being agents of change. However light is a gathering, a centripetal movement that creates light like a city on a hill.

Light was a corporate image for Jesus; a gathering image. And for us as disciples, as we gather as ANSD, it is by our life lived in Christ-likeness that will together determine the quality of the light we show the world. How do we rub up against each other? How do we interact? We are to live as alien residents; as a people who are counter-cultural; who live by the upside down values of the kingdom of God; where the sermon-on-the-mount lifestyle means we address with creativity issues to do with materialism, looking after our earth, anger, truth, loving our enemies; caring for the marginalised. And so when we come together like this, may it be our desire that we will be known as the early Christians were known: as a community of love. Tertullian reported that the Romans would see the early Christian community and exclaim, "See how they love one another!" This is the centripetal force – a coming together to encourage, strengthen, sharpen and love one another, and impact the world around us.

And so as we come together at this conference in 2014, what is the vision for ANSD? This was discussed at the Executive meeting and together this is our response.

Firstly we look back:

- We can see the rich gifts given to us by the small band of folk in Australia who laid the foundation in 1989/1990 for ANSD.
 - In 1990 there was little awareness of any programs based in Australia for the formation of spiritual directors. Now, 24 years later, there are at least 17 programs with others waiting in the wings.
 - There has been a rapid increase in interest and involvement in the ministry of spiritual direction across denominations and faiths.
 - Through this time, ANSD steadfastly provided a number of extremely valuable functions for the Australian spiritual direction community.
1. A Network – ANSD has provided a network connecting and encouraging those in the spiritual direction community who were exploring the depth and dimensions of such a vocation.
 2. A spiritual direction community – ANSD is broad and inclusive of all interested or simply curious in finding out more about spiritual direction through to experienced spiritual directors and supervisors. There are many stories of those who, through their involvement with the ANSD community, have found the space and context in which to discern their own call into the ministry.

3. Ecumenical – Anyone and everyone is welcomed and embraced, and there is a healthy and robust respect for difference.
4. A community – ANSD provides a vibrant community of encouragement and sustenance for those who for a variety of reasons may have been experiencing isolation or lack of support from their own faith communities. It is a strengthening and embracing community where there is mutual support, challenge, encouragement and inspiration occurs as we explore the ministry together. Again, there are many stories where the ANSD has been significant in members' journeys.
5. Conferences and Regional meetings – ANSD provides opportunities for gatherings for professional development and exploration of the ministry of spiritual development.

Looking forward:

As the interest and involvement in spiritual direction spreads rapidly and widely, there comes also the concomitant danger of it becoming shallow and losing the depth of ministry and best practice. With this in mind, the twin trajectories of *wisdom* and *witness* have seemed to set their course before us, and those may well be the theme of our next conference in 2016

God has been faithful and has brought ANSD thus far. We will trust God for all that is to come.

Final Prayer.

In conclusion - please join with me in the prayer below of St Teresa of Calcutta.

Prayer of St Teresa of Calcutta

Dear Jesus help me to spread your fragrance everywhere I go.

Flood my soul with your spirit and love.

Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly

That all my life may only be a radiance of Yours.

Shine through me and be so in me that every soul

I come in contact with may feel your presence in my soul.

Let them look up and see no longer me but only Christ Jesus.

Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as you shine,

So to shine as to be a light to others.

Amen

1. See Alan Kreider, "Salty Discipleship: Bringing New Worlds to Life", in *The Other Side*, (March/April 1989), pp34-37.



*Labyrinth—St. Joseph's Centre for Reflective Living
(photo Patricia Bouma)*

Faces from the 2014 Conference



*Conference Speaker;
Andrew Mayes*



Reflections and responses from the 2014 Conference

"Here are some quotes which really impacted me on the weekend:

- The outcome is affected by the quality of the waiting
- Being pushed into the river of transition
- Be still and keep moving
- Amid the rocks of the desert Jesus clarifies his vocation
- In the desert: prayer of exposure and prayer of enclosure
- Jesus has become the foreigner
- Contemplative prayer is mainly about transforming perception
- Transfiguration: where ultimacy touches intimacy
- In the transfiguration the change was not occurring in Jesus but in the disciples
- Liminal space is the space of anti-structure, of unlearning, of unknowing."

Jim Longley

"I had not encountered the concept of John the Baptist as a role model for a Spiritual Director before the conference. This has given me much to ponder as I am a director in training and trying to work out how I can be an effective director."

Kathy Cave

From the Reflection Board at conference:

"Standing steadfast in the raging torrent, arm in arm with my directee (times of transition)."

"Asking questions LIBERATES!"

"Give me a Word..."

"To be the 'beloved' is at the core of our existence" (Henri Nouwen)

EVERY TIME WE DRAW A LINE

Every time we draw a line,
the good guys and bad guys we define;
we distinguish friends from enemies;
invent us-and-them categories.

We erect a fence, make our defence,
show disregard and give offence;
discriminate, castigate and alienate;
exclude, dismiss and denigrate.

We state what's wrong and what's right;
all simply a case of black and white.
You're in or out, no shadow of doubt;
one size fits all; just figure it out.

Or condescend to tolerate but
the body language says: eliminate;
go back where you came from mate,
or at least get legal then migrate.

We marginalise and sanitise,
protest our case and ostracise;
while God waits on the other side,
every time we draw a line.

David Thornton-Wakeford



One of the richest blessings of each ANSD conference I have attended has been a real sense of community – of my belonging to a wider group of others who, like me, hold the sacredness of ‘holy listening’. Within my community of faith (Baptist) I often feel like an outsider, a foreigner who speaks another language: of prayer, of worship, of mission and ministry. In an energetic, evangelical protestant church, there is not always an acknowledged space for the quieter, contemplative pathway. How many Quiet Days have I run, with only 1 or two participants and on a couple of memorable occasions – NONE! It’s not that there has ever been any negative feeling or rejection of what I have offered into congregational life, but most commonly my contributions have been met with bemused or quizzical reactions. “She’s lighting candles again!” I am, I fear, the resident oddball. Things are changing, but slowly...

Throughout the past 15-20 years, as I have explored and embraced the contemplative path, I have found a welcome and a heart’s home down the road at Forth, at the Mackillop Hill Spirituality Centre, run by the Sisters of St. Joseph. I direct and am directed there, I belong to a supervision group, have led and participated in workshops and enjoy the wonderful library. Even so, I am once again, a bit of an oddball – a curiosity: the only Baptist – often, the only ‘protestant’ in a room full of Catholics.

What I enjoy so much about Conference is not needing to explain to anyone what Spiritual Direction is. And if I am sitting on my own in the sun, people assume I am reflecting or meditating, they don’t think there’s something wrong with me! When there is space for silence, no one rushes in to fill it with words – the silence is full, shared, and spacious. It feels like community. I, who normally would loathe the idea of beginning a conversation with strangers or sharing a room, do both because no-one feels like a total stranger.

But amidst all this community, each year I come up against one experience of Conference that puts me back into “oddball” territory: Eucharist. Hearing the word ‘Eucharist’ immediately has me moving to the outer edge. Because I don’t know what Eucharist is; Eucharist has never been a part of my faith journey. Where I come from we don’t do Eucharist. We do Communion, we do the Lord’s Supper... we don’t do Eucharist. Are these words interchangeable? Perhaps – but then again, perhaps not. I don’t know – I am on the outside looking in.

A few years ago I was asked to read the Gospel reading in the service at the Adelaide conference. Sure – no problem. I love doing the scripture reading in worship services. I walked to the front of the chapel, I placed the bible on the lectern, looked up... and everyone was standing up! Ummmm – what on earth is going on? What was (I thought) straightforward has suddenly become ... uncertain. We don’t stand for the gospel reading in a Baptist church (well, none that I have attended). And in a moment I am on the outside looking in – again.

The faith community in which I grew up, was one of a group of denominations that celebrate their corporate worship by a whole set of different rules. We don’t stand for Bible readings, we don’t generally do ‘liturgy’ as the term is usually used, we baptise by immersion. We practice the priesthood of all believers which means that I can do (and have done!) anything: preach, lead communion, distribute elements, read a gospel reading, pray out loud, get up and share in an open sharing time, baptise a friend. I have been an elder, a worship leader, and a preacher. I have never been ordained – I don’t think that word means the same thing in my tradition as it might do to you.

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A View from the Edge (cont.)

So, maybe you can begin to see how Eucharist at ANSD conferences is like a foreign country to me. Everything looks, sounds, and feels different to anything I am familiar with. I never know the songs. I find the responsive prayers oddly stilted. And each time I line up to receive the bread and wine I am anxious that I will do something 'wrong', or disrespectful. The bread and wine I am receiving, to me, is symbol, it is community, it is an act of obedience to God's word. And that's all it is. I want to reach out and take it off the plate myself. I want to be sitting in a circle, passing the bread and wine around, and saying to my neighbour: "The body and blood of Christ, shed for you". Lining up to take the elements from someone in strange robes feels confronting, alienating, even (I admit it) irritating.

I have always felt welcomed and accepted during these services. But since coming home from this year's conference in Sydney, I have been doing a lot of reflecting. I've been trying to put my finger on what it is exactly that has put me off balance about all this, and here it is: I feel like the person who is always invited out to dinner, but has never had an opportunity to have you all back to my place. I want to welcome you into my "tent" (to borrow an image Andrew Mayes explored in his reflections on the Transfiguration). I have come to realise just how blessed I have been to be able to move so freely between denominations and traditions. I have been welcomed, challenged, alienated, and surprised. I have grown to love certain aspects of worship which I had never experienced before. I have seen how wide and various our Christian community is, and how beautiful it all is. And I have come to realise how dearly I love and hold firm to my own particular heritage and tradition.

I don't feel completely 'at home' in any denominational 'tent' anymore. More and more I hear the words of Jesus: "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head." But I have growing desire to share my expression of Communion and community with you all. I hope that one day we can share this special meal together from my place.

Denise Stephenson

(apart from being newsletter editor, and Tasmanian Regional Rep, Denise is a Spiritual Director, sailor and pilgrim wanderer)



Professional Indemnity Insurance

25 Years of A.N.S.D. Inc.

As mentioned in the previous newsletter, members have made the Executive aware of some options for individual Professional Indemnity Insurance available online. The Executive is not in a position to endorse any particular product. If you have found a policy that you are happy with and would like that information to be available to other ANSD members, contact ANSD Secretary Lizanne Smith (details on the back page) and let her know. If you are having trouble finding a suitable product, contact Lizanne who will pass on any information she has received.

The issue of Group Professional Indemnity Insurance is currently being considered by A.E.C.S.D.

As we enter our 25th year, it seems timely to reflect on our beginnings and where the road has taken the Australian Network for Spiritual Direction Inc. over the years. If you would like to be part of a project to review the Network's archive, or perhaps you have information, photos, etc that record elements of our group history, please contact Lizanne Smith (ANSD Secretary) or your Regional Representative.

*Labyrinth—St. Joseph's Centre for Reflective Living
(photo Patricia Bouma)*



for people engaged in Godly listening



The Australian Network for Spiritual Direction, an ecumenical endeavour, is committed to fostering spiritual direction and to the training of spiritual directors in the Christian Community.

We believe spiritual direction to be a vital ministry in the continuing transformation of all people. It is one of many ministries by which people are set free to take their share in God's ongoing work. It is a ministry of guidance taking many forms, and is exercised by women and men, lay and ordained.

The challenges and benefits of spiritual direction are both personal and corporate in nature. This historical ministry is an effective tool for helping people address the complex issues of our time.

The Network is committed to:

- encouraging spiritual directors in their work
- offering opportunities for care and nurture through regular gatherings and communications
- supporting national, regional and local training programs

We welcome to membership and involvement in the Australian Network for Spiritual Direction all who desire to support this work.

This Statement was adopted by the original committee in Canberra in 1989