

VIEWPOINT

Volume 5, Issue 3, Spring 2022

A magazine of the Canberra Region Presbytery of the Uniting Church in Australia.
Online copy at canberra.uca.org.au



Spring Flowers at Kippax Uniting Church

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Indigenous Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the people of the Ngunnawal, Ngambri, Ngarigo, Yuin, and Gundungurra peoples, custodians from time immemorial of the lands on which the people of the Canberra Region Presbytery worship, serve and witness.

Hello

Thank you for reading Viewpoint. In this edition we interview Rev Liz McMillan, our new Presbytery Minister Wellbeing, to warmly welcome Liz to the Presbytery. We also have information about elections to Presbytery positions that will be held at the Annual General Meeting in November, and articles about a desert pilgrimage and compassion in ministry. Please let me know if you have any comments, or if you would like to write for future issues of Viewpoint.

In Christ

Robbie Tulip

CRP Secretary and Viewpoint Editor

Welcome to Rev Liz McMillan, our new Presbytery Minister Wellbeing

Liz starts as Canberra Region Presbytery Minister Wellbeing in December, returning to her teenage home in Canberra from her current home in Melbourne. She recently spoke by Zoom with *Viewpoint* Editor Robbie Tulip. This is an edited transcript of Liz's comments.

My father was an Australian diplomat in San Francisco. I

travelled to see my family and enrolled in a degree in Arts in Film and Television, which was not offered at the time in Australia. I completed my studies there and came back to Australia and got a role with Crawford Productions, as a 'continuity person/director's assistant'. Since my teen years I had wanted to work in television, which was my great love. I started on a show called *The Sullivans*. Also *Neighbours* which recently has closed its doors, and I worked on *Prisoner*, all the Australian oldies. I continued in that business working in film and television until I was thirty.

Visiting my parents in Brisbane, my father said why don't you give yourself a break, you are always working contract to contract. He sneakily put the theological college's latest subjects on the coffee table which I then picked up because my other passion was an interest in studying theology. I gave myself six months long service leave, to see if I would like learning theology and after extending to a year I decided to candidate in Brisbane. I was accepted and did three more years there. I wasn't ordained there but completed my studies and returned to Melbourne where I was offered yet



another television show and decided to do that. Ten years later, the Presbytery Minister in Yarra Yarra told me you either decide to go into ministry or we need to cancel your candidature. I said do you really think I would be accepted as a minister? They sent me away on supply and I thought wow, I had been delaying for all these years because I thought people in the church would not accept someone who was from that kind of rock and roll background of television etc.

It was where I was meant to be. I was put forward for ordination and went to my first parish at the ripe old age of forty and have been doing that since and absolutely feel so privileged to have been able to follow two passions in my life. In many ways they intersect because it is about sharing story, and sharing story well, so that people can hear the message in that story.

Those shows are like campfires, the 'cold fire' of TV. The family gather around the TV in the evening to watch a show at the end of the day. In our congregations we gather around the word on Sunday, usually, and that is where we as a family conduct our stories. It has a lot of overlying ways of communicating.

It is wonderful that the Presbytery Minister position is called Wellbeing. In our world today we should all strive for a sense of wellbeing in our work, in our play, in our relationships. I have found myself in the last ten years being an advocate for ministers and someone who is there for them. What I am looking forward to is establishing those relationships. I find that a really important and enjoyable part of the role. When you build healthy and trustful relationships, where you build links and networks and communities, we all benefit. I love doing that so that is what I am looking forward to.

I was in congregational placement for four years, then seven years in an inner city suburb where we did some radical changes, then I was called to be Presbytery Minister Pastoral Care for Port Phillip East Presbytery, then I was called to be Presbytery Minister for Ministers in Yarra Yarra, and have been ten years in this role.

My father was ordained as a Presbyterian Minister and was in full time Ministry until I was eleven. Then he was offered a role with Immigration because of his work with refugees in Melbourne. That is how we came to Canberra, and I started high school in Canberra. The postings came and we went to England for two years and America for three years. That is how my link with Canberra came, I was a child of the public service. My siblings are spread out across Victoria and I have aunts and uncles in Canberra. My son will accompany me initially, he is 22 and finishing his degree in electrical engineering. He will live with me while looking for full time work.

I am a keen op-shopper, I love going to the op shop, I still think it is a bargain. I love getting a bargain. Love doing up second hand furniture and creating clothing. I am a bit of a handy person, crafts, garden, boxes to grow my herbs in. I love getting inspired by artists, when I am tired a good book in a sunny spot, love going to theatre and cinema, binge watching TV when it is cold and awful, force myself to walk. I would love to visit church markets in the Presbytery.

From our Victoria and Tasmania perspective in the church, my current ministry is in the old Bible Belt where everyone looks back to the days of 600 children in Sunday School and all that sort of thing. We have a changing church. We have too many congregations for the amount of ministers available. People are very strongly attached to their buildings which means there is a great deal of pastoral care needed to help people see a different way. There is also a vibrant youthful church that often they don't see. I had one person say to me in a church with eight members, all very elderly, that the church dies with us. I thought wow, they really have been in their own little bubble. God will always

be present. God is always calling us. It may not look like it did in the 50s or 70s, but it is a vibrant call upon peoples' lives. How we change as a church to see that or to support and nurture that vibrant call is upon us at this very time.

We really need be doing something to not say that our young people are almost approaching retirement themselves but to understand that the sixties are often the active people at this time and they need to be looking to those in their forties, and those in their forties need to be looking to those in their twenties. Not passing on buildings but passing on experience of faith, experience of wisdom and being open to that change amongst each other. It is about relationships.

With faith, one of the really interesting pioneering things in Melbourne has been started by a young woman pastor in placement. There are a lot of young people, but small in number in some places. There is always such better feeling when there is a collective, when you feel there is a group you belong to, when you are not just one of two teenagers in your congregation. She has started this thing called the Sonder Collective, which is also ecumenical. In that group there is a great deal of support for one another. They are not just on their own, they actually belong to a generation who have distinctive feelings about faith, about how we worship, how we go forward. They feel they can become a voice then, rather than being feted as the young people of the church and being put on every church council, which is not really what they are looking for at that age.

Ecumenical contact is important especially at the moment because most people come to faith or to church, into contact with religion and the church, through a friendship. They say I would not mind coming along to that sort of meeting or that sort of group and getting to know this. Rather than assuming someone who is seeking who is in their 20s or 30s wants to become a Christian, we must see it will not happen for them if they go to a place doing the same thing every time.

I had fifteen children in a congregation that I had and one day one of them said to me, 'you know when everyone puts their heads down and say that prayer that starts Our Father, how come everyone just knows that and no one teaches us that?' I thought oh wow, the guilt of the minister who has just assumed. We had to learn it to be able to say it. We practice with so many assumptions that people know things or know the hymns. There has to be a special space of meeting for younger people to be given a chance to learn what the faith entails and how we practice it and what liturgy means and how we write it because that is how they begin to own it rather than just someone else's practice.

What I am really looking forward to in coming to Canberra is I know how big the region is. I took my holidays down on the beaches and did my skiing and tobogganing up in the Snowy hills. Unlike people who have gone before me in the same role I am not an academic. I have studied theology and I understand the basis of our reasoning but I am not a great academic leader. What I lead in is building up of relationship and trust and a sense of connection with everyone. Ministry can be so solitary and you can be so vulnerable. To have knowledge that there is support and care for you beyond the immediate is really important to every person in the role.

Getting to know the congregations and ministers and culture of the Canberra Region Presbytery, what needs there are, and working with people on building up capacity and care and support and trust in one another is the most exciting thing for me. I am hoping that although the distances are large the number of ministry agents and congregations is a bit less than I have experienced in Melbourne. Which will give me time to be one on one with so many people which really excites me.

I have enjoyed reading *Viewpoint* on the website. It is exciting to begin to see the picture, especially to see stories about so many of the congregations, their stories and what they are up to at the moment.

I am really looking forward to getting to know everyone.

Canberra Region Presbytery Elections 2022

Our Presbytery has 26 Congregations, worshipping in 44 different locations, and 23 stipended Ministers or Pastors. The key focus of our Presbytery leadership is to ensure all Congregations are resourced and equipped for their vital local mission and ministry. In this, Committees play a critical part, and we thank God for the many lay and ordained people who volunteer their time and gifts to enable our faithful discipleship, worship and service to others.

Presbytery committees work to implement the five pillars of the Strategic Plan adopted in 2017:

1. to resource Congregations to function in healthy ways;
2. to work with Congregations to discover new futures;
3. to care for Congregations facing change;
4. to govern efficiently, increasing innovative and accountable leadership; and
5. to deepen connections, working with the wider church for mutual well-being.

The Annual General Meeting of Canberra Region Presbytery on Saturday 19 November will hold our annual elections for Presbytery Office Bearers, Committees and external organisations. Please consider if you or someone you know would be suitable to serve the church in this essential work. Below you will find all the elections we expect to hold at the AGM. Congregations should be represented at Presbytery meetings, and should advise the Presbytery Office of any changes to your representation. For any questions please contact staff or office bearers listed at the end. Presbytery meets 4 times a year to address a range of issues relating to the local church context (e.g. extensions of placements, selection and oversight of candidates, ordinations) and also the wider context of church and society.

Congregation Representatives to Presbytery

Presbytery Representatives bring concerns, network with each other and report back to their congregation and Church Council about matters dealt with at Presbytery meetings. This is an essential part of our church life to keep the whole church connected and informed about activities in our region and beyond. Congregations with less than 150 members are asked to elect one rep, those with between 150 and 250 members may elect two, and those with over 250 members may elect three Presbytery representatives.

Office-bearers of Presbytery

We have two Co-Chairs - Judy McKinlay, whose term ends in 2022 and Rev Dr Ross Kingham whose term continues to the end of 2023. The Chairperson can be elected for a total of up to 5 years.

The Deputy Chairperson is Janet Kay. This position is normally elected annually.

Presbytery Secretary Robbie Tulip is in this position until end 2022. This position can be elected for up to 5 years.

Our Treasurer, John Sutton, is in this position until end 2022. This position is normally for a period up to 5 years.

The Deputy Treasurer position is vacant. The Presbytery is seeking a Deputy Treasurer to assist the current Treasurer with a view to electing to the Treasurer role in the future.

The November AGM will hold elections for one Co-chair, Deputy Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Deputy

Standing Committee

Standing Committee (SC) focusing on the efficient governance of the Presbytery. In cooperation with regular meetings of Staff and Office Bearers, SC provides overall governance of the Presbytery between meetings of the full Presbytery. It meets every 6-8 weeks and is chaired by the Co-Chairs. Standing Committee deals with matters such as property, mission, and congregational wellbeing.

The Standing Committee of Presbytery has 12 elected members plus ex-officio members. The 12 elected members are each elected for a two-year term, with half elected one year and the other half elected in the following year. Standing Committee normally meets twice between Presbytery meetings whenever there is work to be done or decisions to be made, ie 8 times per year. Meetings are held on Thursdays from 5:30-7:30pm. It makes decisions referred to it by the Presbytery or on behalf of the Presbytery. The majority of elected members need also to be representatives to Presbytery from congregations. One member of Standing Committee is appointed to the Greenhills Board.

The November AGM will hold elections for six new SC members for the two year term 2023 – 2024, and one vacancy to end 2023.

Current members

Ex-officio: Co-Chairs; Deputy Chair; Property Chair; PRC Chair; Presbytery Minister-Wellbeing; ; Presbytery Minister Congregational Futures; Presbytery Treasurer; Presbytery Secretary

Elected members to end 2022

John Goss (St Margaret's Hackett)

Elected members to end 2023

Andrew Lund (Weston Creek);
Brian Carle (Braidwood);
Jan Tarbotton (Wesley Forrest);
John Williams (Kippax)

Pastoral Relations Committee

The Pastoral Relations Committee has 12 elected members each for a period of three years, with 4 elected each year, plus ex-officio members. The PRC is responsible for regular consultations with ministers and congregations. Each PRC member participates in these consultations as they are available. PRC also deals with placement approvals and other matters pertaining to ministers and the congregations in which they serve. This committee meets monthly on the fourth Tuesday of the month from 1:30 – 4:00pm via Zoom.

The November AGM will hold elections for one PRC member to end 2023, one member to end 2024 and four members to end 2025.

Ex-Officio members of PRC

Co-chairs of Presbytery, Presbytery Ministers

Current to end 2022

Rev Elizabeth Raine
(Tuggeranong)

Current to end 2023

James Ellis (Tuggeranong),
Irene Lund (Weston Creek),
Daniel Mossfield (Crookwell),
Jean Shannon (Sapphire Coast)

Current to December 2024

Dorothea Wojnar
(Tuggeranong), Subramanian
Sukumar (Canberra City)

Candidates Sub-Committee

The candidates subcommittee reports to the PRC. It meets to process applications from people wishing to be considered for training for ministry, either Minister of the Word or Deacon. It also processes requests from Presbytery that a person be considered for the position as Pastor and requests for Periods of Discernment. Membership is the Convenor and at least four members elected annually by Presbytery, including at least one minister, one layman and one laywoman. The Convenor of Candidates Sub-committee is a member of PRC and is appointed by the PRC. The committee meets as needed and at least twice per year.

The November AGM will hold elections for Candidates Sub-Committee for four positions for a one year term.

Convenor - Rev Aimee Kent (*Kippax*) – ongoing

Current elected membership to end 2022

Graeme Brown (*Wesley Forrest*); John Goss (*St Margaret's Hackett*); Rev Elizabeth Raine (*Tuggeranong*); Geoff Dornan (*Wesley Forrest*)

Property Committee

We need people who have property expertise as well as the ability to think strategically with a concern for the future of the church. Property committee has an important role in advising and approving building projects and day to day management of Presbytery properties. The Property Committee has up to 8 members, with 4 elected each year for a 2 year term

Current to end 2022

Keith Thomas (North Belconnen)

Current to end 2023

Mike Evans (Kippax)

Norman Schroeder (Yarralumla)

Peter Ellis (Kippax)

The November AGM will hold elections for four positions for a two-year term 2023 – 2024.

Board positions that Presbytery nominates

Pilgrim House Policy Committee – one representative and alternate

Pilgrim House Management Committee – one representative and alternate

No elections required at this meeting.

Greenhills Board

The [Greenhills Centre](#) is governed by a Board appointed by the Presbytery, with each member appointed for a term of three years. Up to three positions are appointed each year.

There is a vacancy for one member from Presbytery Standing Committee. The Board would also welcome enquiries from other people who can make a contribution and have a heart for Greenhills. Please contact Harold Small on 0429 880 415 if you are interested. Meetings are four times a year.

Current Membership:

To end 2022: Andrew Taylor; Harold Small; Alistair Davidson

To end 2023: Susan Akhurst; Delia Quigley

To end 2024: Craig Grant; Rebecca Christie

Representatives we elect to external bodies

ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS) – currently Elizabeth Raine and Karyl Davison (one year)

ACT Churches' Council – currently Robbie Tulip and John Goss (one year)

We will hold elections for one or two positions on each of these bodies for 2023.

Mission Strategy Committee, by Rev Andrew Smith

No elections are held to MSC at the Presbytery Meeting. The MSC is an appointed subcommittee of the Standing Committee (SC). It meets on the third Tuesday of each month. MSC is convened by David Fox, with Andrew Smith providing key support. The membership of the committee also includes Martin Harris, Bill Lang, Marie Walsh, Rev Karyl Davison, Rev Miriam Parker-Lacey and Rev Elizabeth Raine. Judy McKinlay attends regularly

in ex officio capacity as Presbytery Co-Chair. This committee has a focus on the second pillar of the Strategic Plan, to resource Congregations to discover new futures. Its main focus is on high level thinking and planning and acting to enrich the missional capacity of the Presbytery; with the capacity to engage with and be called upon by committees of the Presbytery for special expertise or knowledge to facilitate, enable and collaboratively deliver particular missional developments within the Presbytery.

Its role includes recommending to SC strategies for use of property for the mission of God, including strategies for income generating missional use of properties to fund further mission of the church and strategies for reallocation of properties for mission. It will also recommend to SC strategies for increased lay and ordained leadership capacity for mission in the Presbytery, including:

- stimulating and encouraging congregations in prayerful discernment of the signs of the Spirit among them for mission and to act on that calling; and
- fostering and facilitating innovation, experimenting, discovery, reflection, experiential learning and adaptive management of enterprise.

In addition, it will recommend to SC strategies to discern, support and encourage congregations that are experiencing growth to build their potential and capacity to expand their mission.

Recently the MSC has been assisting Presbytery carry out its responsibilities in relation to the processes of the Synod Growth Fund. The Synod Growth Fund has been established to invest in strategic initiatives that support the Future Directions strategy to see the Uniting Church become a contemporary, courageous and growing church. The Synod Growth Fund seeks to support a small number of projects each financial year, that will help the Uniting Church grow in discipleship, relationship, number and impact. It gives congregations the opportunity to apply for funding to support growth and to inspire genuine renewal. The MSC has been involved in providing letters of support for applications to the fund from congregations in the Presbytery, in evaluation of the applications, and in administration to help the processes work as best they can.

We celebrate with Tuggeranong in the success of their application for funding toward a new part-time ministry position with particular responsibility for developing leadership in the growing “Rainbow Christian Alliance” and in the growing ministry with children and their families. We are also excited with Kippax about recent news that their Expression of Interest for funding has made it through to the final stage of applications. The Kippax application is for part funding of ministry positions to enable the ongoing growth of relationships and fresh expressions of church with the new Ginninderry Housing development, along with fresh ways of worship to connect with people in the Kippax area who are not interested in accessing typical Sunday morning worship services.

The last meeting of MSC included reviewing recent survey results from McCrindle and the Australian Community Survey conducted by NCLS Research about the place and role of church in Australian society. Of particular note was the willingness of people to accept invitations to church from family and friends who attend church. However, there is a high proportion of the population who believe they do not know anyone who attends church. Hence there is no one they know from whom they could accept an invitation. The

committee aims to use this information to help support congregations in making further connections with their local communities, and encouraging them to be invitational.

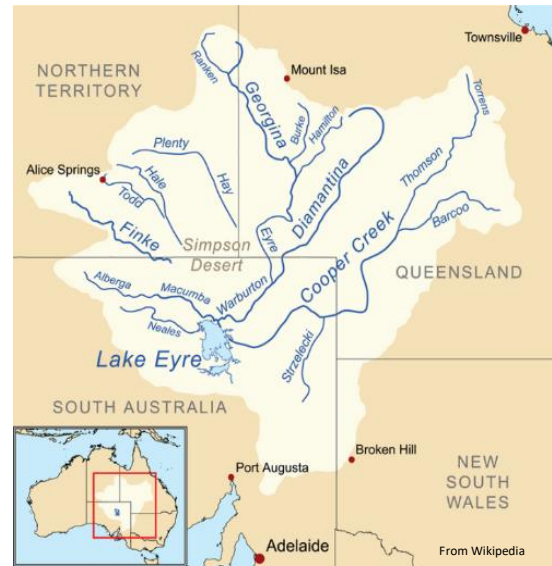
A Reconciliation Pilgrimage, by Robbie Tulip



From 24-31 July, a desert pilgrimage group walked along the oldest river on earth, the Finke in Central Australia, known in the Arrernte language as Larapinta, or Salty River. We were there to mark the centenary of the death of Lutheran missionary Carl Strehlow and to celebrate his achievements in supporting and documenting the living culture and language of the Arrernte people. As well as his ground-breaking anthropology research, Strehlow directly protected Aboriginal people

from threats of massacre, building up the Hermannsburg mission as a sanctuary of respect for Aboriginal dignity.

The Larapinta/Finke headwaters are in the Tjoritja mountain range (the West MacDonnells) in the Northern Territory. The river runs past Hermannsburg/Ntaria, and ends in the dry sandy lands of the Wangkangurru people in the Simpson Desert ([language map](#)). The ancient geology and ecology of this spectacular region provide windows into deep time, in a watercourse that has flowed through the same valley for about half a billion years. So too, the indigenous names of the mountains and waterholes are very old in human terms, shaping sacred songlines that have provided meaning and memory in this place for many thousands of years. On top of these layers of complexity, recent history since white settlement in the late nineteenth century has brought this isolated country into connection with the modern world, creating much sadness for its indigenous people.



Rev Carl Strehlow was pastor at Hermannsburg Mission for 27 years between his arrival with his young wife Frieda in 1894 and his death on 20 October 1922, apart from one year taking his children back to Germany in 1910. The poignant drama of his final days was told by his son Ted in the renowned book [Journey to Horseshoe Bend](#), describing the family's desperate but unsuccessful effort to go by horse and buggy down the Larapinta/Finke toward medical help in Adelaide. The journey ended in tragedy, at a time when faster travel in this remote region was almost impossible.

The legacy of Strehlow's achievement is seen in the [Strehlow Research Centre](#) in the Museum of Central Australia, which houses sacred secret tjurunga objects given by Arrernte elders to Ted Strehlow for safeguarding. While controversial due to some breaches of trust and questions over access, this priceless collection enables elders to continue their living cultural practice in ways that might be impossible if it did not exist.

Uniting Church Minister the Reverend Dr Mel Macarthur organised our walk. Mel is now completing a PhD dissertation on Strehlow's journey, seeing our partial repeat of it as a type of Australian pilgrimage that can



help to bring together white and black histories to promote a message of reconciliation.

Unfortunately, Mel fell ill just before our departure and was unable to do the walk. The walkers were Uniting Church members Rev Dr William Emilsen, Martin Reusch, Bill Tulip and Robbie Tulip, as well as Professor Hart Cohen of the University of Western Sydney, who is making a film about it. Two support vehicles were driven by cameraman Rob Nugent and long-time Central Australia resident Glen Auricht. Glen has lived in Central Australia for fifty years and speaks Arrernte. He was our guide, sharing some remarkable stories along the walk about the spirit of place and cultural context, especially at the permanent waterholes that used to be home to large indigenous communities. Locals David Hewitt and David Moore also joined us for part of the way. Invitations were extended to the local indigenous community, but none took part.

We started at Hermannsburg/Ntaria and walked a total of 70km along the Larapinta/Finke in the path of Strehlow. Unlike his rough journey of pain and sickness and fear of death, we were supported by four-wheel-drive vehicles carrying our bags and camera gear. For the first few days there was not a cloud in the sky, and at night the desert stars were stunning, providing great opportunity to tell stories of the constellations. The clouds came in on our fourth day. No animals were to be seen apart from birds in the sky and fish in the waterholes. At night we heard the neighing of horses and howling of dingoes. One point of sadness for threatened species is how the invasive [buffel grass](#), the cane toad of arid regions, has killed off native animals by removing food and shelter. Buffel is now throughout the more fertile soils of the Larapinta/Finke valley. It has outcompeted the fragile native grasses and killed trees by burning too hot.

The Larapinta/Finke had a ten-metre flood in the big rains in February this year, so there was a lot of debris high in the trees, and enormous amounts of firewood, which gave us some crackling campfires. The



floods usually run out in the Simpson Desert, but we heard some of the water this year reached Lake Eyre.



The pebbles in the riverbed are a rainbow array of different colours, reflecting the many geological sources that have contributed to the river over hundreds of millions of years, washed down from the mountains from before plant life emerged on land.

We heard these large rocks symbolise a story of the key importance of sharing food in traditional culture.



Our walk ended at Irbmangkara (Running Waters), just part of the distance of Strehlow's journey. We then returned by bus to Alice Springs/Mparntwe and the next day drove six hours to Strehlow's riverside grave at Horseshoe Bend on the edge of the Simpson Desert, where we completed our pilgrimage at a commemoration service with the local community.

The presence of God in guiding and blessing our pilgrimage in the heart of Australia emerged in conversations along the way and around the campfire, in the spirit of place of the beautiful ancient river gorges, and in the warm feelings of the local community toward remembering the work of Carl Strehlow. Our pilgrimage honoured Strehlow's achievement as a martyr for indigenous reconciliation. He remained in Hermannsburg after he fell ill due to his passionate commitment to the people, staying true to his calling to mission. His legacy shows the important ongoing role of Christian faith in both supporting and challenging indigenous identity and culture, through a ministry of reconciliation, seeking a completely honest and open understanding of the difficult situations facing indigenous people today.

Pilgrimage is a journey of reverence where we can cultivate a sense of awe and wonder for the holy. Finding the sacred requires a contemplative ability to listen and hear, to look and see, to enter dialogue and put thoughts into a coherent story. Ancient ideas of pilgrimage have lost meaning for many people due to the confusion that surrounds religion. A new meaning for pilgrimage can bring together all the different sources we encounter along the way, in the effort to understand and explain the spiritual meaning we find on the path. Pilgrimage can integrate the heritage of wisdom with new experience in a spirit of respect for sanctity in nature and culture.

Our pilgrim journey to Horseshoe Bend considered four themes raised by Ted Strehlow's book:

1. awareness of Carl Strehlow's pietistic calling from God with his strict Christian theology;
2. the rich cultural depths of indigenous people with their difficult modern realities informed by the ancient dreaming songline heritage;
3. the flawed but honourable outback settler culture; and
4. the beautiful and rugged natural environment of the Larapinta/Finke River.



In different ways, each of these themes invites us to explore how time connects to the eternal, how our world connects to God, and how Christianity can evolve to integrate and recognise local cultures.

The [preamble](#) to the Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia states "The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways."

Walking the Larapinta/Finke River in a spirit of pilgrimage helped us to reflect on the indigenous encounter with the same divine presence we see in Christ, within their own distinct cultural traditions. In this context, the complex spiritual order of God at the ground of Christian faith can acquire a new and deeper light, bringing together contrasting approaches as we work toward an integrated understanding.

A transformative theme in our discussions was around the essential role and beauty of indigenous language. The philosopher Martin Heidegger said language is the house of being. In the context of the Larapinta/Finke river, the ancient indigenous language of the Arrernte people speaks to the identity of place and culture and their unique sense of being in ways that simply cannot be understood or translated in other languages. Our story of being, with the ethical values that emerge from that story, is embedded in our own language, and can be deepened and enhanced by respect for the wealth of difference in other cultural traditions, approached in a spirit of pilgrimage.



Marking the 21st anniversary of the SIEV X tragedy

On the afternoon of Sunday 23 October an event will be held at the SIEV X Memorial in Weston Park to mark the 21st anniversary of that tragedy when 353 asylum seekers were lost at sea trying to reach Australia. The Memorial was founded by author Steve Biddulph and UCA minister Rod

Horsfield, with contributions from schools, churches and community groups from around Australia. The event is being organised by Canberra Refugee Action Campaign and The SIEV X Memorial Association. We had planned to hold this event last year on the 20th anniversary but it had to be cancelled due to restrictions at the time on public gatherings. For this year's event, we will have a few speakers and musical performances, plus activities for children. The themes of the event will be to remember the deaths of innocent refugees, celebrate the strength of those seeking safety, and committing to action to help those asylum seekers still struggling for a safe place to live. You are invited to bring a picnic lunch and join us from 12 noon on, with the formalities to begin at 1pm and conclude at 2 pm with a walk through the poles of the Memorial, attaching messages and flowers to them.

Paul Meyer, President, SIEVX Memorial Association

Gutsy compassion, by Tom Henderson-Brooks

Author: Katy Nicholls

Report on a talk given to Canberra Christians for an Ethical Society on 18 May 2022

Jesus felt compassion for the crowds as 'a churning in his bowels' (*splagchnizomai* or *σπλαγχνίζομαι* in Greek), because they were "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). This quote became the light on a journey for Christians for an Ethical Society at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, as the Venerable Tom Henderson-Brooks explored compassion as the core of God – innate, foundational, and axiomatic – and what that means for us.

In a talk structured around Jesus' compassion, his own journey, and what God calls us to be today, Tom entranced us with images and insights into human fallibility and the support of the Holy Spirit. He reminded us that in the verse following the quote on Jesus' compassion for the harassed and helpless, Jesus calls for laborers for the harvest – those with the character of compassion.

What does the character of compassion look like?



Tom took us on a comprehensive survey of the pain in a 'Passion week' typical for part of his life in Kings Cross – asking us to have compassion on all from perpetrators of violence, busy office workers, homesick backpackers, to those most abandoned by society and themselves, homeless, seeking comfort and a living in drugs and sex work, or abandoned, despairing and dead. Jesus' love encompasses all. We are called to witness to this love.

But being a compassionate disciple calls for guts in risking the reputational slurs Jesus received – as an alcoholic, friend of sex workers, subversive ... Tom's stories of meeting addicts and sex workers where they were, and offering them acceptance, love and the space to try again made this clear. Compassion will take you to places you can't imagine. Even quiet actions can upset powerful and angry forces, resulting in risks greater than those to reputation, such as your safety, or your family's.

Gutsy compassion acts. And it will disrupt your comfortable lifestyle – we were reminded of Mordechai Vanunu, sentenced to 18 years solitary confinement by the Israeli government for revealing the existence of its (till then) secret nuclear weapons program. It was Mordechai's becoming a Christian in Darlinghurst that gave him the courage to release the photos and information he had taken, and face the risk of his imprisonment: "I have heard the voice of my conscience and I have nowhere to hide".

Finally, Tom reminded us that Jesus touched and healed lepers. Sometimes the church has failed the lepers of its day – whether with covid, or with AIDS in its early days. Sometimes the church has disavowed those who act with compassion. Many of those with AIDS saw God in the response of the church, and lost their faith. Our compassion can fail: but God's never does.

Tom closed with challenging us all – where is God calling us to act– what gutsy compassion is needed now today? God will bring to light what is hidden in darkness – we are called to seek the people who are lost, helpless and harassed, like sheep without a shepherd.

The audience followed his speech with a wide range of questions, seeking his views on compassion in a range of settings. The evening closed with thanks from the CES President, Ingrid Moses, and a hopeful message from the new Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Anthony Maher.

*The Venerable Tom Henderson-Brooks is an Archdeacon in the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn. Christians for an Ethical Society (ces.org.au) is a Canberra-based ecumenical forum which seeks to engage with the ethical challenges of the contemporary world, locally, nationally and internationally. The next CES forum will be on Tuesday 23 August with Richard Refshauge, who will speak on *The Meaning of Justice*. For details see <http://ces.org.au/the-meaning-of-justice/>*

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