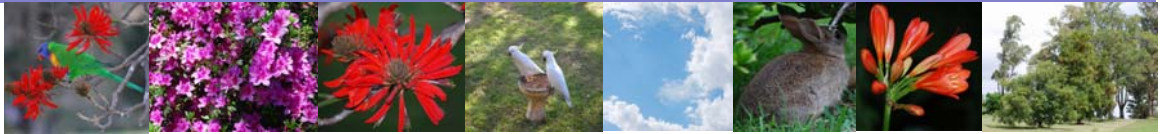


Stepping Stones



ST JOSEPH'S CENTRE FOR REFLECTIVE LIVING

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Editorial

Annie Bond rsj

With each new day another tree puts out a tiny bud or opens a new leaf. The rabbits have returned. Spring is here and it brings joy to the heart, lifting the spirit in joy and wonder. There is something unspeakable about this unfolding of new life—the great Kindness that has given us so much. John O'Donohue in his *Book of Blessings* speaks of kindness and so I have taken the liberty of sharing his thoughts about “kindness” rather than mine.

“There is a kindness that dwells deep down in things; it presides everywhere, often in the places we least expect. The world can be harsh and negative; but if we remain generous and patient, kindness inevitably reveals itself. Something deep in the human soul seems to depend on the

presence of kindness; something instinctive in us expects it, and once we sense it we are able to trust and open ourselves. Here in Conamara, the mountains are terse and dark; left to themselves they would make for a brooding atmosphere. However, everywhere around, and in between, there are lakes. The surface of these lakes takes on the variations of the surrounding light to create subtle diffusions of colour. Thus their presence qualifies the whole landscape with a sense of warmth and imagination. If we did not feel that some ultimate kindness holds sway, we would feel outsiders confronted on every side by a world towards which we could make no real bridges..

The word ‘kindness’ has a gentle sound which seems to echo the presence of compassionate goodness. When someone is kind to you, you feel understood and seen. There is

no judgement or harsh perception directed towards you. Kindness has gracious eyes; it is not small-minded or competitive; it wants nothing back for itself.

Kindness strikes a resonance with the depths of your own heart; it also suggests that your vulnerability though somehow exposed is not taken advantage of; rather, it has become an occasion of dignity and empathy. Kindness casts a different light, an evening light that has the depth of colour and patience to illuminate what is complex and rich in difference. Despite all the darkness, human hope is based on the instinct that at the deepest level of reality some intimate kindness holds sway. This is the heart of blessing. To believe in blessing is to believe that our being here, our very presence in the world is itself the first gift, the primal blessing. As Rilke says “To be here is immense.” **Cont. Pg 3**

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Charter of Compassion

In a recent article Joan Chichester wrote of project TED. This think tank on new ideas in Technology, Entertainment and Design gave its *Make a Wish Award* to Karen Armstrong.

Joan writes: Armstrong's wish, after religious scholarship and writing was that TED would help create a universal charter for compassion among all the major religions of the world This is perhaps the first universally created document in the history of the world.

Armstrong has been working towards this idea for many years. She is a presenter in the TV/Link series on Global Spirituality. TED's initiative is the beginning of the fulfillment of a dream for her.

TED has taken up the challenge of writing a Charter of Compassion. The organisation gathered together a “Council of Conscience” from religious leaders throughout the world. They reviewed ideas and helped mold the final form. The purpose of such a charter is create a movement that binds humanity.

The Charter will also provide an antidote ‘ to the use of religion in justifying the use of violence.

Compassion is seen both as an idea and as an action that lifts the burden off the other.

The Charter will be launched in cities around the world on November 20th this year. This launch will mean all can obtain a copy of the charter and work towards it aims in their own areas. The Charter is a challenge to us all to live the Gospel in a very real way.



The Garvan Institute

This article published with thanks to Helen and her fellow walkers

Congratulations to all who took part in this fund-raising venture.

Stepping Stones

“The Nun’s Run”

On 24th May, Sisters of Charity, Helen Clarke, Leone Wittmak and Anna Parlevliet set off from Dubbo to walk 400kms to Darlinghurst in Sydney. Along the way they were joined by other Sisters of Charity who walked for varying sections of the route.

The run was born out of a dream that Helen Clark had to support cancer research at the Garvan St Vincent’s Campus Centre to commence in 2010. As the Sisters walked through Wellington, Molong, Orange, Bathurst, Lithgow and Katoomba they were raising awareness of the new centre’s support for

those in regional and rural communities. As one in two men and one in three women are diagnosed with cancer at some stage in their lives, it was no surprise that the sisters met many people who are either living with cancer or who have lost loved ones over the years to the disease.

“I will never forget the Australian people whom we met along the way. People offered us hospitality and gave generously to support us. Cars pulled up along the way to give money, cars and truckies tooted and we experienced great friendship everywhere,” said Sr Helen.

A highlight for the Sisters was the hospitality of Catholic people and in particular fellow religious—Josephites, Mercies, Ursulines, Charities and Christian Brothers. They opened their homes and hearts and treated the Sisters as part of their families.

The walk raised over \$180,000 while at the same time it was a lot of fun. The knowledge that they were generating support for a great cause more than compensated for the blisters and aching muscles that most of the walkers were experiencing by the end of the walk.



Dining Room Scenario: A Glimpse Behind the Scenes Joahne Canja-Sanguza



Ambience!

It has been another busy month for the team at St Josephs. We were pleased to be chosen as the venue for the 2009 *Societas Liturgica International Conference*. The event was held from the 9th to the 15th August. With approximately 200 attendees at the seven day event there was definitely no shortage of hungry mouths to feed.

The opening ceremony and accompanying celebration required much preparation behind the scenes. Menus, stock control, ordering, counting plates, cutlery and wine glasses were all the order of the day. We lived in interesting times during those days, as the Chinese proverb goes, as there were many different menu applications from breakfast, to full buffet lunches through to dinners and a cocktail party.

During morning and afternoon tea times percolators were busy churning out what our guests called “real” coffee with one pot after another delivered to cope with the demand. We simultaneously ran two buffet stations during the lunch and dinner services.



Our meal delivery system was efficient and, to our delight, we discovered we had the capacity to cater without compromise.

Thank you to all the Kitchen and Dining Room staff. Each one contributed to making this event such a success. We discovered we were flexible and able to cope with demands, and to multi-task as required. We hoped we provided service with a smile. It was wonderful to be able to serve people who were so dedicated to their ministry and work.

We know that the difference between a good and bad experience doesn’t just affect a single guest on a particular day. It affects many. Because of this it was important for us to design a good customer experience with a well presented venue, good quality food and a helpful staff.

We took pride in doing just that and look forward to further challenges.



On the 10th of August this year, **Societas Liturgica** opened its twenty-second Congress at St Joseph's Baulkham Hills. Societas, a gathering of liturgical scholars, meets every two years to share their research and process the theme of the Congress. This year the Congress studied the "Liturgical Year". There were 200 participants, plus support staff and visitors, coming from over 25 countries and drawn from most of our Christian Churches. We were particularly blessed by participants from Asia and our own Aboriginal communities.

Congress began on Monday evening, in the presence of invited Heads of Churches, with a welcome by the local Aboriginal community. President of the Australian Academy of Liturgy, David Pitman, welcomed all to the Australian gathering and President of **Societas Liturgica**, Jim Puglisi, opened the Congress.

Over the next five days St Joseph's played host to many fine papers and presentations from participants. The week was also marked by a tremendous exhibition of music available in Australia by the Song Company, an insight into the multicultural nature of Australian society provided by the East Timor-Leste, Tongan, Chinese and Vietnamese communities, and a book launch of papers written by both local and international writers on "Christian Worship in Australia".



St Joseph's Centre certainly made it possible for such a gathering. There was plenty of space for the 200 participants to gather in conference and in prayer. The facilities of the Centre were adequate for the gathering—providing meals for the 200 in a single sitting was made possible by creative use of the available spaces. The ever-present hospitality and generous attention by all the staff at the Centre made it all so enjoyable for the overseas guests.

Even though all were not able to be accommodated at St Joseph's, the week proved that St Joseph's is a possible venue for large conferences.

**From Reception: Working at St. Josephs
Heather Edwards**

They say Harrods in London have a policy where they TRY to deliver on all promises to their customers, well at St. Joseph's we not only promise but we DO deliver .

The office at St. Josephs is *womanned* by Mary, Heather, Gillian, Ellen, Irene and Sr. Mary and all of us can say honestly that no two days are the same.

Behind the scenes we prepare all administration documents, answer the phones, stock and sell from our little shop but most of all we have first contact with all Guests and Visitors. We like to think of ourselves as the "Directors of First Impressions."

St. Josephs is equipped with the best Audio Visual Equipment in all the meeting rooms and each staff member is trained to the highest degree to meet the requests of the Guests. We assist in making sure that all Retreats, Seminars, Conferences run smoothly and efficiently, this ensures that the Guest's time here is beneficial to their cause and of course they make a return booking!!!

At Reception we have had the strangest requests eg: "Can you sew a button on my shirt?" or to take a Guest to the local Medical Centre. All of these encounters make for an interesting time and as we said in the beginning "no two days are the same" and we wouldn't want it to be any different.

Our guests are our main concern because they are what keeps St. Josephs viable and without them St Josephs would not be what it is today. Coming to work everyday in such a beautiful, peaceful place makes our job that much better . . .sure beats working in an office in Parramatta . . .

A Word from the Director . . .

"They are humble too!!!"



Heather and



*THE MIRROR
LIKE
PERFECT
LOVE
WILL JUST
KEEP GIVING
OF ITSELF
TO ALL
BEFORE IT.
HAFIZ*

Editorial Continued from Pg 1

Nowhere does the silence of the infinite lean so intensely as around the form of a newly born infant. Once we arrive, we enter into the inheritance of everything that has preceded us; we become heirs to the world. To be born is to be chosen. To be created and come

to birth is to be blessed. Some primal kindness chose us, and brought us through the forest of dreaming until we emerge into the clear-ance of individuality, with a path of life opening before us through the world.

The beginning often holds the clue to everything that

follows. Given the nature of our beginning, it is no wonder that our hearts are imbued with longing for beauty, meaning, order, creativity, compassion and love. We approach the world with this roster of longing and expect that in some way the world will respond and confirm our

our desire. Our longing knows it cannot force the fulfilment of its desire; yet it does instinctively expect that primal benevolence to respond to it. This is the threshold where blessing comes alive.

(Taken from: **Benedictus—A Book of Blessings** John O'Donohue. Transworld Publishers. London. 2007)



A space for exploring life

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St. Joseph's Centre is set in 18 hectares in the Hills District of north-western Sydney. The Centre has available 68 rooms with ensuites for those groups requiring accommodation. As well there are numerous large conference rooms and technical facilities available for hire. Because of the size of the Centre it is possible to organize a large number of break-out rooms to facilitate discussion.

Our newly refurbished chapel also provides an additional area for use as a multifunctional space.

The conference rooms are all well equipped for audio-visual use.

Other facilities available include an art space, a games room, swimming pool, a labyrinth and numerous quiet spaces suitable for reflection and meditation.

We're on the web:

www.stjosephscentre.org.au



Reflection: Spring:



Spring unfolds for us in many ways and the emotional energy that this season awakens often includes a restlessness of spirit that urges all creation towards change. . . a change that is both urgent and immanent.

Perhaps it is a form of this universal restlessness that enables the seed in the ground to break open and begin its long journey towards the light. The embryonic plant has been held by the dark long enough.

The energy of restlessness, of attraction towards the light, impels the seed upward. Forces of life within it defy the downward pull of gravity. These forces overcome the attraction of the soil and the seed surfaces to become something visibly new.

Yet the plant still needs the dark so part of it remains below the surface of the earth and part above it.

Richard Rohr suggests that we need the darkness as well as the light because it is

in the dark that God works. For him the dark night of the soul is not a time of despair or loss but simply the space in which God works unbeknown to us.

Perhaps in our own personal journey we have discovered that change occurs even in the most suffering lives, in our darkest moments, when the awareness dawns that Christ is present in our suffering and is suffering with us.

A God who works in our darkness does not deny the dysfunctionality of our world, nor the struggle human beings have to maintain a meaningful life, or to survive the pain of loss and so on. The Christ who suffers with us only does so because he was sent by God and

God is love.

Spring with its pervading restlessness makes real the Incarnation as life takes on new shapes and forms. The constancy of the seasons show that the Incarnation is not a 'wrinkle in time' but an all pervasive act of the living God renewed for us many times in our life.

Let us rejoice in our restlessness, in the changes we are prepared to make this spring and in the promise of God: "Behold I make all things new!"

Colleen O'Sullivan rsj

