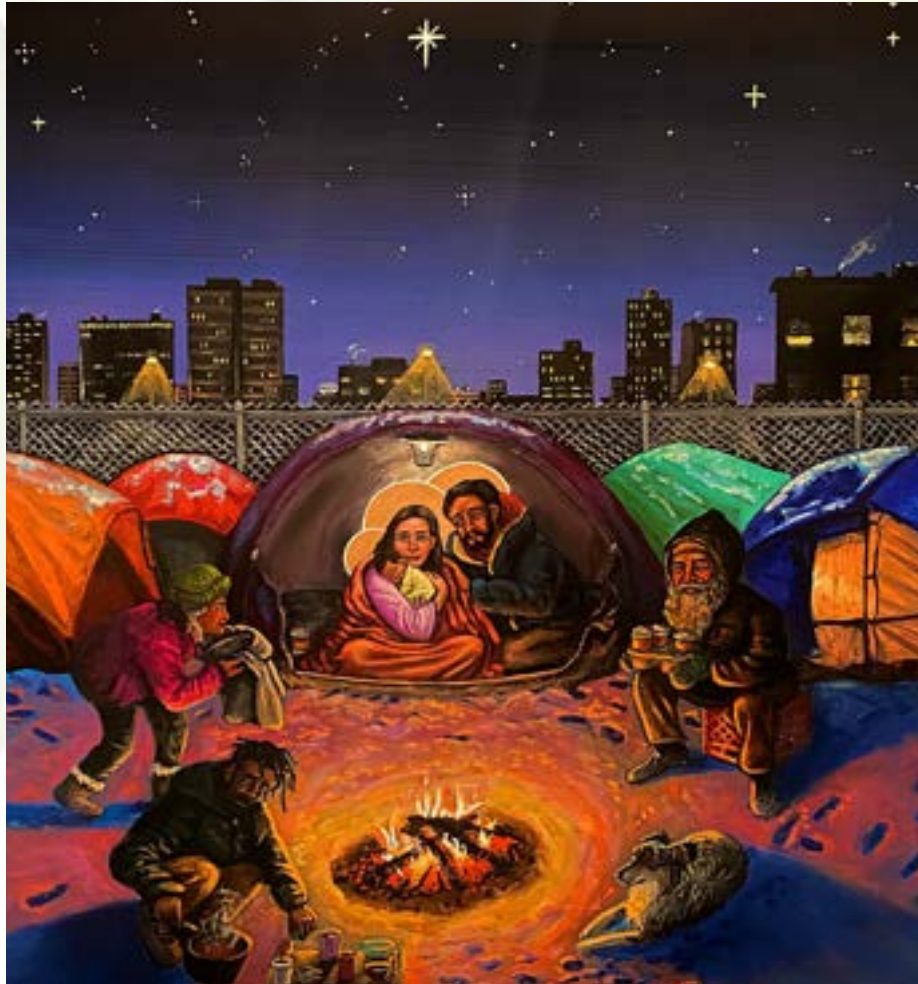


# Newsletter 2023



from  
**Jamberoo Abbey**

May there be an outpouring of  
Prayer and Peace  
over our world at this time



*Into this world, in which there is absolutely no room for him at all, Christ has come uninvited. But because he cannot be at home in it, because he is out of place in it, and yet he must be in it, his place is with those others for whom there is no room. Christ's place, is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons, tortured. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in this world.*

Thomas Merton ocsa

Christmas greetings to you all. This time of year usually has us looking forward and looking backwards. We become conscious of so much we have not done during this quickly fading year, of the ways in which we have perhaps let others down or the ways in which we have been hurt. We can find ourselves limping into 2024. Into the bargain, we are faced with the obvious - an increasingly dangerous world. No matter where we look there is war, division, catastrophe, hatred and we are confused, powerless and frightened for the future.

At the same time, perhaps some good things have come our way as well. We here at the abbey can rejoice because we have come to know so many more people with the opening of our cottages, the internet has provided opportunities to reach others through our on-line retreats and guidance sessions, to say nothing of contact with our monastic communities abroad. God has blessed us with increasing membership, new initiatives have been taken by our oblates, people have volunteered to help in our grounds and done so unobtrusively, to name but a few.

This year we have seen a rare sight, something we have not seen for perhaps six years. The Illawarra Flame tree bloomed this year, it made a spectacular sight throughout the region. There is one just outside our Church window. As many of you know these trees only bloom when they feel themselves under stress. They then put all their energy into flowering. Year after year we can look out and forget that the flame tree is even there, we can lose hope that it will ever bloom, we think it is only capable of broad green leaves and then one day it surprises us with a fiery red array that seems to come out of nowhere.



There is a parallel here for us. We too are under greater stress than perhaps at any other time in human history. But it isn't time to die, it is time to bloom. It is time to grace the world with hope. How can we do that? It is easier than we might imagine. Look inside your own heart and life this Christmas. Don't wait for someone else to fix things before you can act, don't wait for the endorsements of other people, their affirmations, apologies whatever. Look inside yourself and around you and claim the good that is in there. Once you have done that then act on it. Don't worry about the mistakes, leave those to God, He knows what to do with them.

And let's remember the good that comes our way, even the smallest fragment. It is a way of reminding ourselves that the Flame Tree does bloom. There was an old song years ago "Try to Remember". Part of those lyrics were *Try to remember and if you remember, then follow, follow, follow*. Let's make a resolution to do that this year, after all it is the good God whom



we are following, the God who says *For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future*. (Jeremiah 29:11) When we meet again for the newsletter of 2024 we might all have a story of life to tell, a story of hope fulfilled, and the world may just be a different place. Perhaps the flame tree will be seen again in our window. That is the hope in which we here at Jamberoo live and pray, we will take you with us.

Mother Hilda and all of us at the Abbey



## ENGLISH BENEDICTINE CONGREGATION – July 2022 & 2023

Mother Hilda

As some of you are aware there has been a momentous shift in our community history, we are now formal members of the English Benedictine Congregation. This move was brought about by a document from Rome *Cor Orans* which mandated that all communities of enclosed nuns needed to belong to a wider group. Happily, in 2022 we, along with the nuns of Kylemore Abbey in Ireland and Mariavall in Sweden, were formally accepted by the General Chapter of the Congregation and a new adventure has begun for us.

This has opened up areas of mutual benefit in terms of formation, advice and ever widening horizons. The stories of our connections between communities are evolving with much promise for the future. As was once said in a much dated history of renaissance, “The idea of progress has yielded to the idea of arrival”.



Since then we have been involved in several collaborations and work commissions. Sr Therese belongs to the Commission for the New Nuns' Constitutions, Sr Magdalen to the Commissions for Continuing Formation and I belong to the Commission for Inclusivity and the Election of the Abbot President. Most of our communication happens through zoom though both Srs Therese and Magdalen have needed to have face to face meetings overseas.

November, 2023, I too needed to attend a face to face series of meetings for the abbots and abbesses, this was held at Ampleforth Abbey York England. This was a very valuable meeting in making worthwhile connections and in being able to spend time together thanks to the excellent Benedictine hospitality of the monks and staff of Ampleforth.



We are blessed in our fellow travellers whose honesty and commitment to our monastic way of life is both refreshing and encouraging. These people are committed to seeing monastic life grow and thrive.

The starting point this November was our getting to know each other and establishing common ground. The whole time was facilitated by an Irish Marist priest, psychotherapist, facilitator and organisational consultant Fr Martin Daly sm. He did his job so well, we are looking forward to meeting again and pursuing our joint monastic endeavours in July next year.



Any trip to England always includes a visit to our sisters at Stanbrook Abbey, who are also in



York. One of our two founding sisters, Mother Magdalen Le Clerq was from that abbey and our links have remained strong across the years. They are very much “family”. It is a delight for us whenever any of them can come here, as they have done over the years, and it is always “home away from home” when we are with them at Stanbrook. Next year they will celebrate a significant milestone, four hundred years since

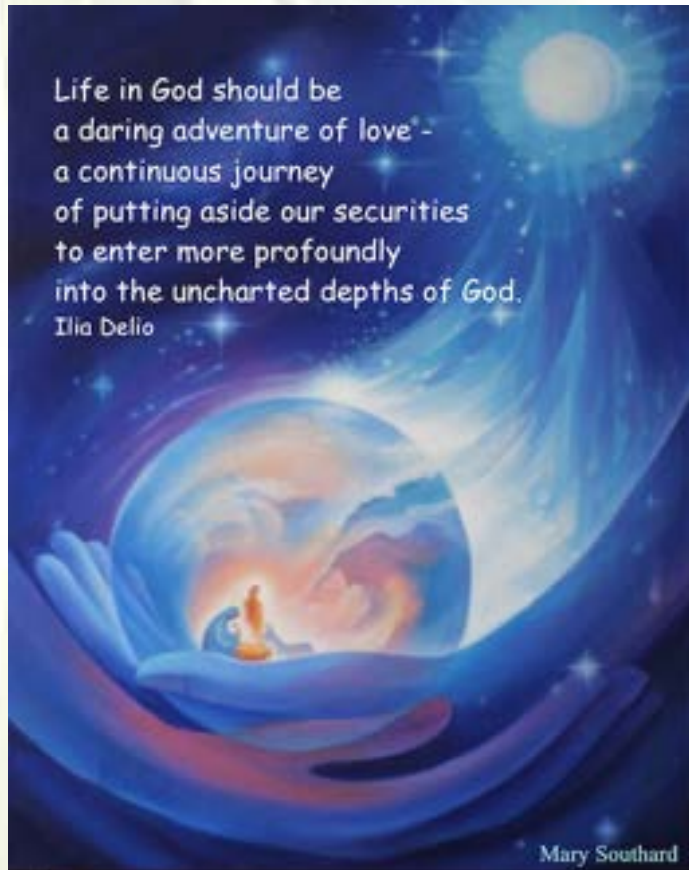
their foundation. Perhaps one day we will celebrate a like time in our history!



## Benet Hill Global Spiritual Direction Course 2022/23

Sr Veronica

Two years ago, I began a spiritual direction course from Benet Hill Monastery in Colorado USA. It is here that I found the contemplative heart of God seeking me out. I didn't expect that. I did want to connect more deeply with life and people of like minds and hearts. And it's that journey of life experience, visited in the surprising presence of a healing and compassionate God, that has brought me into a more open and trusting space within myself.



By creating a safe place of acceptance, the supportive open hearts of others invited me to be vulnerable, where slowly a revelation began to show me who I am and who I can be. I could discover my truer self and relax more into that acceptance of myself and others.

How did that happen I ask myself? Not all my action I discovered.

The surprising nature of God kept me seeing more of God's initiative happening in my life bringing deeper healing and freedom. I still am becoming the person God wants me to be.

What does God want to do there in my inner being and soul? Well that's what spiritual direction is about, finding out. There's a connection between our experiences in life and our discoveries of this mystery we name God in each other. When I open my heart to others I become vulnerable and when I do this in the presence of God I become whole. It's worth contemplating.

## JANUARY

### Arrival of our first EBC visitors since joining the Congregation

Sr Therese

Fr Gabriel Everett, EBC Formation Consultor, and Sr. Josephine Parkinson, Novice Mistress at Stanbrook Abbey, Yorkshire UK, arrived in January 2023 for three weeks with us.

The main purpose of the visit was to assess and evaluate our Formation Program here at Jamberoo. The visit involved conversations, discussions and meetings with Mother Abbess and our Formation Team: Srs Antonia, Therese and Mary Bernadette. This was a valuable opportunity for open and trustful listening, learning and sharing of issues and concerns related to the 9-year journey of our sisters in Formation, so that their formation would enable them to become true “seekers of God”, living monastic life according to the Rule of St. Benedict with fidelity and authenticity.



Our time together was also an opportunity for some outdoor fun and adventure for our visitors. Outings to the Blue Mountains and to Symbio Animal Park were part of this.

We appreciate the wisdom shared, and encouragement given to us throughout this time. We also value this worthwhile opportunity to strengthen and deepen the bonds of care and support between our EBC communities, especially for those who are involved in Formation.

Thank you Fr Gabriel and Sr Josephine. We had a lot of fun didn't we? Fr Gabriel dipped his first candle into hot coloured wax. Well done. Upon retirement you are on our list for employment in the Candle Department.





## A Gospel Reflection: Breaking the boxes and breaching the boundaries

Sr Magdalen osb

This reflection on Luke 4.21-30, the gospel for the fourth Sunday of ordinary time Year C was recorded for the *Australian Women Preach* podcast an initiative of WATAC and the Grail in November. You can listen to it on the following link: <https://anchor.fm/awp>

In this gospel passage we have arrived at the second half of the story of Jesus' return to Nazareth and the aftermath of his teaching in the synagogue. Here he breaks out of quite a few boxes into which he was placed by the expectations of those who knew him in his growing, and breaches many of the comfortable and familiar religious and cultural boundaries of his fellow Nazarenes.

Have you had the experience as have I – in the early twenties as I recall for myself – of returning home, young, fresh, so convicted, so *certain* that you had *all* the important answers – quite possibly the answers to the questions of life the universe and everything? Newly minted in adult experience – the first living away from home, the first job, the graduation, you arrive back home for the first time in quite a while, ready to take your place as this, well, *adult person* – expecting to be seen as such and, within not so very long things begin to go downhill. Your brother ignores you, your sister teases you, parent patronizes you mistaking you still for a child and for all the growing you believe you have done you shrink to those same habitual reactions and scripts which seem to have played out for as long as you can remember. Your place in family memory and history and dynamic, rises up to claim you, placing you back in the box from which you thought you had sprung free. A well-known American spiritual teacher is famed to have said, “if you think you have achieved enlightenment go and spend a week with your family!” Well, this seems to have been also part of the story of Jesus.

When Jesus stood up in the synagogue to read from the prophet Isaiah he was giving voice and form to the vocation, to the inner conviction, to the newly minted sense of core identity and destiny which had become clear to him in his experience of Baptism, and the time which followed, of testing, of purification, and of healing in the desert. From these powerful and transfiguring experiences Jesus realized in his deepest knowing that “the Father and I are One”. It is this core identity that is confirmed and affirmed and is a consistent thread in his teachings for *us* – “Father may they be one, may they know themselves as one with you, just as I do”.

And secondly, another way of naming his purification in the desert *might* be that he did his inner work, he worked with the temptations of his inner demons and finding healing, the demons left him, “for a while” says one translation and “until the opportune moment” says another. Like you and me the growing and healing in Jesus is not complete, he will continue to grow in truth and strength and dignity as his demons are provoked and confronted throughout his life, and this is the path he calls us to as well.





At the same time this Jesus who enters the synagogue in Nazareth is a person who has come to know who he is and will not be boxed by the preconceptions, expectations or stereotypes which others try to place on him, a man who has come to know what is important and who is not afraid to breach boundaries, religious, social or political or personal, which may limit the vocation and mission he has come to know as his own calling from God.

It is worth bringing to mind those elements of the prophetic mission with which he identifies from Isaiah 61, because these are the bones of contention which drive the drama which ensues.

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and has anointed me*

*To preach the good news, hope to the poor*

*To heal the broken hearted*

*To proclaim release to captives*

*Thus to give sight to the blind*

*To strengthen with forgiveness those who are bruised.*

(Loosely translated from the Aramaic Peshitta)



Then Jesus sits down, and all eyes are fixed on him and he says: “This very day this passage *has been* fulfilled in your hearing today.”

Obviously, Jesus speaks to them at some length and the story tells us that at first, he won the approval of all. They liked what he had to say – the gracious words that came from his lips. But what *was* it that was heard or not heard? What *was* seen or not seen? What did he challenge or provoke in them that these people turned on a dime, from an admiring crowd to an angry mob who wanted to kill him? Perhaps it was that Jesus said: “Today”! A challenge to those who look with nostalgia to the past, or again to those who look ahead expectantly to the time which is to come. No, Jesus is all about NOW, today, waking up, and perhaps they did, but not quite in the way Jesus might have hoped.

They certainly stopped and took a look. They saw the lad who had grown up in their midst, played as a child with them, or with their children, just an ordinary boy, with a beginning shrouded surely with mystery, suspicion, gossip. This is Jesus, the carpenter’s son. You are only one of us.

And the eyes which had begun to open wide with wonder became clouded with the dense certainty of what they thought they knew and it begs the question of us: Who can hear the good news? Who has ears to hear and eyes to see the wisdom he teaches and the wisdom he embodies? Who can accept the healing he is bringing? Surely those whose eyes are not clouded and whose ears are not dense with the density and certainty of their “knowing”.

It seems to me that Jesus is quite a bit provoked himself and he challenges them saying: “No doubt you will quote me the saying, ‘physician heal yourself’” and the “yourself” he refers to here in, ancient middle eastern culture, did not refer to the individual as we would understand ‘individual’ rather it is the tribe, the group. Jesus realises that in fact these people he has come home to are saying “hey, you are one of us, you healed others, heal us”.

Here is the climax of this gospel, this is the powerful point in time. In this home ground, where Jesus is tempted to be diminished and shrink back into the boxes that were made in his childhood and growing up, to be “you are just Joseph’s son”, he remembers and is able to stand firm in that shining core identity which was revealed to and purified in him in the baptism and the desert sojourn.

Now Jesus provokes them a bit more, taking them out of their comfort zones, challenging their blindness and lack of understanding of the Scriptures and in claiming this new identity he is standing with the prophets: “Yes, I am a prophet, and you will no more accept me (or have the capacity or ability to accept me) than our ancestors could accept Elijah or Elisha”. Jesus knows he can do no healing there.

No, there is too much back story, which plays so loudly in their heads that they cannot comprehend him. Jesus is in good company as Elijah and Elisha likewise could not heal their own. The gates of heaven were closed and it was the foreigners Naaman the Syrian and the Sidonean widow of Zarephath who were healed and helped by the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Just so, Jesus can do no healing here, because they neither see him nor hear him as he really is.

Do you find that when we do *not* know the back story, the prequel to some saga or drama in our lives, *then* we are able look with fresh eyes, and hear with quiet ears and open heart? Then there is room to see reality and what is really happening now. We have no investment in the story being other than it is. However, when we are invested in our story being, just so, we are like the crowd, blind, deaf and stubborn of heart.

Digging in their heels the crowd become enraged and turn on a dime. Feeling rejected, probably confused and disappointed they refuse to see and hear anymore and they usher him out of the synagogue intending to throw him off the cliff. Literally? Perhaps. Certainly, figuratively they choose to toss him out, refuse to see or hear, and so are lost to the good news and healing which Jesus may offer them.



But this is the healed and the healing one. This is the one who has been affirmed, who emerged from the desert whole of heart and healed. And so, he walked away. He had no need to engage there, nothing to defend, nothing to prove. Jesus knew who he was and he was simply able to walk away, right through the middle of this crowd.

Jesus breaches the boundaries and walks through them as if they were not there.



## JUNE

### Strengthening the Vine

Sr Therese

The typical warm Benedictine hospitality and welcome we received on arrival at Ampleforth Abbey made us all feel very much 'at home'! "We" were the group of Novice Masters and Mistresses from the EBC communities across the world meeting again for the first time since Covid. It was however, the very first time for the Novice Mistresses from Kylemore Abbey Ireland, and Mariavall Monastery Sweden, and for me, to be part of this group.



The theme of the meetings, "Strengthening the Vine", emphasised connecting (and reconnecting) with each other, with opportunities to share our personal vocation stories and our experiences as Novice Masters and Mistresses in our communities.



As well as updates on the 'happenings' within the EBC, topics from various presenters included "Spiritual Needs of Young People", as well as a group of members of the Manquehue Apostolic Movement, Peru, sharing their experience of "Spiritual Accompaniment" which was indeed inspiring.

Popular UK Historian and Author, Lucy Beckett, spoke eloquently about her favourite Novice Master (St. Aelred), and led a guided tour of the stunning ruins of Rivaulx Abbey.



The high point of each day was sharing Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours with the Ampleforth monks in their magnificent Church. Spending an evening with the monks in their Calefactory, and having Mass followed by 'lunch on the garth' with the community at Stanbrook are also special memories of our time together.

Our final farewell was the opportunity to share and recall the experiences of this valuable time together.

Having time afterwards with our sisters at Stanbrook Abbey in the peaceful Yorkshire countryside was next! This was an opportunity for the Novice Mistresses from the four EBC Nuns communities to spend time together, sharing and developing deep bonds of understanding, support and encouragement of each other in our work with our sisters in formation.



Time was also spent having discussions concerning the drafting of our new Constitutions and an outing to Whitby was a day of great celebration for us all.





As I gather the threads of all these days, I recall with deep gratitude, the hospitality of both Abbot Robert and the Ampleforth community and of Abbess Anna and the Stanbrook community, and I thank those who planned and organised this gathering with such care and thoughtfulness.

I have been truly blessed by many precious moments and experiences of community – praying, giving, receiving, sharing, and joyful conviviality with my brothers and sisters in the EBC.

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### **The Covenant of Peace**

*“My love for you will never leave you, and my covenant of peace with you will never be broken”, says the Lord. (Isa 54:10)*

Photo: Sr Mary Bernadette

## JULY

### **Reflection Day – Edmund Rice College**

Sr Antonia Curtis was invited to take part in a reflection day for staff at Edmund Rice College in Wollongong in July. She was part of a four person panel from four different religious groups. The presenters included Rabbi Zalman Castel a Jewish Rabbi, Calisha Bennett a Muslim woman educator, Theresa Ardler an Aboriginal educator and Sr Antonia. Sr Mary Bernadette Sunarjo accompanied Sr. Antonia and assisted with the presentation of the PowerPoint which Mother Mary had prepared to go with Sr. Antonia talk.



The day centered around the following statement which the RE Coordinator at Edmund Rice had asked the group to consider:

*People have an aspiration to have a sense of inner peace - how do you find it? How does that then impact your work and interaction with others? How do you contribute to building a community of peace? This year the theme for Reconciliation Week is 'Being a Voice for Generations' - building on that, how do we open spaces to hear voices of those who are unlike us? Those whom we rarely encounter? How can we be the ones who seek encounter?*

Sr Antonia introduced her topic with the following words:

In this reflection experience we will be opening out the Benedictine motto of Pax (Peace) by pondering the values of Reverence and Community, both of which are integral to the Rule of St Benedict. Our way of being in community and our reverential living toward all of creation profoundly effects/begets peace, within ourselves, our families, our communities, society and the world. Peace begets peace so it needs to begin in our own hearts first. This way of being in



community, and this reverential living are not just for monks and nuns but for all of us if peace is “our quest and aim”. (Rule of St Benedict) Within the context of these talks we will be practicing the values of silence and listening, both of which are critical for peaceful living

From Rabbi Zalman

“Yet, perhaps we must make peace with disquiet, with not having answers to all the questions but in sitting with some of the questions that arise in the human encounter of an infinite God, through the 70 faces of the Torah.”

From Calisha Bennett

“In this session we will discover the concept of inner and outer peace in Islam as humans struggle to navigate their way through the turmoil in the world. Common assumptions and misconceptions about Islam and Muslims will be addressed as well as an investigation into the attainment of peace through submission to Almighty God.”

From Theresa Ardler.

“We will be considering Aboriginal Spirituality as the heart of Aboriginal Culture for thousands of years.”

## FEEDBACK

Given the highly interactive and depth presentations of this day, the general consensus was that this was a day well worth having. We applaud the initiative of the Leadership team at Edmund Rice College and its Religious Education Co-Ordinator Judith Hurley for the great insight they showed in enabling this day. Surely this is matter of enormous import in these the days of our times. It proved to be of inestimable value to the educators present since it falls on their shoulders to enlighten the minds and hearts of their students toward ways of peace.

As the day proved, this not just a matter of information, but rather a matter of the heart, a matter of personal and communal understanding, a matter of truly living the “unity within the diversity”. Diversity as we saw during the presentations is not only life giving but also points us in the direction of our deeper selves and to who we can be as a nation, as a neighbourhood, as a small community.

When we can live from that deeper place, then we might know peace. The personal example and committed witness of those involved, Rabbi Zalman, Claisha Bennet, Teresa Adler and Sr Antonia spoke volumes. It has enhanced relevance now given the events unfolding in Gaza as this goes to print. It also speaks when we consider the light of our own indigenous peoples.



At Jamberoo we were humbled to be asked, in the competent person of Sr Antonia, to be a part of this venture. St Benedict exhorts us in his Rule, to make “peace our quest and aim” Prol.17 and that was certainly the message of this day.

## AUGUST

### Silver Jubilee

Sr Joanna celebrated her jubilee on the 4<sup>th</sup> August which marked twenty-five



years of monastic profession. Her brother Kim and her sister Verity were present for the occasion. Fortunately, they were able to come down the night before and share the office of Vespers with us. Mother Hilda shared a brief homily relevant to the occasion using the analogy so dear

to Sr Joanna's whole being, namely that of music. Here is an excerpt from that homily:

*With this jubilee, we have a new piece of music at once old and new. It belongs to Joanna and in sharing it she gifts us as well with an awareness of our own music. The crescendo and the diminuendo of the music takes us back and with a smile turns our face to the horizon where the mystery of our original call from God beckons once more. We know it again and as if for the first time. At Lauds this morning we sang 'Lord God we give you thanks for all your saints' and then came the words which very much fit our Sr Joanna today:*

*'Who sought the trackless footprints of your feet,  
who took into her own a hand unseen  
and heard a voice whose silence was complete.'*

*As we sit and listen to this different way of life, notes of incredible beauty rise from the heart, notes that brings the sight and sound of those we have loved, those who have, in their kindness and in their presence in our live, become an ostinato which invades our dreams.*





*We hear the chords of fidelity that have blessed our lives. We are so glad to have Verity and Kim with us for this celebration, a tangible reminder of the fidelity and goodness Joanna has known through her family.*



*There will be the odd minor key every now and then and that is as it should be. In all our lives there has been pain, there has been loss and that loss and pain in whatever way it came to us, was like the refiner's fire that purified our notes and made them true. Our pain, like the phoenix, can rise and take our song to new heights and at that same time bring the sweet song of the magpie in the gathering evening.*

*There is of course far more, but that is for you, Joanna to know and consider. So we would say: Thank you Joanna, thank you for permitting us to share your music, to be a part of your music, thank you for being part of our music so that tomorrow we are gifted with a whole symphony, that has always been these twenty five years and yet is new.*

Morning tea in our guestry the next day was a wonderful occasion and a great opportunity to speak with Kim and Verity. This was followed later by dinner in our Community Room. There was joy all around in Sr Joanna and this opportunity to share such a significant milestone with her.

### 80 years young

On 26<sup>th</sup> August we celebrated the eightieth birthday of our Sr Antonia and as it happened so did forty of her relatives, including her sister Kerrie who travelled from Canberra with her husband Ed. Nieces, nephews, cousins, brothers-in-law and friends all descended on our guentry dining room and filled the air with sheer delight for and in Antonia or “Tesh” (short for Therese) as she is affectionately known. Sadly Antonia’s sister Margaret, presently in Darwin, was unable to attend and this special gathering brought into stark relief the absence of Leonie who passed away in 2022. Perhaps they were present though in their adult children who would not have missed their aunt’s big birthday.

The common denominator for all the guests is that they shared some connection, big and small with Coolamon, a town in the Riverina region of south-west New South Wales, where Antonia and her four sisters, Leonie, Elizabeth, Margaret and Kerrie were born. As it happened their father Gerald was born there too. Their mother Ella was born more locally in Wollongong.

The stories flowed thick and fast, the laughter was deafening and a great cross section of generations mingled together. They needed no entertainment. Kerrie provided a beautiful cake for the occasion and Sr Mechtilde and the community provided the rest of the fare. Nothing was lacking.



The community celebrated on the actual birthday, 22<sup>nd</sup> August, with yet another morning tea and festive dinner and the same swapping of stories although with a different flavour. We remembered the visits of Ella, Antonia’s mother, who was always such a gracious lady. We asked Antonia to tell us the wonderful stores from her boarding school days with the Sisters of St Joseph in Goulburn and her short-lived career as a child violinist! We heard again our favourite Coolamon stories of a sheep in the boot of a car taking an unscheduled shopping trip to Wagga, and releasing itself at the Coolamon Bowling Club after the journey. Then there was the car which exuded flames through the floor until it went through the creek, the only way to travel in it was with one’s feet on the seat. There was also the heartache of drought, floods, storms and sick children. We never tire of hearing it all.

Antonia assured us that her birthday was a very happy one and we thought so too. We are blessed to have her prayerful and wise presence in our midst, may she endure for many moons to come!



## SEPTEMBER

### Eulogy for Sr Clare Gamble, 1928-2023

Mother Hilda

If one looks for a dominant word which describes the life of our Sr Clare, it would be the word RELATIONSHIP and she lived it in all its forms. She formed relationships very easily and so has left behind her an interlocking of life.



#### HER FAMILY

There are the relationships with family her niece Clare being of special fondness, there was/is a bond there like none other. As many of you know Clare's early life was shrouded in sorrow with the untimely death of her mother and the eventual separation from her father Walter, when Annette and Clare went to Perth to be in the care of their grandmother. The grandmother died not all that long after their arrival and twenty one year old Aunty Ellen took over their care. Clare only saw her father for a few months when she went back to Sydney before joining the Good Shepherd sisters. She was never to see him again. It was because of that that Clare formed a great relationship with Mary the Mother

of God. As a bereft twelve year old, she actually ran down to the Church in the minutes after her mother died and asked Mary to be her mother and she was indeed exactly that.

Her siblings, Annette, Bernard and their children were much loved by Clare. They were more than people who shared the same DNA. She knew exactly what each was up to, exactly what was dear to their hearts, she was a ready confidant for all their troubles and joys, their visits to Jamberoo and their letters meant everything to her. That included the members of the extended family, those who by virtue of their attachment to anyone, was counted as family too. Clare was faithful to her family.

#### GOOD SHEPHERD SISTERS

At age eighteen Clare began the wonderfully fulfilling relationship with her new family, the Good Shepherd Sisters with whom she remained in relationship her entire life. News of them was eagerly awaited, their concerns were her concerns, nothing about them or her life with them was ever forgotten. The stories were as fresh as on the day they happened. Clare remained faithful to her Good Shepherd Sisters.

#### FRIENDSHIP

Friendship always mattered to Clare witnessed by so many of you here today. I won't mention names because each of you had your own unique relationship with Clare, she could bend and stretch to meet each where you were. Her office was a veritable library that contained letters, cards, notes, photos from so many of you; she kept them because they brought you and the memory of you to her. She has taken that memory with her now. She remains faithful to you.

#### HER SISTERS IN JAMBEROO

Clare's vocation to Jamberoo was a gift that came later in her life and as with all of us, it was not an easy road in the beginning. Yet with typical devotion and doggedness she applied herself

to every aspect of the life. Her favourite quotes from the Rule of St Benedict embodied how she lived. In Chapter Four we read “Never give a hollow greeting of peace” and her life of relationship with each one bore that out. Again, in the same chapter “Never lose hope in God’s Mercy”, by which she meant hope in the God’s incredible fidelity. Clare took our way of life, a life of constant conversion, very seriously. She did not shy away from the deeper journey, she never stopped asking herself the essential questions, her capacity for self-reflection was genuine and so often resulted in an immediate apology to even the newest member of the community. There was a part of Clare that, like a true Benedictine, was always a beginner. Clare was faithful to us and to the life

#### RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

Clare had a beautiful singing voice, was a wonderful cook, meticulous in all she did, was hard working, a woman of unstinting service who left no stone unturned in whatever she undertook. However, these qualities did not define her, they do not tell us who she was. It is the most important relationship that gives us that answer and offers substance to every other relationship namely her relationship with the God of her life. It was close, it was real, it was ever new. Clare knew that God IS relationship.

So many of us when we came to Vigils at 5.00 a.m. would get into the Church, and yet no matter how early we were, Clare was always there before us, her eyes closed, her soul in deep communion with her God. So often she would sit with her favourite parts of Scripture from Psalm 62 “O God you are my God for you I long.” There was an understanding between them and Clare was faithful to her God as he was to her.

Now she is with the one for whom she has always longed and she knows the fullness of life she sought in life. She is finally with her parents Ettie and Walter, with Annette and Bernard with her nephews Mark and Damien. She takes us with her and her in prayer will continue to be faithful to us all.





### **By the work of our hands**

This year we have been focusing on marketing our products so for a week in September we had our art, candles, crafts and other handmade products on display at the Old Fire Station exhibition centre in Kiama.



It was a wonderful success financially but also as a local community event. It was holiday time in Kiama and more than a thousand people came in to view our work and purchase our products.



We couldn't do it without our generous helpers Jemma & Marie  
and, of course, Rafa (Rafael)

**Click on the following for a quick view of the display**

<https://youtu.be/2IeylUwVWIA>

**Link to Abbey Crafts & Books:**

<https://www.jamberoobbey.org.au/shop/shop-home/>

## SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER

### Overseas Visitors

#### **Sr Laura Swan osb**

In September Sr Laura Swan osb from St Placid's Priory in Seattle United States came to give us our annual retreat. Sister holds a Masters in Christian Ministry and Renewal from Franciscan University. She also has a Masters of Theological Studies and a Post-Masters in Spiritual Direction, both from Seattle University. She is a widely read author of all things relevant to Benedictine Spirituality including the Wisdom of the Desert Mothers and Fathers, and the Beguine Movement. She is a respected historian and archivist. Sister Laura has also served her community as both Prioress and Formation Director for many years.



All that said, Sister clearly brought us a wealth of lived monastic and human experience. It was obvious to us that her wisdom and compassion has its roots deeply embedded in a solid life of prayer. We were more than blessed to have her with us and to continue our connection with her.

Her visit to Australia was shared with our Good Samaritan Sisters who likewise partook of her wisdom through several presentations and a retreat. These wonderful sisters opened their doors to include oblates and anyone else who wished to partake of the opportunity to sit at the feet of such a knowledgeable guide.





### **Sr Judith Sutera osb**

Sr Judith did not exactly come on an aeroplane to visit us but she did do so through the mechanism of zoom!! Sister is a member of the Benedictine monastery of Mount Saint Scholastica in Atchison, Kansas. She has degrees in psychology, sociology counselling and theology. She is an oblate director, spiritual director, author, and director of retreats and workshops on monastic spirituality.



A brief search of the internet will reveal her many books and articles including: *St. Benedict's Rule: An Inclusive Translation*. Sister has given six sessions to us during the year, all centred on the Rule. They have been invaluable in adding to the quality and understanding of our way of life. We hope to continue with her teaching into next year.

+ + + + +



### **The Window**

*Windows allow us to see past the boundaries of our lives. (unknown)*

Photo: Sr Mary Bernadette

## **Visitation**

In October we were blessed with the company of our Abbot President Abbot Christopher Jamison osb from England and Mother Franziska Lukas osb from Dinklage Abbey in Germany.

They came to conduct the official time of Visitation. This is a canonical requirement for every Religious Community to ensure that all is well and to offer assistance and advice as needed.

Under the English Benedictine Congregation (EBC), of which we are now a member, this happens every four years. For us this was a first, since we were admitted to membership at the last General Chapter of the EBC in July 2022.

It was a joy to be able to share our life with them for the ten days they were here and cemented the bonds already growing with our new membership. It was a pity that time did not allow for a little sightseeing of the surrounds. Abbot Christopher is Australian by birth and knows the layout of the country but this was Mother Franziska's first visit and hopefully not her last.





## Oblate Initiatives

Rev Cameron Freese

On 28 October 2023, myself and Sharon Mitchell commenced what we hope will be the beginning of many more Oblate gatherings in South-East Queensland. In conversation with Mother Hilda and Sr Hildegard, we both recognised the difficulty of regular connection with our home communities when many of us live at great distance from them. We also recognised the importance of connection with each other and the support our home communities and other Oblates provide.



As a consequence, we are developing a space here in Brisbane where any Oblate from any Abbey can come and connect and provide support to each other when we are away from our home communities. At this stage we plan on having quarterly Oblate gatherings in 2024 with an initial time of refining our processes and program.

The first day was slim in attendance but it was deeply spiritual as we gathered to pray, to reflect with *Lectio* and share some fellowship with each other. I was able to find videos of Mother Hilda on YouTube (Wisdom from the Abbey) and one of them “God is looking for you” formed the basis of our morning together. Our first meeting wasn’t complicated and that’s likely how we will continue. It was lovely to stop and connect with each and with God.

We all know love and miss the communities to which we are attached. We hope that in moving forward into 2024 we can bring a small piece of what we experience in our home communities into our lives together in South East Queensland as we support each other from afar.

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Area Dean Moreton Deanery  
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## Our oblates who have made their Oblate Commitment this year



8/1/23	Margaret (Ruth) Heuschele of Toowoomba, Queensland
1/4/23	Joanna (Hildegard) Hayes, of Brisbane, Queensland
1/4/23	Christina (Aelred) Perez, of Subiaco, Western Australia
1/4/23	Catriona (Faustina) Nunan, of Albion Park, New South Wales
11/11/23	Nicola (Margaret Mary) Gooden, of Shellharbour City, New South Wales
11/11/23	Michel (John) Campos, of Melbourne, Victoria.

Usually an Oblate takes a new name on the occasion of her/his commitment – the names taken are shown in brackets.

Sr Hildegard

The Oblates of our community can only be described as holy people. I have been oblate director since 1990, and I continue to be overwhelmed by their spirit of prayer, their integrity of life and their thirst for justice and peace in a world which is under the great shadow of war. Where there is only destruction of human life, our Oblates want to up-build human life. Where there are only secular values, our oblates want the values of the Gospel put into place. We thank God for them, with their sincerity and truth, and their embracing of the Benedictine way. We wish all our Oblates a Christmas and New Year blessed with the power of deep love.



## NOVEMBER

### **Spirituality Day Canberra - Called Deeper: a story of spiritual journey**

Sr Magdalen was invited to lead a day of prayer and meditation at St Vincent de Paul Catholic



Church, Aranda. The day was hosted by the Christian Meditation and Centering Prayer groups in Canberra and the invitation to attend was extended to all who have an interest in contemplative/spiritual practice. The ecumenical flavour of the day was both inspiring and encouraging – as was the hospitality, welcome and sense of belonging which drew

everyone present together.

Sr Magdalen says: “Contemplative practice, prayer and perseverance are three markers which help keep us on the road of spiritual growth. To that end the day offered periods of input, reflection, practice and sharing - reminding us that we are always in good company as we journey.”

There was much praise for the graces which flowed during that day. Many spoke of the wisdom they heard from Sr Magdalen, the doors that were opened, the paths that were affirmed and the commitment to prayer which was strengthened by participation in this day. There was a growing sense of community in that shared time together.

Should you wish to experience more of what Sr Magdalen offers in the area of prayer and guided mediation please go to her YouTube channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCULHhg3GOU10wSpP8t3QOQw>

**Thresholds Retreat** 24-26 November, 2023 Sr Magdalen also offered a pre-Advent weekend retreat exploring the theme of Thresholds. Our cottages were full for this event. The retreat combined the contemplative practice of meditation, with the body prayer sourced from Julian of Norwich, and we kept company with Mary as she walked toward the threshold of the birth of Jesus.

Sr Magdalen: The time together opened with an exploration of the nature of threshold, the reality of change and transition in our lives. It suggested how we may identify and maintain our balance within lives which are always in process of one transition or another.

Each session then focused on one gesture of Julian’s prayer: Await - Allow - Accept – Attend. We explored each of these fluid movements of prayer and were invited to use them as a practice by which we are better able to understand and navigate the waters of change in our lives. Hopefully what is experienced in these contemplative practices is both the growing felt sense of our deep self, held in the loving embrace of God and also a profound sense of our connectedness and belonging - to self, to God and to each other.



Our guests told us that this was a *transformative* experience for them *in terms of teaching silence, space and Eucharist, being wrapped in holy mystery, an opening out into the more of God*. We share here, with permission, a poem written by one of the participants Sarah Kirsop which sprang from her complete immersion in the working of grace and insight during this retreat.

**Another Way Home** (echoing the movements of awaiting, allowing, accepting and attending)

Just as the three Wise Men,  
Dazzled by wonder,  
Transfigured by the baby Jesus,  
Went home by another way,  
So,  
We,  
Risking delight,  
Risking everything,  
Can choose to leave  
By another way.  
Hand in hand with the Beloved.  
Stilled.

Hands on lap,  
Waiting.

Arms stretched heavenwards  
Releasing,  
And being released.  
Breathing.  
Breathing in,  
Breathing out.

Hands gently cupped over our heart,  
Source of wonder,  
Fount of wisdom.  
Pondering.  
Treasuring.





Hands open,  
Palms faced outward towards encounter.  
Keeping vigil with our lives,  
And,  
Finally realising,  
« I am » is  
The Other.  
« I am » is  
« it just is »  
(it may not be moral).  
We are the Other.  
We are One.  
We are Home.

+ + + + +



### **Heaven and Earth**

*Between heaven and earth there is no between.  
And so, between God and the soul there is no between.*

**Julian of Norwich**

Photo: Sr Mary Bernadette

### Visit of our friends Doug & Chris Pitman

Douglas and Christine Pitman have been tuning and maintaining our church organ for over thirty years. All good things come to an end as change is inevitable in the lives of all of us. And so, it came to the time when Doug couldn't manage to go on climbing the ladder inside the organ and tuning the Swell and then the Great. Doug has suffered for years with a painful back, and we knew that his ageing back would give up one day.



Doug handed over our Church Organ to Matt Richards, of Pitchford Organ Builders. In the short time Matt has been coming, we have welcomed his family and enjoyed their company.

What we didn't expect was that Doug would become seriously ill with cancer. We were shattered by this news. Just when he could finally take a break and retire from work, his health gave way to a terminal illness.

Chris brought Doug to the abbey in November, to say his final farewell, and we joined them for morning tea. Doug played the organ once again for us, and true to his spirit of generosity, brought a tool box, full of tools needed to tune the organ. He has left it there for Matt Richards, in case Matt takes on an apprentice. Doug always so thoughtful and generous! We will miss Doug and Chris and we owe them a debt of gratitude that can never be paid in full.





## Inter-faith Sharing – Visit of the Buddhist Nuns from the Nan Tien Temple

Sr Maureen-Therese

On November 27<sup>th</sup>, the community at the Abbey had the privilege of sharing hospitality with the Buddhist Nuns of Nan Tien Temple. Rev. Youji and 5 of her Venerable Nuns came with 11 students from Fo Guang Srimala College in Taiwan. The students were in Australia on an overseas Buddhist study course with the intention of expanding their horizons.



We enjoyed a lively morning tea together where there was much talking, laughter and moments



of profound sharing as we listened to each other. While we are different in our traditions and beliefs, we also recognised and were surprised at how similar are both our values and lifestyle. Both the Buddhist Nuns and ourselves share the vocation of living apart from the world but very much at its heart.



Rev Youji asked if we would share our Midday prayer with them. It was 20 minutes of connectedness between two traditions. A brief time of chanting, silence and deep reverence. The willingness to understand and be together in peace was palpable.

The students then gave us an opportunity to listen to them sing in Mandarin and then in English, a beautiful song about how to bring peace, mindfulness and wholeness to our lives.

We shared gifts and then in 2 short hours our visitors had to leave for their next destination, Kiama. Rev. Youji said they were to have lunch in Kiama but after the morning tea she felt it would be entirely unnecessary!

Rev. Youji and her Nuns warmly invited our Sisters to visit them at the Temple, which is only 20 minutes from the Abbey. We look forward to fostering this connection between our two monasteries and have another opportunity for Inter-Faith sharing.





DECEMBER

# The Good Oranges

Sr Petra

We have Thursdays as an unstructured day here at the Abbey. An unstructured day for us is like your Sunday in the professional working world. The *horarium* (timetable) for the day is 9.30 am for Lauds combined with Communion and then 5 pm for Vespers. The rest of the day is free. Other prayers are prayed privately. Some of you might have wondered, what do nuns do in their free day? Well, we balance our work and prayer with nurturing the gifts that God gave us in form of our hobbies, or activities that are live-giving for us. Some of us do gardening, some do knitting, some reading, some watching DVDs, some might catch up on sleep or very needed rest or do extra study.



## Plucked with Joy

One particular Thursday, Yvonne came to me with an idea, “Petra! Let’s go to the farm and pick oranges. Grace will be coming too once she is finished at the garden.” I responded with great excitement for doing something outdoors and down at the farm! We went fully equipped with buckets, ladders (to reach the oranges high up on the trees), and the tractor because we aimed for loads of oranges and they’ll be too heavy to bring back. The 3 of us managed to

bring back 5 buckets of oranges with all oranges and all personnel packed onto the tractor! How’s that for an achievement.



### **Loaded with Love**

In the kitchen was where the real work happened. I washed the oranges. Yvonne wiped them and sorted them out between those that would look good for dried oranges and those more suited for juicing. We didn't sort between lambs or goats in these oranges. They are all good lambs and good goats! <sup>1</sup>

Sr Marie Grace worked through the good looking oranges, sliced them one by one, coated them with sugar and put them into the oven, while Yvonne juiced the good tasting oranges for the benefit of all the nuns in the community.



### **Packed with Care**

The next day, Sr Therese contributed the idea of packing these oranges and selling them at the Advent Day retreat on Saturday. You know how when the Spirit moves, everything just falls into place? Well, that was what happened.

Sr Therese coated some of the dried oranges with chocolate. Then we spent our rest time on Friday packing them nicely.

<sup>1</sup> See "Good Goats: Healing Our Image of God," a book by Dennis Linn which is a recommended reading.



On Saturday, we put these oranges on display during the Advent Retreat. Some people asked, what they were for? Well, just so you know, you can: dip them in hot tea, use as a cocktail, a cake decoration, add flavour to soup or stew, or just simply eat them as they are - a healthy snack and delicious too. We managed to sell quite a few and the remainder went to our shop and sold quickly. It turns out the proceeds of this sale enabled us to replace an item in the kitchen that was broken.



We thank those who supported our impromptu fundraising effort. And we pray that you may be blessed with the goodness of these Abbey oranges.

What do we do on Thursdays? We Harvest the Good Oranges!



Sr Grace is getting ready for the next exciting adventure.  
Above: all produce from our Abbey gardens.

### ***Let the Light Come***

On December 2 we held the first day retreat at the Abbey since the arrival of Covid in 2020. It was with great delight we welcomed familiar and new faces to join us for this day of retreat for Advent. *Let the Light Come* was our theme. Some came from as far afield as Sydney and Canberra. This was a day especially set aside for reflection with Christmas in mind. A day to visit hope, to look toward the light that may just have escaped us during this past year, and yet still shines brightly beyond the clouds, beckoning us toward all that is good in the time head.



The day began with optional Mass at 9.00 a.m. and some well-chosen words of encouragement and purpose from our chaplain Fr Wayne Stanhope O.Carm, reminding us how often God speaks in silence. From then on until 3.30pm the Cottage precincts were alive literally with the Goodness of God.

Mother Hilda, Sr Magdalen and Sr Julian offered some reflections in the form of talks and guided meditation. Sr Mechtild organized a delicious morning tea. Sr Petra managed the registration desk and Srs Grace and Yvonne were the providers of packets of chocolate dipped dry oranges and plain dried oranges harvested from our own trees.

Our Cottage team, Debbie and Nellie made sure our retreat space was sparking and in perfect readiness for us all. Thank you to all those who contributed to such a wonderful day, and a particular thank you to our guests whose enthusiasm, openness and sheer joy filled participation and gifted us immeasurably. We are encouraged to continue these days. Watch this space!

Here are some comments from guests in answer to the question:

#### ***What has been most important to you about today?***

- The chance to reflect on Advent illuminates and gives connection.
- To stop and focus on my spiritual life.
- Most important is the Light he gave us and helping to share it.
- Wonder.



- A day away from the city and the mountain with its vibrations of silence, prayer and deep peace.
- Remembering my relationship with our loving God.
- I care. I am concerned and I can do something in my own little way. That is part of my Christ consciousness which I can radiate to others.
- I appreciate the humble, honest sharing of lives lived in the presence of God.
- I have been prompted to continue seeking to grow in love.
- To find a deeper understanding of peace and contentment, through looking at the beautiful philosophy of Kenji Miyazawa.
- Reconnecting to the Light of the world so I can learn to dance in the rain, and find my rainbows in my storms. What is important is that I see within and know love.
- A restful, joyous day.
- En-LIGHT-ening.
- Looking forward to the ADVENTure to come!
- Thank you for the gift of yourselves.
- You brought light into my restless soul and peace is the gift I am taking away.
- Thank you for a gentle immersion into the ADVENTure of ADVENT!
- Connection, belonging, beloved.
- I truly appreciate all the three sessions as the sisters tackled contemporary issues, not just theological ones.
- Thank you, I carry a little of the light out into the darkness.
- Amazing hospitality.
- God brought me here today to let me know that the Light is within us, and as we are light to others our light becomes brighter.



### **On the Wings of Prayer**

*Prayer is the wing wherewith my soul flies to heaven.*

St Ambrose

Photo: Sr Mary Bernadette

## The Light Enters the World

Sr Julian

Today we start the celebration of Christmas with the beginning of Advent, the season of light culminating in the light entering the world at Christmas. In this talk, you and I will explore the



season with the Gospel of John. Through his poetry and cosmic view of the Christ – the Light. What John’s readers heard at that time and what it means to us today. Then we will explore a way we can live John’s call to us this Christmas season and going into the future. Language is important and I want to share my meaning of two terms I use. Firstly, cosmos, it is a term used to mean the universe but it is a harmonious universe. Secondly, contemplation, it is a daily practice of deep listening which better connects us with ourselves and divine love. The contemplative mind is about receiving and being present to the moment, to the now, without judgment, analysis, or critique. We reach contemplation through prayer or meditation. It is a lifetime’s work that leads to the self with God.

What do you love about Christmas? What do you struggle with?

As a child I loved Christmas, my imagination was totally captured with the nativity story, the journey on a donkey, the no room in an inn, a birth in the stable, a new baby, an amazingly bright star, the angels appearing to the shepherds and their visit to the newborn baby. Every year my school would put on a nativity play and it was also part of the Christmas Eve family mass. When I was a teenager we started to go to Christmas Day Mass and my Christmas was changed. No nativity play but worse not even a nativity reading. The Gospel reading was from John, its poetic and beautiful but to me it was not Christmas.

So how do I reconcile the poetry of John to the drama of the birth of a child named Jesus. It is complex and begins at the beginning of the universe. The beauty and drama is everywhere and everywhen.

As I said language is important and so is story, together they are more a part of our lives than we realise. The Gospel of John is a story and poetry, in which I find a new story of Christmas. It starts with one of the most well-known lines in the Bible – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” The Aramaic word used for “in the beginning” is the same as the root word in Hebrew used at the beginning of Genesis. The words point to the origin of all existence as an outpouring of light and fire.



We now know that the universe came into being in a flaming cosmic explosion that gave birth to



space and time. At the moment of birth the universe was bathed in light. Ours was a fiery birth, an unfurling of vast, raw potentiality which quickly began to take shape and form. This was the Big Bang. Three hundred million years after the Big Bang the first stars and galaxies emerged, forming clusters as the universe continued to expand.

What an amazing beginning – chaos and violence lead to such amazing beauty. And what a miracle we are here, both as a species and as persons. Since all the matter – which is the building blocks of all things - that now exists was formed in that initial bursting forth of life, we must each be formed out of the primordial dust that became stars. Think of this: in its latent potential, the embodied person that you are at this very moment – all the components that would eventually come together into the person that is you – was present in the Big Bang. As Judy Cannato would say, “isn’t that radically amazing?”

And as equally amazing, in the prologue of John, we hear, “The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.” An Aramaic reading of this reveals light as the light of consciousness. And that consciousness reveals the direction in life for every human being. John’s Gospel goes on to say, “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”. The Word is the most material part of us, the ‘flesh’. Consciousness is not within us, it becomes us. This may be difficult to grasp, but it boils down to something like we are not in our bodies, our bodies are in us. St Athanasius put it this way, “God became human so that humans may become God.”

### **Contemplation Exercise**

We will spend several minutes in silent reflection. After I have finished speaking you are welcome to write things down, meditate or sit in silence. Settle yourself by taking a few slow deep breathes, just focus on breathing in and out. Now put your hand over your heart and focus all your attention interiorly to your heart space. This is a sacred space, a place filled with light.

Ask the Word, to become more conscious within you. Now, pondering what you have heard so far, what is sitting with you? What is making you stretch and bring more out of yourself?

So, we now know that the Incarnation was to bring a new consciousness into the world, into each of us. But what is consciousness? If you don't know, you are not alone. We know we have it, but we do not know why or how we are able to be aware. And yet our consciousness seems to be growing, changing, evolving, just as the universe continues to do the same.

Quantum physics, the new paradigm, says that the prime mover in the universe is consciousness, and we are all part of this consciousness. Consciousness is no longer seen as a phenomenon popping out of the brain, but as the ground of being, in which all material possibilities, including the brain, are held in creative potential. And if that isn't enough it would seem that there are no individual consciousnesses; there is only one consciousness, it's the Christ consciousness of which we are all one.

And finally, consciousness is aware, it is active and its nature is love. Neither love or consciousness can be measured. Love is the force that brings things into further and deeper relationship. In other words the creator's presence in the form of life itself is the driving force that is woven into the fabric of the universe

Love is an evolutionary force and we are part of it. We co-create and contribute our part to the whole. God creates out of love, in love and for love; every act of creation expresses the love of God. Love is not an attribute or relation of God; it is the very beingness of God. Is there anyone here who has ever been in love? How that feeling of being in love transforms your image of the world, and the people around you. You want everyone to have the experience you are having. To be so excited and full of wonder over what is happening in your life.

So, when we speak of the incarnation i.e., Jesus – it is not to speak of a divine community vote where the Son is elected to become human. Incarnation is what creation is all about. Each being expresses the infinite love of God in a unique way; God becomes “this” being, and “this” being is not “that” being. Everything that exists, every star, leaf, atom, bird, tree and person, has an ineffable divine depth. This flower is loved into being from all eternity, just as this person is loved into being from all eternity.

Beatrice Bruteau put it this way:

If Jesus asked me, “Who do you say I am?” my answer is: “You are the new and ever renewing act of creation. You are all of us, as we are united in You. You are all of us as we live in one another. You are all of us in the whole cosmos as we join in Your exuberant act of creation. You are the Living One who improvises at the frontier of the future; and it has not yet appeared what You shall be. (Beatrice Bruteau, *The Grand Option*, 172-73).





When Jesus comes as the Incarnation of God, there is a “perfect fit” because everything has been made within the light of Christ. All things the sun, moon, trees, animals and stars all have life in Christ, the personal Word of Love, through whom all things are made (cf. Jn 1:1). Jesus’ intimate experience of God and his self-identity with the Father (“The Father and I are one”) empower him to act in the name of love by healing and reconciling all that is unloved in us. He gathers together what is scattered, heals the sick, eats with sinners, speaks with women, dines with tax collectors and Gentiles, dealing with each person as one called into greater wholeness. The emphasis is on wholeness.

Jesus’ God-centered life shows a way of relating to others that makes wholes where there are divisions. and empowers them to live the law of love the love that makes whole, uniting humans to humans and humans to God. Jesus ushered in not a new religion but a new humanism. In love, God gives himself to us without reservation, becoming one of us. Love is the creative secret of God, the hidden mystery, manifest and active in all aspects of life but especially in the human person.

The destiny of humanity and the aim of the cosmos are intertwined in the mystery of Christ. What took place in the life of Jesus must take place in our lives as well. It matters what a human person does and how we live in relation to God, for only through our actions can we encounter God. Teilhard de Chardin spoke of the human person as a “co-creator”. We are created to evolve into a new future; the choices we make in love and for love, co-create our future.

We are called to be connected through the heart to the whole of life. We are irresistibly called forth by the Spirit to creatively express our gifts in the evolution of self and the world. We are called to be Christ anew; to penetrate the truth of the Christ mystery within ourselves, in other persons and non-human creatures as well. To live the mystery of Christ is to live in the freedom of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17), recognizing the connectedness that is a basic reality of our existence. We are always becoming part of a greater whole, trusting that God continues to create in and through us.

### **Contemplation Exercise**

We will spend several minutes in silent reflection. After I have finished speaking you are welcome to write things down, meditate or sit in silence. Settle yourself by taking a few slow deep breathes, just focus on breathing in and out. Now put your hand over your heart and focus all your attention interiorly to your heart space. This is a sacred space, a place filled with light. Ask the Word, the connection, that only each of us uniquely can have to become more conscious and present within you. Now, pondering what you have heard about consciousness, what is sitting with you? What is making you stretch and bring more out of yourself?

The paths of the mystics show us that we have the capacity to be transformed into beings of new consciousness say Ilia Delio, that we can radically transform ourselves to live a new, higher level of consciousness and new unities of love. “The truth of ourselves lies in the mystery of God”. As Catherine of Siena boldly proclaimed: “My me is God”.

So, what do the mystics know? The key, I believe, is “one-ing”. It’s a word that comes from the mystic Julian of Norwich, who says that ‘prayer ones the soul to God’. What’s striking about the verb ‘one-ing’ is that it expresses a sense of the vital, dynamic process of becoming one *with* God as well as the centring, grounding and abiding at-onement of the soul *in* God. The communion of love, the oneness that God is, is not static, or self-enclosed but an ever-fertile movement of love pouring itself out and receiving itself back. And this has profound implications for how we imagine our contemplative journeys. Because we’re not striving one day to arrive at an end, to get ‘there’ and possess our spiritual achievement; rather, we’re being drawn into an eternal dynamism of love which, is both enclosing, still and abiding, and outpouring, creative, evolutionary.



This one-ing in Love is an en-Christing journey. It’s how we come to share the mind of Christ or awaken Christ-consciousness. The three contemporary mystics, Teilhard de Chardin, Beatrice Bruteau and Ilia Delio all hold the conviction that the rise of oneing consciousness is connected to the emergence of communion consciousness. Communion consciousness naturally imparts a greater awareness of our wholeness. The energy of oneing heightens a stronger connectivity and fuller being. This profound realisation of our “Holy Wholeness” is critical for responding to the needs of our time, because the energy of oneing in us flows out to affect the whole. Can we be the oneing that creates communion and awakens communion consciousness? Well, can we? How do we accept the invitation to be one-d by, with and in love?

An example from Julian of Norwich encourages the movement of self-emptying through the practice of ‘beholding’. For Julian herself, ‘beholding’ began when she was suffering from what had seemed a mortal illness and was handed a crucifix to gaze upon. She looked upon the wounded Christ, and gradually her seeing deepened, so that (as she writes) “in seeing a bodily sight of his bleeding form” she simultaneously “sees a spiritual sight of Christ’s homely loving”. In other words, progressing from bodily beholding she begins to see with the eye of the heart, and this deeper beholding draws her onto the inside of that which she beholds. “Beholding involves...emptying ourselves of all conceptualisations, as we pour out our heart in love”. Beholding transforms us into the subject of our beholding. Or as Catherine of Siena put it, “Love transforms one into what one loves.” It leads to inner light and freedom, and new choices for radical love. As the mystic travels into the inner universe the separation between self and God wears away. At the summit of luminous darkness, there is one conscious unified reality, grounded in love.

In other words, the mystics help us realise that the soul has a depth of freedom and light that shapes how we see the world, and if we do this how the world see’s us. Brian Swimme says our task in life, in the cosmos is “to become the human form of radiance.” May we each start to behold so we may be one-d into radiance.

After all this, for me and for you. What does all this have to do with Christmas, other than the Gospel of John’s prologue being the reading on Christmas Day and the Incarnation being another way of looking at Jesus birth. For me, it’s a reminder of the truth of Christmas. When



I am enjoying the spectacle of Christmas lights, the joy of the carols, the awe in children's faces and the wonder of the season, within myself I am aware that we are all of us, mothers of God's new birth, Christ within each of us. So may each of us start this season of light with Beholding, so we may each be one-d, so we may become the radiance of God in our world.

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## SILVER JUBILEE

Sr Magdalen celebrated her Silver Jubilee on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> December which marked twenty-



five years of monastic profession. It was a truly gentle day which began with the community honouring their already booked-in commitment to a zoom talk on the Rule with Sr Judith Sutra osb. Morning tea followed in our community room, the sharing of Magdalen's chosen gift and a chance for us all to let Magdalen know of our delight in this day. It has been a long time since we shared a video together and Magdalen chose one of our favourite comedies for the evening.

Typically, she thought of us in this choice and went to no end to trouble to procure it. Our Sr Magdalen is a woman familiar with mystery, in its many and evolving forms. She teaches prayer and meditation to all manner of people, she leads them into mystery.

Mother Hilda offered a few words in a homily the day before:

*Magdalen as we celebrate your Silver Jubilee it seems appropriate to consider 'mystery'. Monastic life, as we know, is a journey into mystery, a journey surrounded by mystery. Everything that happens is mystery, we are not sure what God is doing, we are unsure about what is called for from us, we are not sure what is being done to us. We are not sure how the journey will end or indeed how the journey will even progress. These twenty-five years you have abandoned yourself to such a journey.*

*Caught in what seems to be unending mystery we try to apply the same rules we used on other roads only to discover that they do not work on this monastic journey. Confused sometimes, and yet with a glorious sense of freedom at other times, we learn to embrace these new road rules and way of being. We take note of what is given to us for signposts, not the ones we wish we had but the ones right in front of us; the Word,*

*the company of our sisters, the gold threads that come along. The reflector lights on our road are Christ. For our own safety, we cannot for a moment take our eyes off him and after a while we discovered that we do not want to take our eyes off him. He is at once our destination and the whole journey.*

*In twenty-five years, we have discovered that we cannot stop on this quest, neither are we actually in the driver's seat. At some stage in twenty-five years Christ and the soul swapped places and we have seen that Christ is the driving force bringing us deeper and deeper into the only mystery that counts.*

*Magdalen, thank you because yesterday, today, tomorrow and the day after that, you consistently give us reason to look again at the mystery of this incredible journey. You give us cause to rejoice in the fact that for twenty-five years you have stayed true to this quest. Misquoting the Man of La Mancha, you have 'dared to dream the mysterious reality of the impossible dream'.*



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**God's Beautiful Painting in the Sky**

Photo: Sr Mary Bernadette

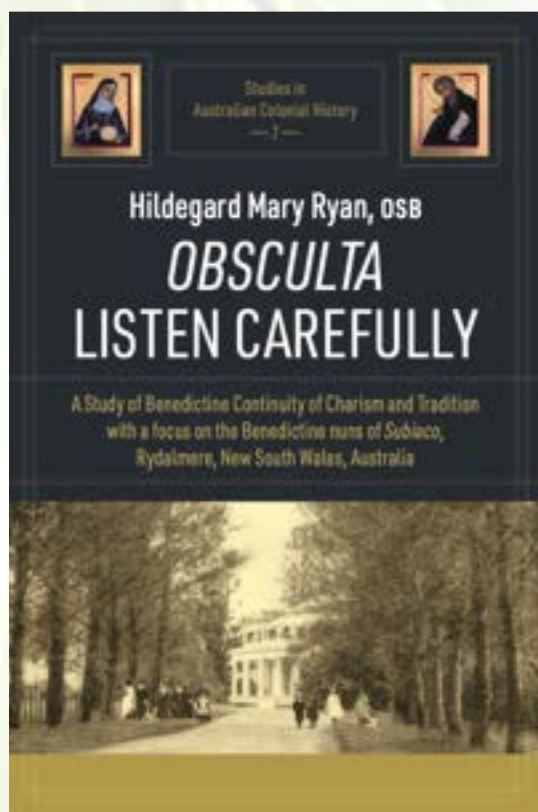


## Two New Books

We are particularly pleased, and proud, to let you know of two books, each from our own ranks, currently in the final stages of publication. Sr Hildegard Ryan has written a fine work, “*Obsculta*”, on the history of our Community from 1948 until 1957 and Sr Antonia Curtis has written a very usable and informed manual, “*I Give You My Word*”, for the teaching of *Lectio Divina*. In both cases these books have been a labour of love for God and for the community.

### *Obsculta*

Sr Hildegard says: The book I have been encouraged to write is a story which has never been



written. It is the history of the first Benedictine women’s monastery in Eastern Australia, which was officially founded on 2 February 1849. The title of the book is “*Obsculta* Listen Carefully: a Study of Benedictine Continuity of Charism and Tradition with a focus on the first Benedictine women’s community of Eastern Australia”. I have given these women a voice, by taking the approach of “history from below”, a history which doesn’t hide behind kings, queens, cardinals, bishops or other members of the male hierarchy of the Catholic Church. It is a history which sheds light on monastic women who allowed the flame of their courage, determination and faith to shine brightly within this ancient land, Australia. Over the last twenty years, the Benedictine *Obsculta* has been likened to the *Dadirri* of the first nations people of the Daly River, Northern Territory. It means inner deep listening, quiet still awareness and waiting. The Benedictine nuns, who gave their lives to the Australian Foundation (as it came to be called), listened deeply to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in all their living, and were quietly

aware of the working of the Spirit, always waiting to make their response, no matter what the cost.

Fr. Michael Casey, ocsa, Professor James Harrison, and Professor Peter Bolt (of the Sydney College of Divinity), and Sr. Laura Swan, OSB, (St. Placid Priory, Washington), have encouraged me to tell this story which, until now, has been missing from the pages of Australian Catholic Church history.

The Community says: “This work by our Sr Hildegard is a missing piece of the jigsaw for us. We have known our tradition mostly through oral sources, but have never had it in the concise written form in which Sr Hildegard now presents it. This work has a great impact on us because, among other things, we have been able to detect those traits of character, our communal DNA, which unites us forever to the nuns who have gone before us. We marvel and are inspired by their courage and perseverance in intolerable situations.

Despite very real poverty, in every sense, our nuns never doubted the future of Benedictine monastic life in this far off land, even when they felt at most lost. Their life of prayer was insistent and integral to all they did, their love for one another real and the legacy they have

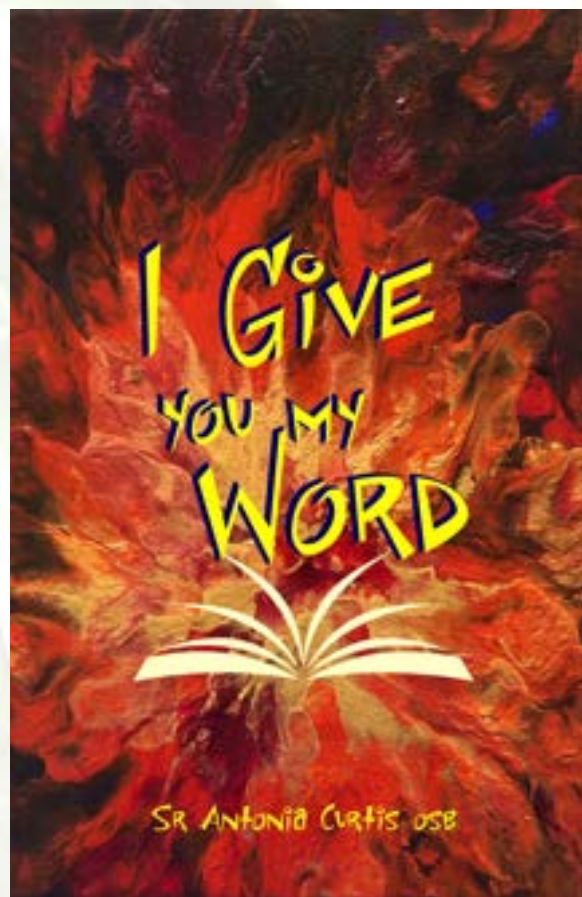
left us is immeasurable. Our community can never thank Sr Hildegard enough for bringing our story and that of the early Australian Church to us in this well researched and relatable book.

## **I Give You My Word**

Sr Antonia says: The purpose of this manual is to offer a guide for parish workers, catechists, spiritual directors, youth workers and others working in adult spiritual formation, as well as for religious education teachers in secondary schools. The aim of the manual is to assist them in introducing participants to the ancient art of praying with the Word of God. Benedictines, and others, have been using this practise of *lectio divina* in our monasteries for centuries and our hope is that we can assist facilitators of groups to pass on this ancient treasure to all who seek to meet God in a personal and deep relationship of love through engagement with God's Word primarily, but not exclusively, in scripture. Whilst there are various methods of *lectio divina* available today what is offered in the manual is the traditional Benedictine way of praying with the Word of God. It will be on sale through our abbey shop towards the end of January 2024.

The Community says: *Lectio Divina* lies at the very heart of our life together and it has always informed Sr Antonia's own life. All she does is done in light of the Word. This book comes to you from the depths of her own prayer and reflection as well as many years of teaching prayer to both cottage guests and sisters in formation. Whoever uses this book will find in it a practical "user friendly" guide to the Word who is at once both tool and life. It is a joy for us to know that the essence of our monastic life is being made available beyond our home here at Jamberoo.

Both of these books will soon be on sale. Our website will contain details for their purchase.





## Sr Scholastika Haring osb



As we go to print for this newsletter, we are enjoying the arrival of Sr Scholastika Haring osb from Dinklage Abbey in Germany. It has long been a wish of hers to experience Advent and Christmas in the Southern Hemisphere and now her dream has come true! We are delighted that she has chosen to spend this time with us.

Sister is well known for her work as a canon lawyer and advisor to the *Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum* (CIB). This is the worldwide group of Benedictine women's communities, a most vibrant group of which we are proudly members. What a joy to have Sister Scholastika with us!



This is what her own monastery looks like right now, her new outlook will be very different!



The Abbey of Dinklage is surrounded by a mote. How exciting!



Sr Scholastika talking to the community on the History of the CIB  
(Sr Scholastika is wearing our habit in order to cope with the hot weather)



## Carmelite Corner

On 17th December 2022 Fr Wayne Stanhope OCarm (left) became our chaplain.



His homilies and joy filled presence with us is a great gift. Fr Wayne is from the same order as our former chaplain Fr Paul Gurr OCarm (right) who was with us for over thirty years. Fr Paul is



currently plagued with a range of health issues and would certainly appreciate your prayer. Fr Wayne, like Fr Paul before him, has become a real brother to us. He has also brought the rest of his Carmelite brothers into our orbit.

Fr Matthew Tonini OCarm has been ordained almost two years now and on one



of his visits he shared the Eucharist with us. This was a particular joy since Matthew has been part of us since he was a high school student making a class retreat here. He continued to visit, to be with us and then happily he joined the Carmelites. We have always followed his journey and so to actually have Matthew finally say Mass for us

after all this time was a sheer delight. We count him as one of us.



Fr. Bruce Clark OCarm was elected Provincial of the Australian Province of the Carmelites in November last year and has made a few visits up here to Jamberoo since that time. It is lovely to have him among us again. He is particularly taken with our barn which offers a very simple style of retreat space and accommodation. We hope Fr Bruce takes the opportunity to avail himself of some hidden “Elijah in the cave time” more often.

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### **Staff & Volunteers**

We are very blessed in all those wonderful people who help keep the Abbey running. Their work is so varied and each brings to their employment and their volunteering a joy and commitment that is an inspiration to us. We owe each one a great debt of gratitude and more besides.



# Take O Lord and Receive

## St Ignatius' Prayer

MB

C G(B) Am C(G) F

Take O Lord and re-ceive my en - ti - re li - ber - ty, my

4 C(E) F D7(F#) Gsus4 G

me - mo-ry, my un - der - stand - ing and my whole will.

7 C G(B) Am C(G)

All that I am and all that I po - ssess,

9 F D7(F#) Gsus4 G C Em F C

You have gi - ven me. I sur - rend - er it all to you, to

13 F C(E) 3 Dm G

be dis - pose of ac - cord - ing to your will.

15 C Em F C

Give me on - ly your love and your grace, with

17 F C(E) Dm G F Gsus4 G

these I will be rich e - nough, and will de - si - re no - thing

20 C F C

more.

The music for the above hymn was composed by Sr Mary Bernadette.  
Please feel free to use it in your parish or ministry.

## Online Retreats

Sr Antonia is offering the following retreat during Lent 2024:

# Jamberoo Abbey Online Lenten Retreat

Care for our hearts!  
Care for the earth!

## Borrowing Tomorrow

### ABOUT

Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* concerns himself with the state of the heart as he reflects on the destruction of our planet.

In this retreat we will be examining our lives and asking the hard questions in relation to how we care for our own heart which is reflected in how we care for our earth.

### COST

The cost of the retreat is \$200.00. We understand how difficult it is to make ends meet these days so do not hesitate to email if you are unable to manage the full cost.

### DATE

Retreat begins Sunday, February 18th and finishes Palm Sunday, March 24th.

What is the purpose of our life in this world.  
What need does the earth have of us? Pope Francis

### Jamberoo Abbey Online Retreat with Sr Antonia Curtis osb

### DETAILS

There will be one Conference each Sunday as well as suggestions to explore the contents of the talks. Short reading or story weekly. An Optional one off Zoom session with Sr Antonia is available for those who wish.

### CONTACT

Register online at:  
[jamberooabbey.org.au/retreats/online-retreats](http://jamberooabbey.org.au/retreats/online-retreats)  
You will also find many other online retreats on our website.





Please check our website  
in the new year  
for a list of our  
Day and Weekend  
Retreat Programmes  
for 2024

<https://www.jamberooabbey.org.au/retreats/abbey-retreat-programs/>

You will also find many  
Online Retreats  
Available here:

<https://www.jamberooabbey.org.au/retreats/online-retreats/>



## **A Request**

It is an unusual for us to even raise this subject but our circumstances are such that we must.

For some years now our roof has been in need of replacement. It is leaking seriously in several areas and that of course has meant wholesale deterioration of wooden beams, window frames etc. The problem of course will not go away and with the passing of time only gets worse.

The plain facts are that we, like so many people right now, lack the financial means to undertake this important job. Estimates come in at one million dollars and the longer we leave it the more that figure will increase. It is time. The whole matter is compounded by the same issues facing everyone else at this time, increased cost of living. Our earnings at present go toward simply making ends meet and that so often falls short.


Next year we hope to begin a serious fund raising effort with the help of some very fine people. To that end, we are asking if there is anyone out there who would be willing to assist with this project. Perhaps some of you are very familiar with raising money, know how to go about it, and/or know someone who is and who would be willing to help.

If you are able to assist please send your details to the following email address and we will make contact with you.

[abbess@jamberooabbey.org.au](mailto:abbess@jamberooabbey.org.au)

This request comes with our ongoing gratitude and prayer.





*Light looked down and saw the darkness.  
'I will go there', said light.  
Peace looked down and saw war.  
'I will go there', said peace.  
Love looked down and saw hatred.  
'I will go there', said love.  
So,  
the Lord of Light,  
the Prince of Peace  
the King of Love  
came down and crept in beside us.*

A Christmas Poem by John Bell (1745-1831)

**Go to our website to join us in sending out  
light and peace to our world:**

<https://www.jamberooabbey.org.au/resources/lantern-in-war-zones/>



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