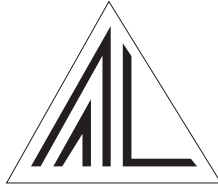




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Editorial



Much of the work of liturgical renewal over the past 100 years or so has centred on the reform of texts and rubrics and the recovery of the whole assembly as the primary protagonist of the liturgy. The former is evident enough in the continuing development of authorised liturgical resources from various church bodies, albeit unevenly adopted. The latter finds expression in efforts to nurture that “full, conscious and active” participation by everyone present and in expansions of liturgical leadership beyond

the ordained. Like all efforts at reform, these, too, have progressed in fits and starts, most recently complicated by restrictions on common prayer related to COVID-19. (Incidentally, the first two book reviews in this issue address that topic directly.)

More recently, focused attention has turned to the assembly itself and the characteristics its members bear with them to common prayer. Feminist reflection long ago began to interrogate how common ways of naming God in the liturgy and certain patterns of celebration have excluded women, a critique now extended to gender more broadly. Many contributions to this journal over the years have advanced this work. Further attention to embodiment in general has continued to yield more specific reflection on sexuality in its diversity and expression, on so-called able-bodiedness (or, as disability theologian Nancy Eiesland famously put it, *temporary* able-bodiedness), and on the intersection of cultural and ethnic heritage, or, in my U.S. context, ‘race’. Alongside these reflections has come continued work on the intersection of theologies and cultures, often referred to as ‘inculturation’ when applied to liturgy.

While some may argue that the first stage of liturgical reform reached a certain ‘ecumenical consensus’ in matters of the shape of liturgy and its basic building blocks, the turn to diversity in the assembly has often yielded more questions, some of which trouble any easy consensus. At the same time, many together still seek what M. Shawn Copeland, in her *Enfleshing Freedom* (Fortress, 2010), has called ‘eucharistic solidarity’ expressed through ‘vigorous display of difference in race and culture and tongue, gender and sex and sexuality’ (82). I know many, myself among them, who yearn to be a part of such a liturgical symbol offering thanks and praise in all our incarnational diversity.

This attention to diversity in assemblies has begun to work its way into the practice of assemblies, now rising to the denominational level. This movement is clearest in the matter of same-gender marriage, which Peter Grayson-Weeks explores in his essay on

developments in The Uniting Church in Australia. From his perspective, the shifts in theological imagination occasioned by the movement toward 'marriage equality' have not required a major overhaul of the received rites, though it has required a tolerance for more than one 'doctrine of marriage' in that church. Melanie Whalley, on the other hand, sees need for a much broader overhaul of rites related to death and loss after the end of a pregnancy, especially given the ways religious texts and traditions acknowledge and celebrate birth. While her own church's *A Prayer Book for Australia* and the Episcopal Church's *Enriching Our Worship* supplements provide some starting points, Whalley sees need for an entirely new liturgy, a framework for which she provides.

While these essays address specific topics and needs, the articles that open this issue cast a broader net. Angela McCarthy's reflections on accompanying persons through ageing and loss—which most persons eventually experience—suggest new challenges for those who prepare liturgy and provide pastoral care through ritual, for example, in aged care homes. This task is perhaps made more complex by the progressive thinning of religious practice, even if many, regardless of faith tradition, still express fundamental spiritual need. David Nelson's case study on the renovation of the Cathedral of SS. Michael and John in Bathurst, New South Wales, signals the possibilities and limits of 'inclusion' in inherited places for prayer. Just as patterns may need to adapt in the care of ageing persons, so buildings also need reshaping to make possible participation by persons with impairment. How to begin such important work? Perhaps by listening to those 'in the pews' for both their memory and their wisdom, as Peta Sherlock (playfully) argues in her essay, informed by her own parish in Trentham, Victoria, along with her years of experience in ordained ministry. Taking new steps on the path toward prayer that is broadly inclusive surely requires listening and dialogue.

This issue's reports contain two of particular note: The first comes from Past President Anthony Doran regarding leadership changes on the Executive Council of the Academy, announcing John Fitz-Herbert of the Queensland chapter as Interim President. Angela McCarthy provides a report on the Fifth Plenary Council of the Roman Catholic Church in Australia with special attention to its decrees related to liturgy.

For my own part I can report some news: Firstly, Michelle Eastwood has agreed to serve as the book review editor for the journal, replacing John Fitz-Herbert as he takes up an executive role. (Please help her by contributing your own reviews!) On the publication front, I can also report that the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) has scanned the past six volumes of the journal to make them available through library searches; we are in the process of preparing scans to make all back issues available. We continue to explore alternative publishing options, now

in partnership with colleagues at the North American Academy of Liturgy, who are exploring alternative publishing options for their annual journal *Proceedings*, edited by our treasurer, Jason McFarland.

And now on to next year's editions of this journal: The May 2023 issue will center on issues related to praying from Australia, New Zealand, and Pacifika, with particular attention to the ways liturgical seasons, lectionaries, and patterns of prayer reflect both the natural and cultural patterns of the North, particularly Europe. Contributions might address alternatives to or adaptations of the Revised Common Lectionary or Roman Catholic *Lectionary for Mass*, prayers for a proposed 'season of creation' that reflect the local natural context or Land and Country, and alternative ways of observing the liturgical year. Submissions for peer review are requested by 15 March 2023; book reviews and essays are requested by 1 April. Let us together continue this conversation as colleagues and fellow travelers.

A Theology of Loss and the Ageing Journey

Angela McCarthy



Dr Angela McCarthy is an adjunct senior lecturer in theology at The University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle campus, and a member of the Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Australia. Her first degree from Sydney University included work in biblical studies and fine arts and then further studies in theology and education from 1993 at Notre Dame. She was awarded her PhD in 2007. Since then, she has completed a further research Masters in Theology in the field of scripture, art and theology. Angela has published in the areas of liturgy,

icons, art and theology, liturgical music, educational practice and theological aesthetics. She is the former editor of the *Australian Journal of Liturgy*, Chairperson of the Mandorla Art Award, a member of the Chamber of Arts and Culture-Western Australia, the Fellowship of Biblical Studies, and editor of *Pastoral Liturgy*.

Abstract

As our society increases in the proportion of aged persons, we are called to consider their care and in particular, their spiritual care. Whether the elderly person is cared for at home or in an aged care facility, the same applies. In a facility it might even be easier, as the care is monitored and assessed, whereas in the home environment complete spiritual isolation is possible. Through an examination of a theology of loss, the experience of the elderly and the various layers of care that are required, as well as the care of those who love the elderly person, must be considered. Spiritual and liturgical care needs to be grounded in principles of inclusivity and accessibility.

Introduction

The reality of our ageing population is no surprise, and it is brought to our attention in many ways every day. Government policy, health care imperatives, desperate need for more workers in aged care, improved payment for workers, abuse of the aged, and security of residents in pandemics are all aspects of the dilemma faced by societies throughout the world. For some it seems like a social malaise, something that we must deal with, but through the eyes of Christians and other people of faith, respect and care for the aged are indicators of values and who we are as an image of God.

Indeed, many of our congregations are primarily made up of elderly people, and most parish communities would have one or more aged care facilities within their boundaries. Our response to the elderly in our community paints a clear picture of who we are and how we see ourselves in God's sight. The commandment 'Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you' (Exod 20:12)¹ speaks of respect and care for those who gave us life and through whom the stories are given and carried. Our elders have given us our heritage in faith and the values we live by and for that, honour and respect are our duty and our privilege. When we live according to those values our 'days may be long in the land that the Lord' has given us. Where such care does not take place, we see increasing incidences of elder abuse and neglect.

Liturgical Principles

The way in which we attend to the spiritual and liturgical needs of the elderly can be informed by all our usual liturgical principles because they call us to celebrate in an inclusive and grace-filled way. For Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities, all descendants of Abraham, there is a narrative that holds us to the past, enables us in the present and opens us to the future in God's grace. As Gerard Sloyan² points out, a biblical liturgy is an action of the present in which 'the Holy Spirit makes our response effective, so that what we hear in the liturgy we can carry out in the way we live (LM, 6).'³ The way in which we present the biblical aspects of liturgy for the elderly may need to be governed by further principles that we draw from The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.⁴ The section of the constitution that speaks of adaptation of liturgy for various cultures and traditions of peoples, speaks of 'legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions, and peoples, especially in mission lands, provided the substantial unity of the Roman Rite' (SC, 38).

In our current climate of increasing secularity, we are indeed in a missionary phase. Adaptation of the rites is needed for the elderly as they seek to experience the presence of God in familiar rituals but where their personal response and engagement will now be different; they might not be able to attend for very long, might not be able to hear very well, might not be able to join in various gestures, and movement around the worship space might be impossible for some. Creative ways of assisting the elderly to engage need to be considered. For some, of course, the repetition of age-old rituals that have been part of their lives and are part of their spiritual being might be welcomed even though active participation in any overt sense is not possible.

¹ All scriptural quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version.

² Gerard S Sloyan, 'Overview of the Lectionary for Mass: Introduction', in *The Liturgy Documents*, ed. Elizabeth Hoffman (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991), 118-23 at 123.

³ Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, 'General Introduction to the Lectionary', 2nd ed. (1981). <https://www.evtn.com/catholicism/library/general-introduction-to-the-lectionary-second-edition-2189>.

⁴ Second Vatican Council, 'Sacrosanctum Concilium: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy', in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1963), 1-35.

Further understanding can be supported by the *Directory for Masses with Children* (DMC).⁵ This document allows for the biblical aspects of the liturgy to be reduced to the reading of the gospel (DMC, 42). A shortened gospel, proclaimed in a way that is accessible to those present, will be of value to the elderly. The DMC also gives a particular focus on singing and music. This is particularly appropriate to the elderly as with decreasing cognition, music often remains even after speech is no longer possible. Music relies on many parts of the brain and can therefore function long after the loss of other cognition. This will be discussed later in this paper.

Loss in the Ageing Journey

The dominant cultural narrative for the successful life in capitalist communities is defined by material attainment, status and the ‘snazzy life.’⁶ How do we view our elderly if all that we see no longer has any relevance to material wealth, physical beauty, intellectual acumen, status, or a ‘snazzy life’? When all the banners of success are gone, how do we respond to the elderly? Such a conflict of values can lead to very negative results, particularly in the abandonment of the elderly into aged care facilities where few are visited by family or friends.⁷ How do elderly people define themselves in their frailty and vulnerability? How do they continue to experience growth in their spiritual lives as all else diminishes? How can we involve them in inclusive liturgies and spiritual care without understanding the losses that are inherent in the ageing process?

Fr John Baran brings this into focus: ‘Our life is not about earning heaven; it is about reflecting heaven. What is the point of rushing to eternity?’⁸ If we view the aged care system (both home care and residential) as a waiting station for death and eternity, then the notion of reflecting heaven in this place requires radical transformation of activity and focus, including that of liturgy and spiritual practices celebrated for the residents of facilities or members of a parish community.

When we come to understand the love that God has for us that is far beyond our understanding, all the banners of success seem to be irrelevant. God’s incarnational love has changed everything. As St Catherine of Sienna discovered, ‘our “true” self reflects God, participates in God. We are called by the divine Spouse to intimate love.

⁵ Congregation for Divine Worship, ‘Directory for Masses with Children’, (1973). <http://www.catholicliturgy.com/index.cfm/FuseAction/DocumentContents/Index/2/SubIndex/11/DocumentIndex/477>.

⁶ Beverley Clack, ‘Against the Pursuit of the Snazzy Life: A Feminist Theology of Failure and Loss’, *Feminist Theology* 22, no. 1 (2013): 4-19 at 5, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735013498026>.

⁷ Personal communication from a director in aged care: The measure of family care and involvement in aged care is how many visitors come on Mother’s Day. In one recent instance in a residential establishment of 150 residents there were only three visitors.

⁸ Personal communication from Fr John Baran’s Easter homily at St Anthony of Padua Parish in Fairfield, Connecticut in 2017.

This amazing gift is offered by God to all, freely and generously. It is pure gift.⁹ This applies to our elderly people who remain reflections of God's love. Celebrating that through liturgical ritual or spiritual nourishment of other kinds with the elderly is imperative.

We cannot equate loss with failure as that diminishes the elderly in our care as those who have failed since they no longer wear the banners of success. Clack notes that Simone de Beauvoir faced this reality in her later philosophy, starkly revealing that old age is 'the failure of all success.'¹⁰ If meaningfulness in life is to be determined by the banners of success as mentioned above, then coming to a place where no achievements are evident, where no one knows your story and your successes, where you can no longer contribute in any way to tell your own story, is truly a place of failure. The solution to this is having value attributed through being of value to others, to be able to offer friendship, wisdom and love and when that is impossible, to be valued as a person made in the image of God.

Suffering is always possible when one loves¹¹ but this does not make it invaluable. Because 'it is vulnerable, love is valuable, precious, to be cherished'.¹² In loving we recognise the connectedness that human beings are born into and the reality of the demise of some of those connections over time. Loss is a reality. Suffering is a reality. St Paul reminds us of this in his letter to the Romans. He says that we

boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (5:3-5)

This level of hope is the end goal.

The image that can express some aged care situations is the forgotten flock; those who are either housebound or in a care facility who no longer come to mind. They are lost to the community unless the community makes an exceptional effort to maintain the connection. When the whole parish community is aged, including the pastor, this has innate difficulties. When family and friends no longer visit, or find a way to care, the loss is profound on both sides. Aged care facilities are having to generate active volunteer programs to ease the burden of loss for the residents and, of course, offer activities in their professional programs that stimulate each of the residents as a member of the community, as a person of value in the sight of God.

⁹ Elizabeth A Dreyer, *Accidental Theologians: Four Women Who Shaped Christianity* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2014), 62.

¹⁰ Clack, 'Feminist Theology of Failure and Loss', 13.

¹¹ Clack, 'Feminist Theology of Failure and Loss', 15.

¹² Clack, 'Feminist Theology of Failure and Loss', 15.

There are many aspects of loss in the ageing process. Loss of intellectual acuity is a natural response to the ageing brain and one aspect that most people will experience is *nominal aphasia*, the inability to remember names of people and things. This can be frustrating as we reach into our memories for a name which only comes to us after a stretch of time, or with the help of someone close, or not at all. The capacity to understand technology, devices of varying kinds, financial arrangements, simple food preparation, medications, and other normal aspects of contemporary life become increasingly frustrating, and support is necessary. The capacity to engage in conversations that were once familiar can be lost and reduce the possibilities of family and communal engagement that was once a delight.

The loss of connections to family and friends can be an isolating experience, particularly when there is geographical distance, and the use of technology requires assistance. With no advocate to support the real human person within the vulnerable and fragile exterior, ageism can be damaging, and the loss of hope and a feeling of total futility can result in depression. Depression is common throughout the older population in Australia, and it is thought that between 10 and 15 percent of aged persons experience depression, but the rate is higher among those who live in residential aged care, around 35 percent.¹³ This is to be expected when the reasons for being in higher levels of care are due to further loss of physical, psychological, and spiritual health.

As intergenerational living becomes rarer, young children will find it difficult to approach elderly people unless it is part of their usual experience. They will find the physical appearance and characteristics of the elderly disconcerting and in some cases even frightening. This can be rectified with intergenerational exposure within our community. An ABC special, *Old People's Home For 4 Year Olds*,¹⁴ was a beautiful examination of the joy that is possible through intergenerational activities and the positive effects were spread across three generations of people who previously were strangers.

The loss of mobility and physical capability is multi-faceted: Hearing, speaking (with tooth loss), eating, walking, picking up items, and bathing or dressing oneself, all express the vulnerability of the aged person. The loss of the capacity to drive and be reasonably independent comes with increased dependence on another and this is difficult for both carers and the aged person. While these capabilities can be gradual in their emergence or have sudden onset with a major health event, they express the decline of the physical person.

¹³ Accessed 8 August 2022, <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/older-people>

¹⁴ Accessed 8 August 2022, <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/old-people-s-home-for-4-year-olds>

Spiritual Care in the Residential Aged Care Setting

All these aspects of loss demand particular care of the elderly person in their spiritual and liturgical life. In the residential aged care sector, it became very clear from the protections placed around facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic that isolation and disconnection seriously affect the health of the residents. Spiritual and religious care is also necessary, and since chaplains and other spiritual carers were not allowed access, rates of distress and despair increased. This meant that spiritual nurturing was disconnected and ‘without spiritual nurturing, the experiences of isolation can be devastating, and the normal modes of the affirmation of narrative become weakened among those who are separated from loved ones.’¹⁵ This can mean that the elderly person can fail to thrive which can lead to loss of hope which can in turn lead to worse health outcomes such as increased infections.

In past times religion and health were seen as intrinsically connected. While spirituality was not spoken of separately, there was an understanding that your health was dependent on spiritual peace and that your culture and tradition ‘formed important ways of living’ such that where there was a disconnection, ill health followed.¹⁶ Health and healing in recent times have moved from the religious domain to being controlled by secular services which led to the loss of the spiritual dimension in health care, and, over the twentieth century, this had become increasingly obvious. Research now clearly shows the need for spiritual care.¹⁷ Drawing from Viktor Frankl’s 1984 book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, MacKinlay says that ‘we are not simply biological beings; we can only be understood completely, if at all, by taking into account the human body, mind and spirit’.¹⁸

MacKinlay asserts that the spiritual dimension ‘is deeply connected with finding meaning, and that the search for meaning is often engaged in story work and narrative’ which ‘becomes the vehicle for the transmission of the individual narrative’ and its affirmation by others.¹⁹ This applies to those who have a religious practice/affiliation and those who are not connected in that way. Relationship is an important aspect of the spiritual whether you are connecting with the God of your understanding or with other human beings; this is universal. One aspect of spirituality that is perhaps less understood outside religious frameworks is the developmental aspect. The spiritual dimension is also a ‘dimension with potential for continued spiritual growth and development, and for transformation or self-transcendence

¹⁵ Elizabeth MacKinlay, ‘A Narrative of Spirituality and Ageing: Reflections on the Ageing Journey and the Spiritual Dimension’, *Religions* 13 (20 May 2022): 1-13 at 1, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050463>.

¹⁶ MacKinlay, ‘A Narrative of Spirituality and Ageing’, 2.

¹⁷ MacKinlay, ‘A Narrative of Spirituality and Ageing’, 3.

¹⁸ MacKinlay, ‘A Narrative of Spirituality and Ageing’, 4.

¹⁹ MacKinlay, ‘A Narrative of Spirituality and Ageing’, 7.

across the life-long journey.²⁰ All of these aspects, and a fully established understanding of the spiritual nature of the elderly, whether considered in a religious framework or not, is necessary for the constructing of a means of assessment of the spiritual needs of aged care residents. It is also important not to isolate spirituality from the various faith traditions and belief groups as this could harm the whole effort for the provision of the best spiritual care.²¹

Assessing Spiritual Care

To ensure that there is a clear process for screening and assessment of spiritual care among the residents of aged care facilities, 'structured and validated multidisciplinary assessment processes'²² are necessary. Drummond and Carey explored the various assessment instruments that have been provided within Australian aged care and the results of the international consensus conference in 2014.²³ The conference accepted a nebulous definition of spirituality, and Drummond and Carey found that it was problematic because it did not provide a clear understanding of the spiritual practitioner's contribution to the aged care resident (called 'consumers' in the article), which means that it is difficult to quantify as an outcome measure. The definition is important because it is relevant to the activities of the spiritual care practitioners.

With the increasing number of Australians identifying as having no religion, it cannot be simply recorded at the time of entry to the aged care facility that the elderly person has a particular religion, or no religion. This denies the need for spiritual care in all the residents, as spiritual care is now considered an element of overall care and is not described in the choice of religion. In the 2021 Australian census 38.9 percent of respondents reported having no religion; this included those who describe themselves as secular or spiritual. Ninety-three percent of people responded voluntarily to this question.²⁴

A simple differentiation between spirituality and religion that the authors found useful was that religion involved 'doing' whereas spirituality was a state of 'being'. Spirituality is intrinsic to human nature but religion is the learned, or cultural, response.²⁵ Traditional care practitioners would provide prayer, sacraments where required, pastoral counselling and reading religious texts. This is not sufficient in the contemporary setting. It is now necessary to be able to evaluate the spiritual care

²⁰ MacKinlay, 'A Narrative of Spirituality and Ageing', 8.

²¹ MacKinlay, 'A Narrative of Spirituality and Ageing', 10.

²² David A. Drummond and Lindsay B. Carey, 'Assessing Spiritual Well-Being in Residential Aged Care: An Exploratory Review', *Journal of Religion and Health* 58 (2019): 372-90 at 372, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-018-0717-9>.

²³ Drummond and Carey, 'Assessing Spiritual Well-Being', 373.

²⁴ '2021 Census shows changes in Australia's religious diversity', 2022, accessed 15 August, 2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/2021-census-shows-changes-australias-religious-diversity>.

²⁵ Drummond and Carey, 'Assessing Spiritual Well-Being', 373.

profession within the modern healthcare metrics and so new paradigms need to be developed so that the place of spiritual care is recognised as ‘it is now fundamentally important to identify the unique contribution that spiritual care and spiritual care practitioners can make to consumer experiences.’²⁶ The initial assessment of a new aged care resident needs to be able to provide the necessary information to design and evaluate a care plan so the usual screening done by a nurse or other health care practitioner needs to be properly augmented by a screening by a spiritual care practitioner. Simply identifying the faith community that a person belongs to, or has been connected to in the past through family, is not sufficient as it does not enable the insight necessary into the unique spirituality of the individual.

The spiritual care of an aged care resident can lift them from despair to acceptance to hope. This is extremely important in the care of the elderly and the response of the family to their care. Drummond and Carey have not yet found the best tool for this assessment but established that a new instrument is necessary and that it should not be ‘framed in specifically religious or spiritual terminology, but rather in generic language in order to allow’ that it be used with any elderly person irrespective of their faith or lack of faith.²⁷ Such a tool will become invaluable to spiritual care practitioners who provide the liturgical or spiritual celebrations to nurture the life of the aged people.

Ambiguous Loss

Ambiguous loss is the loss felt by the beholder: the carer, the spouse, the family, the friends, or parish community. This form of loss is not well recognised or supported, and since many aged care persons are being cared for in the home by people who are experiencing ambiguous loss, liturgical and spiritual care must be carefully fashioned to include both the carers and the ones being cared for.

The loss of a vigorous person, reduced by age and/or dementia of varying kinds, is felt by all those to whom they are connected. The inability to engage in communal activities affects both the aged person and the family/community. The inability to engage in conversation except with exhaustive repetition affects all those closely connected. This is ambiguous loss; the person has not died, has not gone, but parts of their capacity have gone. As Pauline Boss notes:

In the world of unresolved grief, there is a unique kind of loss that complicates grief, confuses relationships, and prevents closure. I call it *ambiguous loss*. It lies at the root of much depression, anxiety, and family conflict. While

²⁶ Drummond and Carey, ‘Assessing Spiritual Well-Being’, 374.

²⁷ Drummond and Carey, ‘Assessing Spiritual Well-Being’, 387.

religious communities traditionally have comforted those who lose a loved one from death—a clear loss—less attention is paid to ambiguous loss. This is understandable as there is no official notice or ritual for such unclear loss.²⁸

This is a loss that is traumatic, ill-defined, relational, not caused by individual pathology and leads to confusion and incomprehensibility.²⁹ There is a physical presence but with a psychological absence. This loss can be caused by various kinds of dementia, but also through excessive use of alcohol and other addictions, depression, traumatic brain injury, stroke or other injuries that rob the person of their capacity. As noted by Boss above, there is no official notice or ritual for this loss, no liturgy, no spiritual nourishment. This needs to be rectified.

Ambiguous loss can be experienced by a worshipping community when the pastor or parish priest begins a psychological decline but is not aware of it, or its consequences. I experienced this with a priest in our university community who would repeat parts of the eucharistic ritual and get stuck in a loop in both the ritual and the homily. In small gatherings it was possible to relocate his attention and redirect his actions, but in the larger sphere that was not possible, so he was no longer asked to be a liturgical leader. This was very distressing for him as he could not understand what had changed, and it was difficult for those who had to redirect him to offer a suitable explanation. He would sometimes attend major public events dressed in an odd assortment of regalia, both liturgical and academic. At times it was possible to intervene and assist him, but at other times that was not possible, with consequent embarrassment felt within the community. The ambiguous loss was felt by the faith-filled community with whom he celebrated and with whom he had worked for a long time. It was difficult to deal with the grief of this loss and difficult to deal with the effects of his dementia. It was also difficult to ritualise this loss. We had a celebration to award him the Distinguished Service Medal on his retirement, but the next day he turned up for work because he did not know that he had retired and could not be convinced that he had done so.

Ambiguous loss also has no closure which is sought within our community. Those who suffer this loss are expected to somehow get over it, yet the problem persists. Boss records how her clients who are suffering this ambiguous loss would stop visiting their loved ones who suffer dementia because their 'discomfort with the ambiguity forces them to consider the person totally gone.'³⁰ This loss leads to suffering for both the loved ones and the elderly and needs liturgical and spiritual expression in order to nurture the spiritual health of all members. This inclusivity is required by our Christian principles, but it is lacking.

²⁸ Pauline Boss, 'The Trauma and Complicated Grief of Ambiguous Loss', *Pastoral Psychology* 59 (2010): 137-45 at 137, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-009-0264-0>. Emphasis belongs to the author.

²⁹ Boss, 'Ambiguous Loss', 138.

³⁰ Boss, 'Ambiguous Loss', 141.

Theology of Loss in the Ageing Process

A theology of loss that focuses on the ageing process is an action of 'faith seeking understanding' (St Anselm of Canterbury and Bec, 1033-1109). Beginning from a stance of faith and using our intellectual capacity to elucidate our direction, we seek to find godliness and reflect heaven in our approach to the ageing process, whether as a personal experience or as a carer. Richard declares that faith 'must be understood not primarily in terms of content or tradition but as a personal response to the transcendent and ultimate reality as revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ.'³¹ God's saving action in this time and place, shown to us through God's Word, through the person of Jesus Christ, is the kingdom of God. This is how we face loss ourselves and face loss in others, this is the core of our understanding of God in this time and place.

Nobody is perfect and there is no perfect life. But as Christians we understand that God is perfect, and we can only move into that perfection when we pass from this imperfect earthly life. As O'Donohue declares, 'When we love and allow ourselves to be loved, we begin more and more to inhabit the kingdom of the eternal. Fear changes into courage, emptiness becomes plenitude and distance becomes intimacy.'³² A theology of loss calls us to respond. What is God calling me to do? How do I, made in the image of God, respond to the acute needs of the elderly? How does an aged person respond in a God-like way? Where is God in all this messiness? How can it be expressed liturgically or in spiritual nurturing?

Paul Kaptein, a Fremantle-based artist, likens himself as a sculptor to the purveyor of loss but also of transformation. As a sculptor he destroys material to reveal something very beautiful. His studio floor is littered with curls of paulownia wood. He builds the wood block through laminating slabs of wood that have finely finished surfaces to make them completely flat so that they can be glued to other pieces. This makes it very strong and can form large blocks. That in itself is *kenosis*: emptying to become something else. Paul speaks of re-creation, the becoming of something new (Rom 8:18-22), the emptying of self (Phil 2:2-12). Christ emptied himself, humbled himself and became obedient even to death, and then God exalted him. To find that vulnerability, to find that capacity to be emptied of all else, enables God to do the exaltation of the person through Christ. This allows the re-creation to occur.

To lose something, to take away something, emptying, discarding material as an artwork emerges, this is re-creation through emptying and loss, providing a profound image in a healing journey. The image below is of Kaptein's work *Portal*.³³ Kaptein describes his work thus:

³¹ Lucien Richard, 'Toward a Theology of Aging', *Science et Esprit* XXXIV, no. 3 (1982): 269-87 at 270.

³² John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara* (London: Bantam Press, 1999), 31.

³³ 'Portal' was a finalist in the Mandorla Art Award in 2016. The laminated, hand carved wood (paulownia) was created for the theme of resurrection. Kaptein had previously won the 2014 Award.

The allegorical wound in the hand becomes an aperture through which [hu] mankind is viewed by spirit and which conversely frames the space through which [hu]mankind reciprocates this contemplation. Each encounters the other through this opening and as such it becomes a space of simultaneous presence—a portal through which distinctions of past and present, spirit and flesh are removed.



This is a helpful expression and a way in which to consider loss as a defining possibility. For aged care residents who have lost the banners of success and even lost their own sense of self, to be able to explore through the senses a beautiful artwork can engage their unique spirituality in a precious moment.

MacKinlay refers to her own recent research where her team conducted interviews with elderly people in residential aged care to hear about their own lived experiences and how they find meaning in the face of frailty.³⁴ An important insight from the participants was ‘finding inner strength within their vulnerabilities.’³⁵ This is an example of engaging with elderly people in a way that continues their own personal narrative in their lifelong search for meaning. As we enter this stage of loss, it can also be a time of transformation. It can be seen as a process of going from activity to passivity where people will do things for me rather than me doing things for others. However, what that enables in the receiver is the ability to develop the theological attitude of thankfulness. This can be beautifully explored through liturgical and spiritual nurturing by using scripture.

³⁴ MacKinlay, ‘A Narrative of Spirituality and Ageing’, 11.

³⁵ MacKinlay, ‘A Narrative of Spirituality and Ageing’, 11.

Luke tells of Jesus' healing of the ten lepers in the region between Samaria and Galilee (17:11-19). Jesus felt compassion for their plight as they approached him. He interrupted his journey to heal them and as they left to show themselves to the priests, they realised that they were clean. Only one returned to Jesus to thank him by loudly praising God and then prostrating himself and thanking him. Jesus was surely saddened by only one returning, and that one being a Samaritan, despised by the Jews. 'But the other nine, where are they?' (17:17b). The attitude of thankfulness affects both the giver and the receiver. To develop such an attitude of thankfulness when you are unable in your frailty to do much in return is to once again be giving and needs to be expressed in spiritually and liturgically satisfying ways.

Theological Themes

Mary Elizabeth Moore has written about parenting elders³⁶ and, through an experience that was often painful, discerned some theological themes. Moore suffered ambiguous loss in the caring of her parents and then their final loss in death as well as the ambiguous loss of her older husband and what that meant for her personal and professional life. The three theological themes that responded to her experience were finitude, gratitude and grace.

Finitude is a reality for us all; we are not in eternity yet and our mortal selves have a finite capacity. Moore declares that 'It is an unavoidable existential phenomenon that arises starkly in eldercare, as in all limit situations. I have found that, amid the limits, God somehow provides just enough strength for one day at a time.'³⁷ Accepting the finite nature of our mortal selves, and of those elderly people who we love or care for, can bring a peacefulness and strength, a release of anxiety and in that a sense of God in the presence of the difficulty.

A second theological theme mentioned earlier is gratitude. Moore describes this theological theme as the 'spark of God's Spirit that warms the human family and the exhausted soul. It is a Divine light that reveals life in the midst of death and limitations.'³⁸ When a person who is made vulnerable by age or illness, or both, can focus on the essence of gratitude and express it within their relationships it has a gentle and immediate effect. The underlying theological theme that Moore presents through all her experiences is God's grace. When the caring and the vulnerability are at their most difficult, that is where the realities of God's grace are present. With my own journey through cancer (from 2019), the experience of extreme vulnerability and suffering, the loss of all capacity to care for oneself or be active in the care of others,

³⁶ Mary Elizabeth Moore, 'Parenting Elders: Finitude, Gratitude, and Grace', in *Parenting as Spiritual Practice and Source for Theology: Mothering Matters*, eds Claire Bischoff, Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo, and Annie Hardison-Moody (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 221-36 at 221.

³⁷ Moore, 'Parenting as Spiritual Practice', 227.

³⁸ Moore, 'Parenting as Spiritual Practice', 229.

demanded a different view altogether of God's presence. Accepting the finitude of my mortal self, the defining nature of gratitude in relationships with all around me, and the presence of God in all of this was indeed grace. Moore defines grace as 'God's heartbeat throbbing in the world, and our encounters with finitude force us to still ourselves and attune to that Divine beat.'³⁹

Moore offers spiritual practices as a way of being open to these gifts of God. All our actions are by choice, and when we choose to centre ourselves in precious moments, then we can savour them and make them a spiritual practice.⁴⁰ When caring for the elderly in a health capacity or a spiritual one, watching for those moments and drawing attention to them is a spiritual practice. It might simply be a time of laughter, or a time of stillness and peace that is brought into a higher level of consciousness. It might a moment when it has been possible to sit in the spring sunshine and rest without pain, a precious moment.

Choosing to be thankful is another spiritual practice, and it is definitely a choice. Thankfulness affects the giver and the receiver. When one expresses thanks, as did the Samaritan leper, the receiver is given grace as well as the giver and the relationship is strengthened. In our prayer and liturgical life, a sense of thankfulness changes our approach and our response. Anger subsides when we make that choice.

Being able to receive grace is also a spiritual practice that Moore describes.⁴¹ In order to receive grace we must be open rather than shutting the doors of our hearts in anger, frustration, and despair. Although these difficulties are real, there will be opportunities to leave the negative responses alone and remain still enough and vulnerable enough to accept the little sparks of grace that are given to us through the precious moments that we share with others.

There are other spiritual practices that can be added and one of them is patience. Patience is always a choice and in caring for the elderly when feebleness of body means that all actions are slow, patience is necessary to allow the fruitful moments of interaction to be also moments of God's grace. The expression of these spiritual practices through liturgical and spiritually nurturing activities are necessary for both the carers and the cared for.

MacKinlay gives particular reference to the arts in the way they can mediate spirituality for human beings. Using the human imagination to evoke creativity and invention will always help in spiritual expression and part of that is our expression through the arts.⁴²

³⁹ Moore, 'Parenting as Spiritual Practice', 232.

⁴⁰ Moore, 'Parenting as Spiritual Practice', 232.

⁴¹ Moore, 'Parenting as Spiritual Practice', 235.

⁴² MacKinlay, 'A Narrative of Spirituality and Ageing', 7.

The arts, then, become a source of joy for others as well, and the arts can express both the heights and depths of human emotion. It is significant that people who have dementia, and even advanced dementia, can often still actively participate in art forms. At these times, one may be privileged to see the joy of connecting on the faces of those with dementia.⁴³

Liturgical and Spiritual Practice

With the principal focus on inclusivity, it also needs to be recognised that there is a vast variety of circumstances in which liturgical and spiritual practice is celebrated. Even an entire manual could not attend to every circumstance, so spiritual care givers need to be creative people. Inclusivity requires the use of repetition and familiarity which can only be in tune when there has been sufficient time for spiritual practices to be absorbed by the elderly participants. Musically, chants are very useful when there is a phrase that is meaningful, perhaps expressing gratitude or peace, that can be put to a commonly known music setting.

The use of sensory materials (smells, sounds, music, taste) can bring spiritual comfort. Beauty is an important aspect that enables the human person to be open to God. It is often at times of great beauty in nature, or in the built environment of a church, that our minds are lifted to God. In the southwest of Western Australia, the karri forests are like the greatest of cathedrals. Their soaring beauty lift the eyes and mind to things much greater than oneself. Having things of beauty around aged care facilities therefore is of great importance. Real art, not just decorative images, can engage the spirit in a constant way. Spiritually directed art that express important themes will be of great benefit, as with the example of Paul Kaptein's work. A work such as Kaptein's could be the focus point in the middle of a circle and accompanied by readings from scripture, or poetry, or engaging narratives, along with music and a simple gesture of mimicking *Portal* will be nurturing.

Beauty in the surroundings will bring peace and joy. The smell of fragrant fresh flowers, incense or aromatic oils will enhance the senses. Sharing portions of food to enliven the taste will also enliven the spirit. In a beautiful space the spiritual practices mentioned above (holding special moments, expressing thankfulness, being open to grace, patience) can be expressed and encouraged within liturgy or within some other prayer or spiritual action. For the spiritual care of dementia sufferers, using sensory materials can bring them spiritual comfort. We do not know their response at times, but their spiritual care is important, and it can be seen if their responses are carefully observed.

⁴³ MacKinlay, 'A Narrative of Spirituality and Ageing', 7.

The use of blessings and touch is also very important. Simple blessings given often, even in passing, can evoke thankfulness and peace. Family members who have become unable to visit due to ambiguous loss, for example, can be engaged in these spiritual actions, in the hopes of a return to regular visits. Such rituals involving blessings and touching for those suffering ambiguous loss could provide much healing. When a parent cannot remember the names of their children, how can we ritualise that? How do we ritualise a celebration within a religious community of a relationship with a spouse who has not died but is no longer present to their partner? Blessing and holding, seeking thankfulness for what has been and hope for what is yet to come, can become a healing experience.

Major ritual occasions are also a time for careful spiritual and religious preparation. Preparation of funeral materials and rituals is necessary to ease the anxiety where none or few of the next generation would know how to prepare a funeral, and particularly a Christian or other religious funeral. If they have no knowledge of the rituals or of the deceased's religious or spiritual practice, it will be impossible for them to honour that in their elderly family member who has died. The spiritual caregiver will need to take up that creative and inclusive work. Careful assessment and collection of information about each elderly person in relation to their spiritual history and needs, as described earlier, is crucial for the spiritual caregiver. A new resource launched in Brisbane in August 2022 and available online is *Lazaretto*,⁴⁴ developed by a team of pastoral workers led by Erica Marshall. It shows great promise as a work of the church and as a valuable resource.

Conclusion

There is no complete manual that can deal with all the issues facing finitude and life as an elderly person. Like all other aspects of life, it is complicated by the fact of our uniqueness as a creature of God, made in the divine likeness. While this paper has described some aspects of life as an elderly person or a caregiver, there is still much to be explored. Research into ways in which the spiritual life of a person can be described and assessed towards a high quality of care in an aged care residency is still needed in Australia. The way in which a community supports and ritualises ambiguous loss is sadly neglected and needs to be addressed. Finding ways to express these complexities in prayer, spiritual awareness and liturgy will always remain a challenge. Suitably qualified and supported spiritual carers who can also encourage the staff in aged care facilities to actively engage in spiritual care of themselves and the residents is a concern. The challenge to us all is to engage in ways in which we can add to progress in this facet of life and love.

⁴⁴ Accessed 13 September 2022, <https://lazaretto.com.au/>.

Liturgical Inclusion and the Built Environment: A Case Study

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Abstract

Churches are constantly being built, renovated, and modified all around Australia. Like other buildings, churches are bound by legislation to incorporate design solutions to provide equitable and dignified access for people with disabilities, reflecting an expectation of contemporary culture. Church renovation projects should be evaluated in terms of accessibility to inform future project teams. The following case study explores both extensions of access and omissions in the renovation of the Cathedral of SS. Michael and John, Bathurst, New South Wales.

Introduction

The provision of access is a legal requirement for public buildings in Australia whether they are new or existing buildings.¹ Accessibility is often thought of in terms of a person in a wheelchair being able to enter and move about a building. This perception is perhaps not surprising as the signage for access is a stylised person in a wheelchair, and the replacement of steps with ramps is a common design feature. However, obstacles that make it difficult to access a building are painfully obvious to anyone pushing a pram, using a mobility aid or even those with stiff or deteriorating knee and hips joints. This expectation of access to a building could be considered an example of the inclusive and egalitarian nature of Australian culture.²

¹ "Access to Premises", Australian Human Rights Commission, accessed August 30, 2021, <https://humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/11930>.

² "Australian Culture", Cultural Atlas, accessed 30 August 2021, <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/australian-culture/australian-culture-core-concepts>.

The values of inclusion and access in church contexts can also reflect the interplay between culture and theology. The cultural expectation of inclusion defined, for example, by legislation, as the dignified and equitable access to buildings coincides with the call of the Second Vatican Council for the ‘full, conscious and active participation of the faithful in the liturgy’.¹ Indeed applying the cultural expectation of access to a church building could be seen as a form inculturation. In post-colonial Australian culture, the institutional church has influenced culture to promote the dignity of the human person. More recently, Australian culture has reflected back to the church through legislation and community expectations the cultural expectation of inclusion through accessibility. While not often applied to building access, Anscar Chupungco’s writing on inculturation suggests the possibility of this mutual informing interplay between theology and culture.²

When reflecting on inclusion and the place for worship, the basic question can be posited: *Are church buildings examples of inclusion or exclusion?* This article will examine the extent to which a recent restoration of a church has improved inclusion along with its effects on the active participation of the faithful, including those with mobility impairments, in liturgical celebrations.

The Project

In 2011 Bishop Michael McKenna initiated a restoration project for the Cathedral of SS. Michael and John in Bathurst, New South Wales.³ The project provided an opportunity to improve accessibility to the cathedral and its precincts for people with and without a disability and enhance the liturgical suitability of the internal worship space. After a period of community consultation and discernment by a committee responsible for advising Bishop McKenna, plans were finalised on what changes would be made to the cathedral and its surroundings.⁴ The construction phase of the project was completed with the dedication of a new altar on 23 March 2021.

¹ Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, art. 14, accessed 5 October 2021, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

² Anscar J Chupungco, ‘Liturgy and Inculturation’, in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies II Fundamental Liturgy*, ed. Anscar J Chupungco (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2004), 339. ‘Firstly there is interaction between Christianity and culture which leads to dialogue. Secondly, there is the integration of cultural elements into Christianity and thirdly there is dynamic transculturation where both parties retain their identity’.

³ Hereafter known as ‘the cathedral’.

⁴ Some examples of the work done on the inside the cathedral included the reconstruction and reconfiguration of the elevated sanctuary, an amended pew layout, the construction of a new altar, augmentation to improve the existing sound amplification system, construction of an accessible sanitary facility and the construction of a new main entrance, which is integrated with a newly formed carpark and pedestrian external landscape. These elements of the project were observed and noted on a site inspection on 6 August 2021.

A number of resources were consulted to assist the restoration committee in discerning its recommendations. Chief among these resources was a publication of the Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference called *Fit for Sacred Use – Stewardship and Renewal of Places of Worship*.⁵ This publication

provides a comprehensive framework for caring for the fabric of places of worship, together with clear guidance for renewing church buildings. It further offers practical information to assist those who will be responsible for the stewardship and renewal of places of worship.⁶

For the purposes of this article, there are three references in *Fit for Sacred Use* to the Right to Access⁷ for persons with a disability. They are:

Narthex/Entry 960 Rebuilding would be required if compliant access for those with a disability does not exist. This is a matter of justice and respect for parishioners, though it can sometimes be challenging to integrate the design harmoniously with the existing architecture.

Place for the Assembly 989 A certain flexibility may be helpful in accommodating different liturgical rites and making provision for the integration of people with disability. If a section of movable chairs is used in conjunction with existing pews, they should match in colour and material. Renewed seating should retain the possibilities for comfortable kneeling and standing.

Sanctuary 1047 Rebuilding ought to allow for disabled access to the sanctuary.⁸

Methodology

To evaluate the outcomes of the renovation with regard to access, I scrutinized available resources on the issue to establish the cultural expectations of access to buildings. Such resources include the Commonwealth of Australia, Disability Discrimination Act 1992⁹ and the associated Access to Premises Standards,¹⁰ and Australian Standard 1428.1 – 2009 Design for access and mobility, Part 1: General

⁵ Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC), *Fit for Sacred Use – Stewardship and Renewal of Places of Worship* (Brisbane: Liturgy Brisbane, 2018), 60, 64, and 71.

⁶ ACBC, *Fit for Sacred Use*, Introduction.

⁷ "Access to Premises", Australian Human Rights Commission, accessed 30 August 2021, <https://humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/11930>.

⁸ ACBC, *Fit for Sacred Use*, 60, 64 & 71.

⁹ "Disability Discrimination Act 1992," Commonwealth of Australia, accessed August 30, 2021, <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2018C00125>. Hereafter referred to as 'DDA'.

¹⁰ "Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010", Commonwealth of Australia, accessed August 30, 2021, <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2010L00668>.

requirements for access – New building work.¹¹ These resources were used to provide a rubric against which to assess the restored cathedral. I then conducted an onsite inspection and audit of the cathedral and its precincts to determine how the outcomes of the restoration project meet the expectation of inclusion through equitable and dignified access as proposed by the resources noted above.

I then undertook a theological reflection on how the building promotes the active participation of the faithful in the liturgy. My methodology is one synthesised, developed and organised by Daniel P. McCarthy OSB and James Leachman OSB and described as the ‘four theological interpretive keys’,¹² which are based on the work of Enzo Lodi and Renato De Zan. The keys are a methodological approach to liturgical theology that can be applied to liturgical ritual, text, symbol, art, and architecture. These four keys are given the headings *anamnesis*, *epiclesis*, *eschatology*, and *theosis*.

Anamnesis, or memorial, refers to Jesus’ command at the Last Supper to ‘Do this in memory of me’, through which the faithful are invited to participate in the eucharist in order to be transformed into the Body of Christ. Anamnesis leads to the second key, *epiclesis*. ‘As anamnesis expresses God’s action in the present, Epiclesis expresses God’s action “here”, in the assembly.’¹³

The third interpretive key, *eschatology*, refers to the lifelong journey of the faithful fulfilling their potential to share in divine life, which is marked by their moral judgments. These judgments are guided by scripture, notably in Matthew 25:31-46, ‘The Last Judgement’: ‘I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me’ (25:35-36, NRSV).

The final theological interpretive key is *theosis*, ‘becoming a free person in love.’¹⁴ Leachman and McCarthy express this key as the ‘mutual incorporation of the divine and human’,¹⁵ or the ‘divine/human exchange’. The incarnate Word allows humans to share in the divine life, and we share more fully as we become fully human,

¹¹ Standards Australia, AS1428.1-2009, *Design for access and mobility Part 1: General requirements for access – new building work* (Sydney: SAI Global, 2010).

¹² Examples of the use of the keys can be found at ‘The Four Interpretive Keys in Liturgical Ritual’, Daniel McCarthy, accessed 31 August 2021, <https://danielmccarthyosb.com/keys/>; James Leachman and Daniel McCarthy, *Appreciating the Collect: An Irenic Methodology* (Farnborough: St. Michael’s Abbey Press, 2008), 127-31 and 197-219; James Leachman and Daniel McCarthy, *Transition in the Easter Vigil: Becoming Christians* (Farnborough: St. Michael’s Abbey Press, 2011), 123-28 and 333-38; Daniel P. McCarthy, ‘Seeing a Reflection, Considering Appearances: The History, Theology and Literary Composition of the *Missale Romanum* at a Time of Vernacular Reflection’, *Questions Liturgiques* 94 (2013): 109-43; James G Leachman, ‘A Liturgical Study of the Proper Prayers for St Charles of St Andrew Houben, C.P.: (1) The Opening Prayer’, *Questions Liturgiques* 92 (2011): 29-45; Daniel P McCarthy, ‘A Gentle Light in Mourning, Fulfilling Christian Initiation and Life at Funerals’, *Ecclesia Orans* 36 (2019): 89-119.

¹³ Leachman and McCarthy, *Appreciating*, 128.

¹⁴ McCarthy, *A Gentle*, 111.

¹⁵ Leachman and McCarthy, *Appreciating*, 130.

just as Christ was fully human and fully divine. We become fully human when our relationships with others are modelled on the Trinity, which is described as ‘united without confusion, distinct without division.’¹⁶

The Restored Building

I used an onsite inspection of the cathedral to gather data for a theological reflection based on the four theological interpretive keys. The purpose of the inspection was to identify improvements to and deficiencies of access at the completion of the restoration project, though not to determine if the outcome complied with the relevant federal and state legislation. The accessibility audit considered the following areas:

- a. The narthex (pedestrian access to the site, parking and the main entrance)
- b. The place for the assembly
- c. The sanctuary

The Narthex: Site Access, Parking and Entrances

A component of the restoration of the cathedral was the appropriate drainage of stormwater and groundwater from the site, as water and its salt content had caused much of the deterioration of the building’s elements. As such, the site around the cathedral needed to be excavated to install a drainage system that was designed



Photo 1: Accessible car-parking spaces

to convey water away from the building. Since the carpark occupied much of the site, it had to be reconstructed. Photo 1 shows the new carpark, which includes a number of carparking spaces for people with disabilities adjacent to the entrance to the building. The shared spaces associated with the accessible carparks, marked by painted ground surface hatching, and the step ramps through the concrete curb provide a near level path of travel to the entrance. These elements greatly improve accessibility.

¹⁶ McCarthy, *A Gentle Light*, 112.

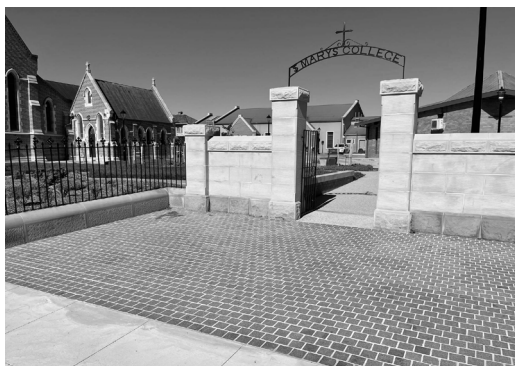


Photo 2: Pedestrian access to site

There are several points of access to the site for pedestrians, which subsequently link to the cathedral entrance. Pedestrian access via the 'St Mary's College Gates', as shown in Photo 2, provides an almost level entrance from the public footpath to the site and subsequently via a 'continuous accessible path of travel'¹⁷ to the main entrance of the cathedral. This constitutes the best pedestrian access to the site.

Other access points from the public footpath involve a level of difficulty for people with a mobility disability to access the site safely from the pedestrian footpath onto the site. Firstly, the driveway entrance to and exit from the carpark is a possible accessible pedestrian entry point to the site, so, pedestrians and vehicles share the same space. This is not an ideal situation for the safety of people, particularly those with diminished mobility who cannot move as quickly as others, those with hearing or vision impairment who could have difficulty being aware of their surroundings, and children who have a lower level of awareness regarding safety.



Photo 3: Pedestrian access via car entry

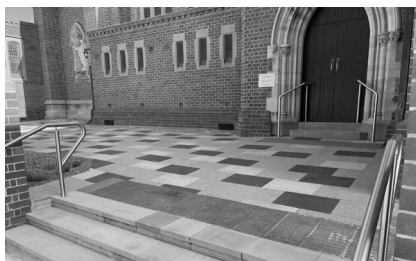


Photo 4: Secondary entrance

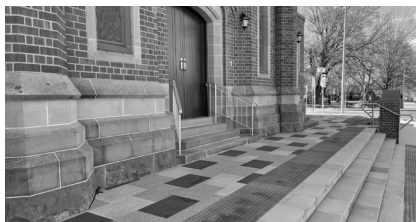


Photo 5: Previous main entrance

¹⁷ Standards Australia, *Design for access and mobility*, 7.

Secondly, the other points of access to the site all involve navigating steps and stairways to the cathedral. Photos 3, 4, and 5 show the steps that have to be traversed either to access the site and/or subsequently gain access to the entrance. All steps are provided with handrails, which aid access when navigating the steps.

Photo 5 shows the previous main entrance to the cathedral, which includes steps to the entrance doors. These steps lead to a landing and are provided with handrails whose size and position make them only marginally helpful to someone with a mobility impairment. The difficulty of these steps at the main entrance was so severe that a number of people had fallen and injured themselves when using them to access the cathedral. The steps also made it very difficult to move a coffin in and out of the cathedral, and the steps made it difficult to exit the building in the event of an emergency.



Photo 6: New main entrance

The improvement to access to the cathedral through the new main entrance is obvious in Photo 6. The new main entrance into the cathedral provides a near flat access. The doors are wide, clearly marked, swing in both directions and provide more than adequate circulation space around them. The ground surface leading to the doors and through into the building is flat and easily traversable.

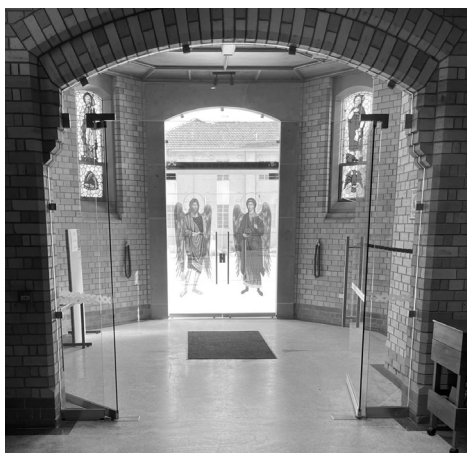


Photo 7: Narthex looking outwards



Photo 8: Looking through third set of doors

Appropriate accessibility continues from the main entrance doors through a second set of doors (Photo 7) into the narthex or foyer; however, these doors and the second set of glass doors into the narthex, lack a suitable visual indicator, which could be problematic for a person with a vision impairment. The Australia Standard AS1428.1 – 2009 details the design of a suitable visual indicator as a solid line, across the glazing at a particular height.¹⁸

Appropriate accessibility continues through a third set of older doors from the narthex into the nave or place of the assembly (Photo 9).

The Place for the Assembly

The seating provided in the cathedral generally consists of wooden pews with a small number of padded chairs. None of the seating is provided with armrests which aid people with loss of leg strength to stand from a sitting position. There are spaces both in and adjacent to the rows of pews, which could be used by people with mobility aids. The space available at the end of rows are shown in Photo 9. There are approximately thirty locations where people with mobility aids could gain access. These are not designated for this purpose but rather a space where the pews finish. The spaces within rows are shown in Photo 10.



Photo 9: Spaces at the end of rows



Photo 10: Space within pews

Both examples are problematic for people with a loss of mobility. The space that is available at the end of pews, while plentiful, does not always provide a direct line of sight to the raised sanctuary—which holds the altar, ambo, and presider's chair—if the person remained in their wheelchair or scooter. The design of the pew with a raised

¹⁸ Standards Australia, Design for access and mobility, 14.

end and kneeler also limits the ability of a person to transfer from their mobility aid to sit in the pew to improve sightlines. The spaces provided within the banks of pews are also problematic as the space between the pews is too narrow to manoeuvre with or without a mobility aid.

Access to the other uses of space in the cathedral is generally good. Access to the public toilet, confessional, Marian Chapel, music ministry space, baptismal font, Stations of the Cross, various devotional art, and the vestry is by way of a flat surface or, in the case of the public toilet, a step ramp.

The Sanctuary



Photo 11: Sanctuary

Entrance to the sanctuary and sacristy is difficult because there is one step to be traversed into the sacristy and a further two steps (three total) to the sanctuary. Reaching the tabernacle requires traversing an additional three steps, leaving six steps from the floor of the nave to the tabernacle (Photo 11).

There was a ramp to the sanctuary located some distance to the altar, however this ramp was demolished in order for the sanctuary to be

re-modelled. The floor surface of the sanctuary was carpet but now is a high-gloss marble tile that does not provide a non-slip surface. This is also the case for the steps. One level of steps, constructed from terrazzo concrete, include a narrow non-slip tape. The other two levels of steps, however, have the same high-gloss marble tile without a non-slip application. Access to the sanctuary does not benefit from a handrail to assist people to manoeuvre up and down the change of floor level. These elements contribute to making access to the sanctuary difficult for people with a wide range of mobility impairments, including those related to loss of leg strength, weight, the use of mobility aids such as crutches, walking sticks, walkers and wheelchairs.

Taken as a whole, access to the cathedral site and the building after renovations is generally good, as is access into and throughout the internal space. Improvements could be made, and some suggestions will be listed below. Access to the sanctuary, however, is poor when compared to the site and the rest of the building.

Theological Reflection

The preceding section identified substantial improvements in access to the cathedral after the renovation work. Also identified were a number of areas where access could be improved. This situation is not unique to the cathedral. The renovation of existing buildings generally yields a mixture of improvements and deficiencies in relation to access. New South Wales legislation steers developers to provide a certain level of access through renovation, though a complete upgrading of a building is generally not required.

While improved access is guided by legislation, there is also a liturgical-theological imperative to go beyond the legislative requirement and ensure that all people are given the opportunity to fully and actively participate in the liturgy enacted in a church. The four theological interpretive keys introduced above can ‘unlock’ an interpretation of liturgical symbol, ritual, and texts, along with the context within which the rite is celebrated, particularly its artistic and architectural elements. The relationship between the liturgy, the building, and the assembly is important because the human body ‘shares in the dignity of the image of God.’¹⁹ Providing a physical environment where people can participate in the liturgical rites enables those participating to share ‘more abundantly those fruits for the sake of which Christ the Lord instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice.’²⁰

The first key, *anamnesis*, can be explored through two constitutive elements: the ritual program and the narration of the saving works of God. The ritual program of the liturgy interprets the original saving work of God when Christ instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper.²¹ The ritual program establishes what the participant does in the liturgy—the prayers prayed, the postures and gestures made—so that the participant can then be Christ to the world. An important aspect of anamnesis is that the ritual program is supported by the art and architecture of the built environment. The narration of the saving works of God is what is heard, seen, smelled, and felt by the participant through the ritual program, which interprets the once-only historical saving action of Jesus, in order to share in the life of Christ, that is, to be holy.

The architecture of a building can hinder the assembly’s anamnesis if people cannot fully participate in the transformative power of the liturgy because their physical needs are not met. While a person with a mobility impairment can access the cathedral from the outside, they have limited choice of where they place themselves in the nave. Further, because of a mobility impairment, they may be inhibited

¹⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Homebush, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 1994), 93.

²⁰ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (Sydney: St Pauls Publications, 2007), 19.

²¹ McCarthy and Leachman, *Transition*, 126.

from participating in a liturgical ministry of leadership. If a person with a mobility disability cannot easily access the sanctuary in a dignified manner, the degree and kind of their participation is limited by the physical environment.

Epiclesis is the second theological interpretive key to be applied to the place for liturgy. Epiclesis is understood as an invocation the assembly makes of God to be manifest at that liturgical event. Epiclesis is most commonly connected to the eucharistic prayer and various other invocations that seek the presence of the Holy Spirit. As a theological interpretive key, epiclesis has a much broader reference when God is invoked to 'be present to us and for us.'²² The presence of God then compels us to respond by presenting ourselves to God through the liturgical action. Invocation and presentation are the two elements of epiclesis.

If the faithful are not able to fully present themselves and participate in the liturgical action because of the building in which they pray, then their human dignity is impaired or even denied, a failure still reflected in the newly renovated cathedral. While persons with disability, particularly a mobility impairment, are able to enter the cathedral to present themselves to God in a dignified way, the limited choice of seating options and locations diminishes their participation. Poor access to the sanctuary inhibits their exercise of certain liturgical ministries. Access to the sanctuary also affects the clergy, who, like others among the faithful, may find it difficult to step up into the sanctuary. As a result they may choose to not take part in the entrance procession but rather enter the sanctuary prior to Mass.

The third key of *eschatology* points to human destiny to become holy and share in the divine life. The liturgy transforms the participant to be Christ-like in the world in which we live. Therefore, the way we behave in society and the way we treat the vulnerable expresses and signifies our share in the life of God, which McCarthy refers to as the 'beatific vision' experienced not only when we die but throughout our life. When churches are built or renovated to include access and other arrangements for people with disabilities to participate fully in the liturgy, all the faithful mature in their understanding and inclusion of all people. This human maturation is an important component of eschatology because it demonstrates how the faithful share in the divine life and the Kingdom of God in their daily life. When persons with disabilities are not treated as equals, whether by being assigned second-class seating or by being restricted from the liturgical ministries of lector, extraordinary minister of communion, altar server or sacristan, the maturation of the faithful without an apparent disability is diminished. The place for liturgy should support participation of the entire assembly, thereby supporting the transformative action of the liturgy on those who participate in it.

The fourth key, *theosis*, describes how, when the faithful are united as one and yet

²² McCarthy, *A Gentle*, 107.

distinct as individuals in their differences, they are able to exercise personal freedom to love God and neighbour, without confusion and without distinction, in the mutual exchange of love.²³ There is a freedom to love in this economy, a freedom from fear of human differences and from attitudes that inhibit full acceptance of all people. It is a freedom that shows how the faithful can accept all of humanity for who they are and respect of their dignity. This naturally applies to people with disabilities, and if church architecture does not represent and promote inclusivity, the faithful are impaired in their journey toward full humanity by the building in which they worship God. The place for worship could further be an obstacle for a person with a disability to fully experience the mutual exchange proposed by the transformative thesis of the liturgy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is an interplay between culture and theology as expressed through the concept of inclusion. The cultural expectation of inclusion involves dignified and equitable access to buildings which coincides with the call of the Second Vatican Council for the 'full, conscious and active participation of the faithful in the liturgy'.²⁴ As noted above this interplay can be construed as a kind of inculturation through which the dialogue between Christianity and culture yields a new 'transculturation' of mutual enrichment.²⁵

The process of inculturation with regard to access for persons with disabilities could be characterised as the institutional church influencing culture to promote the dignity of the human person, the culture reflecting back that notion to the church in laws and community expectations regarding access, and, in this case, this church partly implementing the cultural concept of inclusion. The dignity of the human person is a central tenet of Christianity, a concept reflected in Australian culture in many ways but in particular in the way people with disabilities are treated. Dignified and equitable access for people with disabilities to buildings is a fruit of this influence and has become enshrined in legislation and expected by most Australians. Australian cultural expectations are now influencing the buildings in which the faithful worship, and when a church is renovated there are legislative requirements to follow and expectations to be met. In a theological sense the Second Vatican Council encouraged assemblies to take up the liturgical principle of active participation. This cathedral, however, limits some dimensions of active participation in its built form.

The recent renovation of the Cathedral of SS. Michael and John, Bathurst, was

²³ McCarthy, *A Gentle*, 112.

²⁴ *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, article 14, Vatican City, accessed 5 October 2021, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

²⁵ See, for example, Anscar J Chupungco, 'Liturgy and Inculturation', in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies II: Fundamental Liturgy*, ed. Anscar J Chupungco (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2004), 339.

influenced by the need to provide access for people with disabilities. Renovations were successful to a degree in achieving this cultural expectation. Access to the site, narthex and nave have largely been successful, though some improvements could be made. Access to the sanctuary was not improved and even worsened by the demolition of an existing non-compliant ramp and the replacement of tactile carpet with tiles, which may make slips and falls more likely. Access to the building has been improved which allows a degree of active participation however the inaccessibility of the sanctuary means that the faithful with mobility impairments are not easily able to exercise the liturgical ministries they may be called to perform.

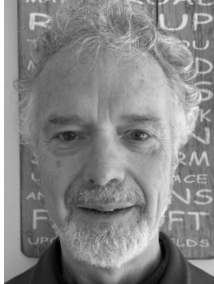
There are further changes that could be made to the cathedral to improve access for persons with disabilities and thereby better facilitate full, conscious and active participation. They include a creative design for ramping into the sanctuary; compliant handrails to the sanctuary at appropriate locations; a greater variety of seating options in the nave including chairs with armrests; alternative locations distributed throughout the nave for people using mobility aids and their companions; a non-slip coating to the floor and steps of the sanctuary; a suitable visual indicator to the second set of glass doors in the narthex; and safety signs for pedestrians using the driveway to access the main entrance.

James Leachman provides an insight into the provision of access to churches and the outcome of limited access, which serves as both a fitting end to this reflection and a summons to assemblies to take up the work of access: 'Some people tend to be overlooked, and more care should be taken to include them in the assembly... Unless we make greater effort, the assembly will lack many of its possible members and the Church in her variety and riches is not made visible.'²⁶

²⁶ McCarthy and Leachman, *Come*, 34/35.

From Equality in Marriage to Marriage Equality

Peter Grayson-Weeks



The Rev'd Peter Grayson-Weeks is a retired Minister of the Uniting Church in Australia, serving in congregational placements in Victoria and Tasmania, 1985-2020. Peter was married to Bea for 31 years before coming to a fuller understanding of his identity. He has two daughters and five grandchildren. He has been married to Daniel (according to the rights of the Uniting Church) for three years after six years of partnership. Peter's last placement was for 12 years at Craigieburn-Wallan in Victoria, during which time he also served as Chairperson of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

Ecumenical Relations Committee, and for three years as Chairperson of the Hume City Interfaith Network. Peter has been a member of the AAL since 2000. He holds a Bachelor of Theology from the Melbourne College of Divinity.

Abstract

The Uniting Church in Australia since its inception has sought to affirm the full personhood and equal status of men and women in all aspects of its life. The marriage service has sought to demonstrate this by removing any references to gender-specific roles or patriarchal practices. This commitment to 'equality in marriage' has allowed for the move towards 'marriage equality' where two people, regardless of gender, may marry. This move has in turn opened the way for a greater understanding of equality in marriage for both opposite gender and same gender couples. In this paper I will outline the process of change that has taken place within The Uniting Church, and touch on some of its theological and liturgical implications. I will seek to address broader questions about how the Uniting Church's theological understanding of 'equality in marriage' as expressed in our liturgy is evolving/developing toward 'marriage equality'.

Introduction

Firstly, I wish to acknowledge that I live on the banks of kanamaluka/Tamar River on the land of the Tyerrernotepanner People, the North Midlands Tribe of lutruwita/Tasmania. I have often reminded the people at weddings I conduct that marriage is an institution that has changed significantly over time. For most of its history in the West, marriage has been a legal contract between two men transferring

property (including the bride) from one to another. Even up to the present day, vestiges of this understanding of marriage have continued to play a part in marriage ceremonies, both Christian and civil.

From its beginning the Uniting Church removed these last symbolic links to an outmoded way of viewing marriage. In the Uniting Church marriage ceremony, the bride is not given away by anyone, and the groom is not invited to kiss the bride (that is, seal the claim to his new possession). Instead, family members of both parties are invited to give their blessing. And the couple are invited to greet each other (or seal their covenant) with a kiss. In practice though, brides are still frequently escorted by their father or other male relative, continuing the appearance of dependence upon a male, whose role is seen as 'giving the bride away' to the new male figure who is to take responsibility for her.

The Uniting Church wedding ceremony, in the three versions authorised since Union, clearly portrays an understanding of equality *in* marriage.

Some Background

Until 1997 the Uniting Church did not have a declared statement of belief regarding marriage, except what was found in the marriage rites themselves. At Union in 1977 the marriage rites of the three uniting churches were accepted as rites according to the Uniting Church in Australia. In the early 1980s a number of service booklets were published as official liturgies of the church: holy communion, baptism and confirmation, marriage, and funeral. In 1988 our first official book of services and liturgical resources, *Uniting in Worship*, was published. It contained revised versions of all the official rites, plus additional resources. In 2005 *Uniting in Worship 2* was released, with further revisions and resources.

So what has been the Uniting Church's stated understanding of marriage? The 2005 rite begins with these words:

Marriage is a gift of God
and a means of grace.
In the life-long union of marriage
we can know the joy of God,
in whose image we are made, *male and female*.

Marriage is founded in God's loving nature,
and in the covenant of love made with us in Christ.
Husband and wife,
in giving themselves to each other in love,
reflect the love of Christ for his Church.

In Christian marriage,
wife and husband are called
to live together faithfully,
and to love each other with respect,
tenderness and delight.
The companionship and comfort of marriage
enables the full expression
of physical love between *husband and wife*.

They share the life of a home
and may be entrusted
with the gift and care of children.
They help to shape a society
in which human dignity and happiness
may flourish and abound.

Marriage is a way of life that all people should honour;
it is not to be entered into lightly or selfishly,
but responsibly and in the love of God.¹

This Declaration gives more emphasis on ‘husband and wife’ than the 1988 version, reflecting the 1997 Assembly Statement of Belief on Marriage (see below), but it is clear, as in previous rites, that there is no hierarchy within marriage. Husband and wife are equal partners. (It is noteworthy that in all Uniting Church marriage rites, scripture passages listed for use do not include any of the passages that expressly describe marriages, or the roles of husband and wife, with their patriarchal, hierarchical understanding.)

The 2018 Alternative Rite states:

Marriage is a gift of God
and a means of grace.
In the life-long union of marriage
we can know the joy of God,
in whose image we are made.

Marriage is founded in God’s loving nature,
and in the covenant of love made with us in Christ.
Two people, in giving themselves to each other in love,
reflect the love of Christ for his Church.

¹ *Uniting in Worship 2* (Sydney, NSW: Uniting Church Press, 2005), 364ff. My emphasis highlights words and phrases that were altered or removed in the 2018 rite, discussed below.

In Christian marriage,
couples are called
to live together faithfully,
and to love each other with respect,
tenderness and delight.
The companionship and comfort of marriage
enables the full expression
of physical love.

They share the life of a home
and may be entrusted
with the gift and care of children.
They help to shape a society
in which human dignity and happiness
may flourish and abound.

Marriage is a way of life that all people should honour;
it is not to be entered into lightly or selfishly,
but responsibly and in the love of God.²

A minimal linguistic change, with maximal practical (and theological) impact! So how did we get to this point? In 1997, the National Assembly (which has responsibility for determining matters of doctrine and liturgy) issued a Statement on Marriage, which in all likelihood was a response to the idea of same-gender marriage gaining traction:

Marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of *a man and a woman* to live together for life. It is intended to be the faithful lifelong union of *a woman and a man* expressed in every part of their life together.

In marriage, *the man and the woman* seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companionship. In the marriage service:

- *The woman and man* make a public covenant with each other and with God, in the company of family and friends;
- The couple affirm their trust in each other and in God;
- The Church affirms the sanctity of marriage and nurtures those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage and calls upon all people to support, uphold and nurture those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage.

² Marriage – Alternate Rite, The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, 2018, accessed 22 August 2022, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://assembly.uca.org.au/images/marriage/2018/Uniting%20Church%20in%20Australia%20Additional%20Marriage%20Liturgy%20(2018).pdf.

Where sexual union takes place, the partners seek to express mutual delight, pleasure, and tenderness, thus strengthening the union of their lives together.

In marriage, children may be born and are to be brought up in love and security thus providing a firm foundation for society.³

Reframing the ‘Marriage Debate’

In 2012 the Assembly was asked to set up a process of consultation across the church to review the church’s understanding of marriage, specifically including the question of whether people in same-gender relationships could be included in a definition of marriage. An interim report was presented to the 2015 Assembly, at which the Task Group was charged with doing further work, with a final report and recommendations to come to the 2018 Assembly. That report was presented on the first day of Assembly, with time given on every day of the weeklong meeting for discussion, reflection, debate, in plenary sessions and in working groups. At the end of the week a decision was reached, by a margin well-clear of the two-thirds majority that had been set by the Assembly itself.

The Assembly resolved:

- a. To acknowledge:
 - i. that within the Uniting Church there is a diversity of religious beliefs and ethical understandings, developed through continuing faithful discernment and held with integrity on matters relating to sexuality and marriage; and
 - ii. that marriage is a gift God has given to humankind for the well-being of the whole human family.
- b. To determine that the Church is able to accept this diversity within its life and make the decisions necessary to enable its ministry and members to act with integrity in accordance with their beliefs.
- c. To vary its policy on marriage by recognising two statements of belief.⁴

The 1997 Statement was retained and a second statement was added, using the same words, but replacing ‘man and woman’ with ‘two people’. During the process it was pointed out that the very existence of the Uniting Church depended on the holding of two very different doctrines side-by-side, namely Calvinist and Wesleyan doctrines of grace.

³ The Uniting Church in Australia, *Minutes of the Eighth Assembly (5-12 July 1997)*, Minute 97.31.12, accessed 20 September 2022, <https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/629>.

⁴ The Uniting Church in Australia, *Minutes of the Fifteenth Assembly (8 July 2018)*, Minute 18.07, accessed 20 September 2022, <https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/647>.

Multicultural, Indigenous and ecumenical concerns were all raised as part of the debate at Assembly. Space doesn't permit a full exploration of those here, but it is significant that when members of the Assembly had opportunities to share their thoughts in plenary sessions, there were Indigenous, Korean, Tongan, Samoan, and Indian voices supporting the change. While the bodies representing the various culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups tend to take a generally more conservative position, and are often seen as speaking with a single voice, it was important to hear that this is not universally the case.

The Position of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress was of particular significance. In the past UAICC has operated as a bloc, on occasions withdrawing from debate on sensitive issues, especially dealing with sexuality. But in January 2018 their National Conference allowed full participation by members, as individuals, paving the way for what in other settings would be called a 'conscience vote'. As to ecumenism, it has frequently been pointed out that part of the Uniting Church's commitment to its relationship with other churches is a willingness to step out of what might be called an ecumenical consensus on a variety of matters where it believes the Spirit of God to be calling us, such as ordination of women and corporate rather than personal episcopacy.

The resolution also authorised the creation of a second rite (identical in all other things with the existing rite) for use by celebrants who wished to operate under the 'two people' definition. To be clear, there is not one rite for different-gender couples and another rite for same-gender couples. Those who cannot in good conscience use the 'two people' version will continue to use the previous version (as they will only be conducting man-woman weddings). Others will use the 'two people' version, regardless of the gender of the people being married. Ministers and other church-authorized celebrants have the freedom to operate with integrity under whichever statement of belief holds true for them. Church councils, likewise, have the freedom to decide whether weddings conducted on their premises are 'man/woman' or 'two people', but cannot prevent their minister from acting under either rubric.

This alternative rite was first able to be used after the end of September 2018. It is worth noting that the decision was not a direct response to the 2017 change in Federal law but coincided with it. Towards the end of 2018 a number of presbyteries (regional councils) were seeking to have the matter recommitted for consideration. Under our Constitution, if the Assembly deems (by a two-thirds majority) a matter to be of 'vital importance to the life of the church', it may refer the decision to synods and/or presbyteries and/or congregations for concurrence. The Assembly consciously decided not to take this course.

But there is also a clause which says:

If within six months of a decision of the Assembly, or its Standing Committee, at least half the Presbyteries within the bounds of each of at least half the Synods, or at least half the Synods, notify the President that they have determined that in their opinion

- a decision includes a matter vital to the life of the Church; *and*
- *there was inadequate consultation* prior to the decision, the President shall notify the Church that the decision is suspended until the Assembly has undertaken further consultation.⁵

While it was close, by mid-January 2019 (the six-month deadline) the number of objecting Presbyteries was not enough to have the matter recommitted.

What Has Changed?

So much for the process. What about the substance? Going back to the Declaration of Purpose from the 2005 rite, it is clear this statement makes as much sense for a same-gender union as it does for an opposite gender union. Let me highlight some aspects:

Marriage is a gift of God and a means of grace.
In the life-long union of marriage
we can know the joy of God,
in whose image we are made...

The statement adds, parenthetically, ‘male and female’. I have always taken that to refer to the equality of male and female as bearers of the image of God—a corrective to previous unequal, patriarchal views, both of God and humanity. (In other Uniting Church liturgies ‘man and woman’ is used in places where older language would have used the generic ‘man’ or ‘mankind’, in the same way the NRSV expands ‘brothers’ in the epistles to ‘brothers and sisters.’) I have also taken this expression to give the idea of community: Male and female together bear the image of God, not just individually. But does this mean that marriage can only be male and female together, or that marriage has to be defined only as between a man and a woman?

In my own wedding sermons I have regularly made the point that the image of God is found in community, and that the marriage relationship is a very specific example of community. I wholeheartedly accept the argument that true community between people regardless of gender is where the image of God resides, but within that community there are many and varied sub-communities.

⁵ The Uniting Church in Australia, Constitution, section 39(b)(i), accessed 20 September 2022, chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnbpcajpegglefindmkaj/https://resources.uca.org.au/images/stories/Regulations/2018/2018_Constitution_Regulations.pdf

So if we just simply say that:

In the life-long union of marriage
we can know the joy of God,
in whose image we are made...

then what follows applies equally to same-gender and opposite-gender couples. The terms *husband* and *wife* that are used throughout to refer to the then existing arrangements and assumptions, can easily be removed without changing any of the meaning of the statement. Thus:

Marriage is founded in God's loving nature,
and in the covenant of love made with us in Christ.
Two people, in giving themselves to each other in love,
reflect the love of Christ for his Church.

In Christian marriage,
couples are called
to live together faithfully,
and to love each other with respect,
tenderness and delight.
The companionship and comfort of marriage
enables the full expression
of physical love.

The next paragraph raised a smile at a wedding I conducted a few years ago where the bride was age 75 and the groom age 82:

They share the life of a home
and may be entrusted
with the gift and care of children.

I needed to add an explanation that this was part of a general understanding of marriage, not an announcement about this particular marriage.

This relates to one of the crucial arguments that was being made about marriage, both in the civil and religious sphere. During the lead up to and running of the National Postal Survey regarding civil same-gender marriage, the assumption was frequently made by those opposed to changing the law that marriage is for procreation, the bearing of children. But we know that there are many children born without marriage being involved, and there are many marriages that do not produce children.

Note that the Uniting Church rite does *not* say (and has never said) that marriage is for the bearing of children. It says that those who marry, because of the commitment that it involves in sharing a life and a home, ‘may be entrusted with the gift and care of children.’ In other words, marriage provides a secure environment in which children can be raised, however they may be produced. Couples may receive the gift of children by birth or by adoption. Children may come as a ‘package deal’ with one of the partners, or there may be no children. At this point the 2005/2018 rite departs slightly from the Statement of Belief, which includes the line: ‘In marriage, children may be *born* and brought up ...’ As was pointed out at the time of the political debate about marriage, the civil law made no reference to children in its definition of marriage.

Most would likely affirm that marriage is not just about the couple but includes a very significant social and communal dimension. Thus a valid marriage, legally and ecclesiastically, requires at the very least a celebrant and two witnesses. Widening the definition of marriage to include those of us in same-gender relationships not only opens the way for couples without regard to gender but proposes an even greater equality in marriages between different-gendered partners by advancing the notion that marriage can move beyond hierarchical and patriarchal understandings of human relationships. In making this change the church has, I believe, taken a further step “to help shape a society in which human dignity and happiness may flourish and abound”.

This paper was first delivered to the Victorian Chapter of the Australian Academy of Liturgy in July 2021.

Pastoral Ritual and Liturgy for Early Pregnancy Loss

Melanie Whalley



Rev'd Melanie Whalley is Rector of the Parish of Toronto in the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle and is married to Angus. They have three children Amelia (11), Gabriel (deceased, would be 6) and Joseph (4). Melanie holds a Bachelor of Theology from the University of Divinity.

Abstract

Pastoral ritual and liturgical expression for early pregnancy loss is a theological area that has had very little exploration. Early pregnancy loss encompasses miscarriage, ectopic, molar and any other loss that may occur prior to 20 weeks' gestation. A slim provision of resources exists from a range of Christian traditions. These few resources provide some pastoral ritual and liturgical expression, with the most developed resource being the Episcopal Church's Enriching Our Worship 5. Though these resources are helpful they do not completely map to the complex experience of early pregnancy loss. This is the case for the existing provision for funerals for children too.

Introduction

The paper explores pastoral ritual and liturgical expression through the lenses of my own experience of early pregnancy loss and the deep connection I have had with other parents and their families. It begins with my experience and the revealed gap in care for persons experiencing early pregnancy loss before moving to exploring my ritual response. The paper then explores issues in preparing and using a liturgy for early pregnancy loss composed from various sources and prayers I have written to be used as a memorial or funeral.

My Experience of Early Pregnancy Loss

In January of 2016 my baby, Gabriel, died at seven weeks' gestation due to ectopic pregnancy. An ectopic pregnancy is a pregnancy that occurs outside of the womb, and in my case, it was a tubal pregnancy. The experience itself was quite horrific in several ways, some of which I will not describe here. It reveals gaps in care for people experiencing early pregnancy loss.

The response from apathetic medical professionals left me broken further. The day I found out involved being told by a registrar gynaecologist in the hospital that 'it may be a miscarriage' or 'you may go on to have a normal pregnancy'. All this after she burst through the door excited to tell me I was definitely pregnant. I burst into tears because I knew I was losing my baby. She didn't seem to understand why her words of comfort were like shards of glass penetrating my skin when she replied, 'I know it isn't good, but at least we know your body is doing the right thing and you can get pregnant'. I cried harder. I wanted this baby, and no subsequent baby can replace this one. It also ignores the plight of trying to conceive, and the short time it took to lose this baby. I was sent with an appointment to be assessed the following week and an ultrasound form.

I got an emergency appointment for an ultrasound that afternoon. When I thought my world had already turned dark, I was diagnosed with an ectopic pregnancy and sent straight to the closest tertiary hospital emergency room. Within fifteen minutes of arriving, I was in a theatre gown and being assessed for rupture and internal bleeding. My world was spinning, but one thing I knew was that the only life I cared about at that point was my baby's life. I was admitted for four days, during which time they monitored my bloods every day to see what my human chorionic gonadotrophin (hCG) levels were doing, and I was left with the choice on the day before discharge between surgery or an injection of methotrexate to terminate my pregnancy.

The whole time during my stay in hospital I was in a four-bed ward sharing with other women who were in for various other reasons. I was not treated like a bereaved mother but more like a medical emergency. No one acknowledged my baby, no one gave me any information for support groups or any type of bereavement support for once I was home. The grief and the guilt were so intense I lay there wishing I could die and let my baby live. This continued for months afterwards.

I had been conducting funerals for more than a year when this occurred, and I remember sitting in my hospital bed feeling absolutely lost about how to proceed with grief when I could have a funeral, a rite of passage where God meets this human experience. Even though I eventually wrote a liturgy and held a memorial service, I was still left with this deep yearning to bury my child and to lay them to rest. I didn't have any remains, so this was impossible. However, in my hospital bed I was at a further loss also because I was about to say goodbye to my baby, yet this baby couldn't be anointed for the journey either. My grief was rendered almost invisible.

It was not until I gave voice to the reason behind the yearning to bury my baby that healing became possible. Having trained to conduct funerals in the bush, where there were more burials than cremations, I see burial as the moment in the liturgy where

the real process of letting go occurs. I never got that moment of finality, that part of the liturgy where you sometimes see families at the grave's edge on their knees weeping inconsolably as their child is lowered.

Over these six years I have met online and in person many people who have been through an early pregnancy loss. Not everyone experiences it in the same way. Some minimise their loss; others grieve privately to protect themselves. Some do not have the same deep connection to their baby. Some experience it as a death, some as huge disappointment, some as brief disappointment, some as dashed hope, and some as all three. Another response is relief when it was not the right time or the circumstances are not right. The experiences vary from person to person and between family members.

However, early pregnancy loss is becoming more and more recognized as an experience of death. Society is changing how it views the grief of early pregnancy loss; those of us who do grieve it deeply are being recognized more often. Registries of Births, Deaths and Marriages in almost every state in Australia now provide 'Commemoration Certificates' for early pregnancy loss. Support groups are growing, along with charities such as SANDS Australia, Bears of Hope and Red Nose Australia, which incorporate early pregnancy loss in their campaigns.

A Liturgy to Address a Difficult Question

I had my own interior questions that my experience brought about which the first pastoral liturgy I composed seeks to answer and sooth. I was very confused because of the apathetic responses to this loss, and I was forced to address the question: 'Is my baby a baby?' The pastoral liturgy gives space to answer this with an affirmative 'yes' through an optional naming of the baby with the parents lighting a candle from the paschal candle and using other physical reminders that the baby existed. The language throughout the pastoral liturgy conveys a baby existed, and the litany of remembrance aids in integration of grief and continual love of the baby throughout eternity.

In my hospital bed I had asked, 'How am I to pray'? It seemed futile to pray to save my baby. I knew the path we were walking, but I was not ready to face it fully yet. I never imagined that I would have such strong emotions and experience this type of loss as a death of a child at seven weeks' gestation. I went through a reimagining of prayer, prayer especially when the only hope is God is with us, our baby is with God and for comfort and consolation for the journey. The pastoral liturgy provides the language and space for this, for the human experience to be prayer and the response of God is presence and consolation.

I questioned how I could feel this way when my baby was lost so early. I even wondered if God sees my baby as a baby. I had no way of moving forward in my grief, and I was seeking validation and permission to grieve and at the same time protecting my right to grieve. The pastoral liturgy provides the language and space to allow the depth of this human experience to come forward and be expressed. The great consolation is in the commendation which truly recognises that God does acknowledge our babies.

Like many other parents I was very reactive to anything that sounded dismissive of my grief. For example, I found the claim that early pregnancy loss is different to stillbirth as dismissive and distressing. Now I understand those differences to be nuances, and these do not always equate to less or more grief. In preparing the pastoral liturgy for a memorial or funeral, careful attention was paid to ensure that the language and phrases are not dismissive of the human experience of early pregnancy loss.

What I have learnt is that the grief experienced by the death of a loved one is not defined by how long you knew them, when it really is how much you loved someone. When I shared my story, some healing came through mothers who gave me permission to grieve by sharing their stories and grief of stillbirth and tragic adult deaths. They never judged my grief because of my early pregnancy loss; they gave me permission to just be. The liturgy I have composed expresses this learning of death, love and grief.

My Ritual Response and Theological Reflection

A theological reflection for a liturgy for early pregnancy loss is about allowing the human experience to just be, as it is. Job's suffering and his friends could easily fit within this scenario. There are the people that abandoned Job, and the friends that did follow him and sat with him and wept for a full week. However, when Job began to speak, their words and actions added to Job's pain. When it feels like speaking will result in more pain, it inhibits the ability to grieve in connection with one another. It leaves us stuck in grief and can exacerbate it.

Instead, the Book of Psalms, in which every emotion is welcomed and nothing is left unsaid, is the theological emphasis behind a liturgy for early pregnancy loss. The psalms are a conversation of the heart, where everything is brought to speech before God.¹ It is a faith that understands that God is participating and attentive to the darkness and the deep pain of life. Early pregnancy loss fits within what Walter Brueggemann calls the disorientation psalms; the psalms relate to the human

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 27.

experience. A liturgy for early pregnancy loss is the 'safe place' to express what is upon the heart before God without the verbal assault from well-meaning people. It enables grief to be expressed and sets the person or people on the way to a new orientation that includes integrating the experience and their baby into their life in a new way that lets them also begin to experience comfort, consolation, and hope.

With this theological reflection in mind the objective for a liturgy for early pregnancy loss is to provide validation and permission for grief to be expressed. It is an important corrective to our broader cultural dismissal of the complex grief that accompanies early pregnancy loss. I found the framework of the 'Funeral Service for an Infant' in *A Prayer Book for Australia* [APBA]² useful as a basis for the liturgy I constructed, though there are limits to its usefulness. After the death of a child, there are often remains, and the funeral ritual includes symbolic ritual actions related to the coffin, including processions and being able to place our hand on the coffin as the celebrant leads the farewell prayer in front of the family. In the case of early pregnancy loss acknowledged as a death, these rituals may not be able to be enacted. They also may not speak to a person's experience if they experience the loss as a dashed hope or disappointment. Using APBA as the only source is problematic because it may not speak directly to these different human experiences.

Through my interactions with others, I began to name some rituals for liturgy that would speak to the human experience and create a framework to work from, to include and exclude options, and to adapt where needed. My first ritual response was composing a liturgy to have a memorial/funeral service and provide a resource for others to use. The introductory pastoral notes were adapted from APBA and the Episcopal Church's *Enriching Our Worship 5* [EOW5]³ to provide a timely update that is inclusive of the experience of early pregnancy loss.

The gathering acknowledges the depth of the human experience of early pregnancy loss and invites God to enter into this experience. Parents have the optional opportunity to name their baby and acknowledge the baby's existence in tangible ways through ritual. These may help the parents move through their grief by enabling them to have the courage to express their grief in different ways. The gathering concludes with God's presence entering into the parents' anguish and carrying their sorrow with the hope of eternal life for the baby.

In the liturgy there is guidance for passages of scripture. I found it distressing having experienced an ectopic pregnancy that resources recommend scriptures with the

² *A Prayer Book for Australia* [APBA] (Mulgrave, VIC: Broughton Books, 1999).

³ Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, *Enriching Our Worship 5: Rituals Related to Childbirth, Childbearing, and Loss* [EOW5] (New York: Church Publishing, 2009).

word 'womb'. It is common that pastoral and liturgical resources, as in secular society, tend to focus on miscarriage because it is the most common experience. This is why I use the term 'early pregnancy loss' to be inclusive of all experiences. Hence, the words of scripture chosen to represent for us the words of God spoken into this human experience and are carefully chosen.

The prayers offer the parents the chance to voice their anguish and sorrow directly to God. There is a call for God's involvement in aiding the parents through their journey of grief whilst acknowledging the trauma that can often accompany this human experience of early pregnancy loss. There is also a call for the people gathered to journey with the parents in their grief. This is in response to the common experience of people struggling to know how to provide support to bereaved parents.

The Litany of Remembrance allows for movement from acknowledgement of the depth of the human experience of early pregnancy loss before God to integrating the grief and love of the baby throughout our lifetime. It thereby acknowledges that grief lasts for our lifetime and that love is eternal.

A healing action is offered through anointing. This is further acknowledgement of God's presence in the journey. Healing is for the movement through grief and also for the healing of relationships that often get ruptured following early pregnancy loss, whether of relationship with God or our human relationships. Early pregnancy loss and later pregnancy and infant loss can result in parents separating or divorcing when they withdraw from each other due to the differences in grieving.⁴ Friends can disappear, and friendships can rupture. Anointing for healing is for the relationships on the journey and for the movement through grief. The movement of gathering around with the lit candle and the laying on of hands brings people together to counteract the isolating effects of grieving an early pregnancy loss.

The commendation demonstrates God's loving embrace of the baby at the great heavenly banquet, and provides an answer to my question of whether God sees my baby as a baby. This part of the liturgy gives space for a committal. Usually, cremation is organised by hospitals or through funeral directors when there are some remains or tiny body, and this can sometimes take place without a funeral happening beforehand. However, when there are remains, the parents may choose to bury or cremate their baby. While hospitals are changing the way they handle the remains of babies who have died in early pregnancy loss, in place of up-to-date policies and procedures chaplains and pastoral carers have to advocate for the patient's wishes within the

⁴ 'Fact Sheet for Early Pregnancy Loss', accessed 26 September 2022, <https://www.sands.org.au/miscarriage>. See also M. Allen, and S. Marks, S. (1993). *Miscarriage, Women Sharing from the Heart* (New York: Wiley, 1993), 16. It is, however, never wise to assume that a father cannot be as devastated as a mother.

hospital system. There are many parents that have been traumatised by knowing medical staff have disposed of their baby through medical waste or yearn to know where their baby's remains are.⁵

Cremation and burial help with closure through letting go and honouring the baby. A mother in an online support group shared an image of the burial of her baby to show everyone that their baby too could have the dignity of having a funeral and burial.

The pastoral liturgy ends with the baby resting with God and the saints, acknowledging life everlasting, and the blessing. The baby rests with God and the saints and the parents have their grief and anguish voiced, validated and acknowledged leaving them to move through their grief and to continue their love of their baby through eternity. Below is the pastoral liturgy I composed for a memorial service.

⁵ Allen and Marks, *Miscarriage*, 16, and multiple personal communications.

A Liturgy for Early Pregnancy Loss

*Introductory notes for the preparation of this liturgy*⁶

Many parents experience the loss of an early pregnancy as they would the loss of a child. However, early pregnancy loss ‘in our culture and even in the Church is seldom acknowledged as a death, the parents have too often been left to mourn in isolation.’⁷ These factors need to be taken into account when providing pastoral care and with the celebration of this liturgy.

Other factors that may compound the loss include the following:

- a. The parents may have journeyed from elated joy to despair within a short space of time.
- b. There may be differences in the parents’ perceptions, which need to ministered to appropriately.
- c. There may have been the use of medical technology in early pregnancy which may have been to diagnose or save the life of the baby or even the mother. This may have helped the parents come to know the baby; however, other parents may feel it has intruded their relationship with the baby.
- d. The loss may have been an ectopic pregnancy. These cases are life-threatening to the mother and can compound the loss of the baby. This may also affect the father’s experience as well. Some mothers feel guilty that they have chosen their life over the life of the unborn baby. This can occur in other medical situations related to pregnancy loss as well. Others are able to recognise that the baby would not have survived the pregnancy. When medical decisions had to be made quickly in an emergency involving termination or inducing labour, sensitivity is required. Feelings of anger, guilt, feeling robbed, and initial shock are common. Most importantly ectopic pregnancies can occur anywhere outside of the womb, any references to babies growing within the womb in the liturgy and scripture readings should be omitted. This applies also when a mother feels her body has failed.
- e. The parents may not have anything tangible to remember their baby and facilitate the movement through the grieving process such as photographs and other items. However, there may be items that can provide some facilitation of the grieving process that can be gathered for a memory box.

⁶ Adapted from APBA, 753, and EOW5.

⁷ EOW5, 21.

- f. The parents may not have a tiny body to bury or cremate which may or may not impact their grieving process.
- g. The parents may have or may not have known the sex of their baby.
- h. Some parents may find it helpful to name their baby regardless of whether they know the sex.
- i. Services may be small in attendance or may be performed privately with the parents and are powerfully intimate. This intimacy must be approached with sensitivity.
- j. The grief involved in this pastoral situation is distinctive, in that such early death seems to run against the Christian notion that life is a good gift of God and given with joy.

The theological emphasis which underlies this service is that God is intimately involved in the pain of grief even when life ends just weeks after conception. This liturgy may or may not be used in conjunction with a burial or cremation. However, this liturgy provides an opportunity for the parents to have their loss acknowledged. It enables them to fully acknowledge the loss and to freely express their grief before God. The liturgy can be used shortly after the death or at a time near when the baby would have been born or any other appropriate time.

This service may or may not involve rituals with others present; however, it may be helpful for the parents to experience God's love and support through being in community. Above all, grief for the death of a child is something that should be honoured, and the ministry of the church should be available to facilitate healing.

The Gathering

1. The minister says these or similar words as appropriate to the individual situation.

We gather today to mourn the loss of N. [and N.]'s child [a. on the day they expected to be celebrating the birth of their child] and [b. together we support them in their grief] [c. together we gather to remember and support each other on this significant day]. As 'their child died before birth, their family is diminished, and their hope has turned to sorrow. Let us grieve with them, and call on God in the name of Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Saviour who sent his Spirit to comfort and heal.' ⁸ [*a, b, c, can be used separately or combined*]

⁸ EOW5, 22.

2. *Optional Naming of the Child*

God's never-ending love is shown for all of his creation, including all children. Today we bring before God N. [and N.]'s desire to name her [their] child for whom she [they] grieves [grieve]."

N. [and N.], what name(s) do you give your child?

A candle may be lit from the paschal candle and placed on a table close by or on the altar. A commemoration certificate produced by the local state Registry of Birth, Deaths and Marriages may be presented here and may be placed on the table or altar.

Other items of remembrance and any Christian symbols may also be placed on the table either in silence or whilst playing music for reflection or whilst those gathered sing a hymn.

3. *Eulogy – The parent(s) may speak about their experience and/or share a suitable poem.*

4. *One or more sentences of scripture may be used.*

As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you, says the Lord. *Isaiah 66:13a*

Or

For these things I weep; my eyes flow with tears . . . But you, O Lord, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations. *Lamentations 1: 16a; 5:19*

Or

The Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. *Revelation 7:17*

5. *Opening Prayer*

Let us pray. Compassionate God, you hold us in your constant love. Comfort us as we grieve the loss of [this child, or N.] whose life was cut so short. Be with N. [and N.] in their anguish. Grant to their child, [N.], the joys of heaven; and to each of us, bring healing and grace. We pray through Jesus Christ, who carries all our sorrows and brings us from death to new life. **Amen.**⁹

⁹ Adapted from EOW5, 22.

Ministry of the Word

Some suggestions: Isaiah 43:1-5, Isaiah 49:1, 1-15 (non-ectopic) Mark 10:13-16, John 14:1-3, Psalm 139:13-16 (non-ectopic)

6. *Homily – May include teaching on grief and God's love.*

The Prayers

7. *The Prayers – These or other suitable prayers may be offered as appropriate to the situation.*

Let us now pray with confidence to God our Father, who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, for the salvation of all.¹⁰

We thank you for your work in creation, for the tiny life [of N.] that is now with you in your tenderness and infinite love, as your love for all children is strong and enduring. Be with us in the midst of our sadness as we come to terms with not knowing our baby [N.] as we had hoped.

As applicable (not all are suitable for every circumstance), these or other suitable prayers may be offered. The parents may wish to write their own.

For not knowing our baby's [our baby N.'s] face,

For not knowing if our baby was a he or she,

For not knowing our baby's unique personality,

For never being able to hold our baby,

For the silence of a missing child in the family household,

For never experiencing a birthday with them, and for all the milestones that will never be reached.

Yet Lord you knew [our baby, or N.] growing within N.

In the midst of our sorrow, we thank you that our baby [N.] is now with you.

¹⁰ APBA, 719.

Loving Lord Jesus, as N. [*mother's name*] loved in her sadness, your mother Mary also loved in her sadness as she stood at the cross and watched you die.¹¹ Be with N. [*mother's name*] and give her healing and comfort for her tears, and give her love in place of emptiness, and help her find hope in place of devastation, just as Mary Magdalene's devastation turned to hope when she saw you after your resurrection.

[We thank you that N. [*mother's name*] has made it through her ordeal safely, may she know your healing presence physically, spiritually, and emotionally.]

Loving Lord Jesus, as your beloved disciple stood by the cross in helplessness, be with N. [*father's name*] in his time of grief. In place of emptiness let him know your love.¹² In place of confusion let him know your peace.¹³ In place of despair let him find hope and strength in you.¹⁴ Give N. [*father's name*] strength to stand by N. [*mother's name*]. Help them both to follow your example of strong caring, and to receive your comfort.¹⁵

May we all stand here with them, sharing something of their emptiness and grief, and may you sustain and strengthen us to support them. Grant us wisdom in choosing our words and knowledge in knowing when our presence is all that is needed.

Litany of Remembrance

8. *A Litany of Remembrance may be said here.*

Memories of [this child, or N.] will come to us, unbidden, sometimes unexpected, in all the various moments of our lives. Although memories may bring pain, they also bring comfort, for as long as we remember, [this child, or N.] is still part of us.¹⁶

Silence may be kept. The name(s) of lost children may be spoken aloud.

In the rising of the sun and its going down,
we remember her/him/N.

At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of Winter,
we remember her/him/N.

¹¹ Inspired by Hannah Ward, 'Healing Service for Miscarriage (2)' in *Human Rites: Worship Resources for an Age of Change* (London: Mowbray, 1995), 222-23.

¹² APBA, 759.

¹³ APBA, 759.

¹⁴ APBA, 759.

¹⁵ Adapted from APBA, 759.

¹⁶ EOW5, 25.

At the opening of buds and in the rebirth of Spring,
we remember her/him/N.

At the blueness of the skies and in the warmth of Summer,
we remember her/him/N.

At the rustling of leaves and the beauty of Autumn,
we remember her/him/N.

At the beginning of the year and when it ends,
we remember her/him/N.

When we are weary and in need of strength,
we remember her/him/N.

When we are lost and sick at heart,
we remember her/him/N.

When we have joys we yearn to share,
we remember her/him/N.

Music may be played here for some reflection.

Merciful God, look with pity upon the sorrows of this family for whom we pray. Remember them in your mercy; nourish them with patience; comfort them with a sense of your goodness; lift up your countenance upon them; and give them peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**¹⁷

9. *The minister continues with the Lord's Prayer.*

Let us join together in the prayer that Jesus gave us.

Our Father in heaven . . .

10. *A hymn may be sung here.*

The Healing Action

11. *The Healing Action is offered here. The parent (s) may kneel/sit/stand in front of the congregation as appropriate to the parents' wishes and the worship space.*

¹⁷ EOW5, 25.

Let us pray that the sign of love we are about to share will help us to know that Christ is working through us and that he will be our strength. May we learn to follow Christ closer, day by day.¹⁸

Optional anointing: The priest takes the oil and says these words whilst anointing the mother and father or mother only or father only.

N., I anoint you in the name of God the holy and undivided Trinity. May Christ be present with you to comfort you, to guard and protect you, and to keep you in everlasting life. **Amen.**¹⁹

Optional: Silence is kept after the anointing of both parents, as they may also take oil and make a sign of the cross on each other's forehead. When ready the priest continues with these words:

As you are outwardly anointed with this holy oil, so may our loving God give you the inward anointing of the Holy Spirit. Of God's bounty, may your suffering be relieved, and your spirit, mind, and body restored to grace and peace. May all of us in the frailty of our flesh know God's healing and resurrecting power. **Amen.**²⁰

The minister now takes the candle from the table and hands it to the parent(s) and says the following words.

May Christ be the light for your journey; may Christ's love warm you and encourage you.²¹

The minister invites all present to come round and lay hands on the parents and says the following words;

May all of us present here today carry the light and warmth of Christ's love in support of N. [and N.] from this day forward. May N. [and N.] know Christ's redeeming love and be comforted by his healing presence amongst us. May they know that they do not need to grieve in isolation.

Those gathered return to their seats. The parent(s) or minister return the candle to the table or altar and return to their seats.

¹⁸ Inspired by Ward, 'Healing Service for Miscarriage (2)' in *Human Rites*, 222-23.

¹⁹ EOW5, 35.

²⁰ EOW5, 35.

²¹ Ward, *Human Rites*, 'Healing Service for Miscarriage (2)'.

The Commendation

Gracious God, we commend [this child, or N.] to your mercy and love, that death may be for him/her/N. the gate of life and peace with you. At your heavenly banquet, may we rejoice with him/her/N. and all your children to see you face to face, one holy and undivided Trinity in glory everlasting. **Amen.**²²

12. *If there are remains to be buried or cremated the committal is said here as found in APBA, 763.*

13. *The minister continues with the following:*

Give rest, O Christ, to your child with your saints
**where sorrow and pain are no more,
neither sighing, but life everlasting.**

The Blessing and Dismissal

The minister says:

May the Lord bless you and keep you;
May the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you.
May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
And give you peace. **Amen.**²³

Or the priest says:

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you.
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
And give you peace. **Amen.**²⁴

The minister may say:

Go in peace in the name of Christ. **Amen.**

²² EOW5, 26.

²³ APBA, 764

²⁴ APBA, 764.

The View from the Pew

Peta Sherlock



Peta Sherlock is a retired Anglican priest who has served as school chaplain, parish priest and Dean of Bendigo Cathedral. Her Doctor of Ministry thesis was entitled 'All Scripture Is Useful', and she has published three books on the three-year Lectionary, *Inside the Sunday Gospel* (E.J. Dwyer Ltd). Other publications include articles on the ordination of women, homosexuality, and matters of hermeneutics, inclusivity and justice. In retirement she thinks globally and acts locally, currently writing a history of her local church.

Abstract

The people of God do most of their liturgical work from their seats. Ministers do well to consider their point of view in understanding and respecting who the people are, their history, their years spent in the parish, their education and understanding, their experience, their commitment, what they see and hear, want and need.

Much of what is written about liturgy is from the minister's point of view, or the musician's, or anyone else who faces the congregation. It tends to be about the words spoken, the sermons preached, the scriptures read, the music played, the pictures displayed and the prayers uttered. Most church people, however, sit in the pews or seats. I hope I do not have to argue that they are an integral part of the liturgy. After all, without them there would be no church. This article is about that view from the pew: what is heard, seen, sung and communicated.

On Ascension Day 1986 I was ordained deacon in the Anglican Church in Melbourne. We women had to wait six years to be priested in 1992. I greatly enjoyed my last appointment as Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, Bendigo. But that career of mine is now ancient history. After retiring at the end of 2011, I did two locums totalling fifteen months in all. Since then I have sat in the pew for almost a decade. In my lifespan of seventy-five years, including fifteen years of unchurched youth, I have sat in a pew for at least thirty-five years.

My name no longer appears in the Anglican Yearbook, not because I died, but because I no longer hold a Permission to Officiate. Some clergy are puzzled by this and wonder if I have lost my vocation. I am not sure I was ever on the same page as to what having a vocation means. I was taught that the church called people to be ordained. When we women deacons were interviewed in 1992 as to whether we now 'felt called' to be priests, I apparently caused some amusement (perhaps annoyance) by answering the assembled gentlemen on the committee, "That is for you to work out. I am in charge of a parish and tired of asking male priests to come and say the magic words for me each week. If you decide I am not called, I suppose the bishop should move me out." Twenty years later I took seriously my approaching sixty-fifth birthday and asked my colleagues, clergy and laity, to conduct a review of my work which confirmed that, while I had done a good enough job for the past five years, I was now getting too old and tired for what was needed for the future of that church.

Here is what I now love and do: the history of my local town, Trentham, and especially its people. Trentham is in central Victoria, centred one hour each from Melbourne, Ballarat and Bendigo, born in the days of the central Victorian gold rush. When we arrived twenty-five years ago, it was a sleepy almost dying town. It never had more than 500 residents until the last twenty years. Now, since COVID lockdowns, it is the desirable place to get away from Melbourne. House and land prices have soared to the point where there is no affordable housing or rentals.

Who Are the Pew-sitters in St George's Trentham?

One of my first written pieces on Trentham church history was "The Disturbance in the Choir"¹ prompted by a mysterious phrase in the Parish Guardians Minute Book of 1891. It turned out to be a dispute around two young women who played the new organ on alternate Sundays. They both had their supporters, so that the church became divided. I discovered it had wider ramifications. One organist was the stepdaughter of the patriarch of both church and township. As a successful businessman he was also the church treasurer and backed the minister in having more evening services, because more money would go in the collection plate.

The overseeing priest in Kyneton refused to allow this, so the patriarch, also the synod representative, contacted the Melbourne diocesan registrar and had the parish removed from Kyneton and put under the direction of the archdeacon of Sandhurst (Bendigo). You can actually work out which of the well-meaning gentlemen of the parish council voted five to four for Miss Utber to be organist, tending to be the old guard versus the new. The minister voted for the other woman, his music student, and within two months had resigned from the parish. The close vote solved nothing and

¹ Trentham and District Historical Society Inc., *Trentham Recorder*, May 2015.

the treasurer and his stepdaughter also resigned. The incident was sadly reminiscent of what can still happen in congregations, but it was also quite human, as the laity tried to have a say in their growing church life in more ways than one. The following more experienced minister did not use either of the organists and waited a few years until the patriarch was ready to be treasurer once again.

I am currently researching a thorough history of St George's Trentham and am attuned to the laity involved. From my usual Sunday pew I can see that the clergy at St George's sit at a prayer desk named in memory of Kate Foster who ran the Sunday School for forty-five years somewhere between 1900 and 1964, when she died. Many older people still in town were taught the faith by her. When I mention Kate to clergy, they usually groan, "Oh, the matriarchs and patriarchs!" But, while the vicar was drawing a weekly congregation of 20 or 25, once every year Kate Foster delivered a congregation of 100 or more for the Sunday School anniversary and prize-giving in a town of 500 people.

Under her maiden name the young Kate Brown was one of the founding members of the Girls Friendly Society and Temperance Union in 1892. Her older sister, Bella Brown, played the organ from at least 1909 until her eyesight failed in 1955, and even then, as the presiding minister gave her the gift of a rocking chair, she refused to admit to retirement. In 1947 Kate had also been given a diamante brooch 'as a token of appreciation of her untiring efforts during the past years.'² Wisely no one mentioned the word 'retirement' to Kate. She is still remembered as very strict but also as one who always had a spare bed for visitors.

Kate Foster was a parishioner all her life from about 1880 to 1964 and saw over eighteen ministers come and go as the parish was established with visiting clergy and local lay readers from 1864. Its first fulltime priest came to live in the vicarage from 1892. Other laywomen could count over twenty incumbents in their church life, but I doubt they would be so cheeky as to count like me. They simply served their God, church and vicar. I have noticed that the local women often lived longer than their menfolk, Kate having outlived two husbands. The women of Trentham seem to have been a particularly hardy bunch even in the cold climate.

In recent years I have sat in the same pew as Norma. She came with her family to Trentham in her thirties, but still saw seventeen incumbents come and go. One Sunday I groaned inwardly as a clumsy locum priest preached for forty minutes and then said, 'Secondly ...' Norma silently stretched out her left wrist, looked at her watch, at the priest, at the watch, and he stopped immediately. I sent an email to the bishop and said, 'Now I understand what matriarchs are for.' She simply did what needed to be done.

² *Trentham Gazette*, 16 January 1947.

Interestingly, Norma had taken over from Kate in the Sunday School. When the church hall finally fell down, photos show she brought the children right into the church sanctuary for their anniversary. I have yet to embark on the history of the indomitable Trentham Ladies Guild, but I have already noted that Norma was secretary for many years and always wrote a paragraph on the clergy's capabilities as part of her annual report—her view from the pew. From what I know of the clergy, she was accurate in her assessments. In other churches identifying the matriarch and patriarch is important in gauging the mood of the parish. They have years and years of wisdom even if they do not know it.

From service registers I have worked out the names and dates of the incumbents, not to mention locum ministers and lay readers. Lifelong locals say that they watch newcomers to this cool Country. They reckon if people survive two winters, then they will likely stay. With a godly vocation added into the equation, we could push it to three years. Trentham's average stay for its thirty-three clergy is three years and eight months. This is probably true for many regional centres. On the other hand, the whole 150-plus years of Trentham parish history can be covered by just two families, or, for the wider Trentham District, just one family, which still worships here. Citified clergy sniff at this longevity at their peril.

Clergy can be romantic and unreflective about their career path and confuse it with the work of the Spirit. I once caused some (more) annoyance at a clergy gathering by wondering why the Holy Spirit had 'called' thirty-five priests to a financially secure inner-city parish but had not called a single person to a poor outer suburban church. Listen to the wisdom of the pew-sitters who have more down-to-earth ideas. Historic letters from Trentham laypeople to the bishop, or notes from the congregational meeting about why clergy have left, show kind hearts and understanding that Trentham's climate is not for the faint-hearted.

Do You See What I See?

It is always useful for clergy to turn around and see what the pew-sitters see. In fact, it is essential. For a start the worst sin for clergy is to get in the way of God, whether by attitude, appearance or odd habits. Furthermore, church architecture and furnishings can distract from and even change the message of their words, even the most carefully crafted preaching.

In my last locum stints, I had narrowed my basic sermon down to just twenty-four words: *God loves you, no buts. No, 'but you have to repent', no, 'but you have to love God back'. God just loves you.* I would repeat this until the congregation could say it with me. I asked them to invite their children and grandchildren to the Christmas

service, and we would all repeat the sermon together. And they did! It was great fun. Occasionally I meet a former parishioner in the street, and they still say with a grin: 'God loves me, no buts.'

In one church building dedicated to St Paul, I preached and preached this sermon until I eventually turned around and looked at the stained glass behind me. It was a beautiful triptych window, with 'Faith' on the left, 'Love' on the right, and some smaller words in the middle. I went up to examine the words one day. No, dear reader, it did not say 'Hope' but 'Charity'. The words described a woman who had worked hard for the parish coffers for over fifty years. In other words, St Paul's abiding good news had been reduced in the windows to Faith, Love and Good Works. I prepared a subsidiary sermon entitled, 'This church has no Hope', before I returned to my favourite topic of love.

I was once an ecumenical guest at Easter at a former Presbyterian Church, when the preacher tried to convince us that 'Christ is risen!' Unfortunately, my attention wandered to the large attractive windows behind him, an empty tomb and the four large words over the angels: 'He is not here!' Now, I understand what was meant, and a few sermons about the real absence of Christ would not hurt on Ascension Day. I am talking here about what was being communicated. I am pondering writing words for a suitable Ascension Day hymn with the thundering joyful chorus: 'He is not here!'

St George's Trentham sanctuary has a pleasant 1927 stained glass version of Holman Hunt's Jesus Christ with a lantern knocking at the door. It is based on Revelation 3:20 ('Behold I stand at the door and knock') but is usually called 'Christ the Light of the World'. The careful viewer will see that the door is old and rusty and there is no handle on the outside. In pre-Raphaelite fashion it is allegorical, with trees evoking the Garden of Eden, and it is hard to find disagreeable since the artist claimed to have been led by God to paint thus. This romantic painting became quite famous and was even exhibited in Australia and New Zealand in 1904 before being permanently fixed in St Paul's Cathedral London. It is another example of how the early Trentham Anglicans tried to preserve something of Mother England: St George, Holman Hunt, not to mention the main streets named High, Albert and Victoria.

I am pretty sure that pew-sitters see the window and think: 'I have to open the door and let Jesus into my heart'. The gospels, on the other hand, are full of stories of Jesus inviting himself into homes and lives without waiting for an answer. Jesus spoke about *our* knocking and seeking and asking. But much understanding of the good news sadly hinges on the response *we* must make to Jesus. 'I have decided to follow Jesus', we sang over and over in the 1970s until many of us began to believe it. So we now believe the Gospel according to Holman Hunt and 1970s jingles. But don't get

me started on the many and various ways we like to think our good works count with God. That is why I preach ‘No buts’. *No, ‘but you have to try harder’. No, ‘but you have to believe harder’.* *Nothing you can do can stop God loving you.* I am, however, well aware that one can run a financially successful parish with a glob of guilt here and there. It is just not the Christian gospel.

Are There Any Intelligent Worshippers Out There?

Almost every Ascension Day while I have sat in the pew, the preacher feels obliged to mention Jesus ‘going up’, if only to say we do not believe this literally happened. Once the same clumsy locum that Norma stopped in his tracks began his sermon by asking our congregation what Ascension was all about. The thoughtful man in the front pew gave a dissertation which sounded as if he had read the Greek theologian John Zizioulas, the man next to me quoted from his own book on God, the missionary on furlough spoke of the kingship of Christ. The preacher looked disappointed with us and went on to talk about a pair of heels disappearing into the clouds!

In the present congregation of twenty we have three retired clergy, three retired clergy wives, a lifelong missionary, a retired politician who once offered for ordained ministry, a bevy of former Sunday School teachers, a couple whose son has just been ordained, a few former churchwardens and Ladies Guild members, and others who have sat in the pew all their lives. There are doctorates, master and bachelor degrees, environmentalist activists, quiet lesbians, local choir members, a car mechanic, an accountant, a trivia champion and a local golfing champion. In our natural state we are not averse to answering back during the sermon. This level of education, awareness, and community involvement is not unusual as the church militant here in earth shrinks and ages. Those who continue to come each week have surely thought about the alternative of going out for a latte or staying in bed. They have decided their faith makes enough sense for them to keep coming. Hence the preaching ought to be aimed at thoughtful involved adults.

My friend Helen wants to ask her vicar, ‘What do you think I would like to hear from your preaching?’ Great question, Helen: Ask him and see what he says. Most of us seniors in church pews have heard a lot, from a lot of different clergy. The general feeling is, ‘Oh, Father Bob has his funny little ways with the liturgy, it is really neither here nor there, we just close our eyes while he bobs up and down.’ Or ‘Val always preaches from the gospels, and I know all those stories. But she will only be here for three-and-a-half years.’ Or ‘Peta only has one sermon.’

My reaction to Helen's question is: First of all, let's have some diverse voices. After all, the Bible is a book of diverse voices, so how can you preach biblically if it is just one voice every week? As I work my way through ancient service registers, I see signature after signature the same. And somewhere around the 1930s, I see the names of lay readers disappear as the clergy feel they have to do it all themselves.

I have always enjoyed the perils of asking the laity to preach about their area of expertise. One dear man spoke of the drawn-out death of his son from brain cancer and concluded that perhaps God could *not* do anything to save him. Clergy never reach so brave a conclusion. Another, a climate change expert, told the congregation it was already too late to save the planet, and this was fifteen years ago! I had talked with him about finding some hope to preach. He did his best but has since gone sailing his boat round the world. And what could clergy spouses tell us if we got them talking!

Secondly, affirm us oldies in our current hopes and acknowledge us in our fears. Do not preach to the congregation you wish you had. Perhaps this is what pastoral visiting could achieve. It is certainly not about fixing people. I am not sure even God does that. The most useful pastoral response I have witnessed is 'And how do you handle that?' after hearing a litany of life's challenges. How do *you* handle that? I have always been amazed how many people settle gently into a new way of life after a devastating diagnosis. They have inner resources I know nothing about. What if we visited people to find out what hopes and fears kept them awake at night, and what inner resources they possess, and began there in the sermon?

A very thoughtful parishioner once told me, 'That was a terrific sermon. After two minutes I went into a deep meditation.' I ascertained he was not joking and have been thinking about my preaching ever since. And then there are the listeners who pick up your throwaway lines and munch on them for the rest of the sermon. It is no use being precious about your brilliant words and ideas. People take what they need.

The Right Words

Most of us older parishioners want familiar words each Sunday. We trust the words of the prayerbook rather than words newly researched from the internet each week. We can both relax into the familiar and digest it enough to really go deep into our worship, rather than having to do a quick check for doctrinal purity before we can say 'Amen'.

The clergy need to understand their role in upholding the status quo. Hence, they have to leave behind personal problems as they enter church and perform the liturgy with joy. But the clergy have another role to ensure the marginalised can find their way into worship. The Psalter gives us the clue that our hymns and prayers are not

all praise but about fifty percent lament. The biblical move is to draw the pain into the middle of worship. The question is *how* to draw deep international, national, local, and individual lament into worship. Honest intercessions can help, with an R-rated warning in case they offend the worshippers who have spent a lifetime being silent about their political leanings. Nor am I talking about long prayers for personal healing. We have the God-given words of the psalms, 'My God, why are you so far from me?', which we can use tenderly without providing everyone with food for gossip about their fellow pew-sitters. With a little research we can even discover a biblical pattern for our laments.

There are other places where we can tell the truth in church. I once asked a colleague how they were fed in worship. He answered: in the sermon and in the notices, so I always made sure I prepared the notices as well as the sermon.

Then there is silence. A wise colleague told me to stand with the hearse and be silent after a funeral, to be the still turning point in a churning world. If people need to speak to you, they can find you easily and in a receptive mood for whatever they need to say. In the Healthy Church movement, one of the necessities was worship with 'pools of silence'. So part of the armour of the effective church leader is the ability to stand still and wait on God, without looking embarrassed or twitching. It is part of the proper performance of liturgy.

There is a current politically correct refusal by some clergy to utter the words 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' and only ever say 'Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier' or endless alternatives. This fails the pew-sitter's intelligence again. Of course, our language shapes our world and we need to be inclusive. But those masculine designations have been the words of the apostolic faith for 2,000 years. The modern replacement is theologically clumsy in that it takes away from each person of the Trinity their part in creation, redemption and sanctification. And we desperately need God to be at least personal.

When you reach a certain age, you want to be able to put your book down or close your eyes to the PowerPoint and say the words from memory. It is part of the comfortable words of faith, and we do not need new words each week. Such are the comfortable words I need for my deathbed.

What Part Does the Music Play?

Elizabeth Smith, clergyperson and hymn writer, writes intelligent words for hymn tunes that are much loved but have unfortunate words, often unfriendly to women. One of my favourites is 'Sing the praise of God our Maker' to the tune MICHAEL.

'All my hope on God is founded' was not too bad but has too many male pronouns and statements about power. Elizabeth replaced it with a trinitarian hymn of great whimsy and grace, I particularly like the second verse:

Sing the praise of God our lover!
trusting, testing till the end,
body, soul and mind delighting,
close as breathing, constant friend.
May we taste
all your grace,
see your beauty face to face.

'May we taste all your grace'. Yes, please. Elizabeth had also been a pew-sitter long enough to understand the desperate need to hear intelligent and relevant words, to utter intelligent and relevant prayers, and to sing intelligent and relevant hymns. Brian Wren is another poet who manages his soaring creativity to fit into the regular metre and verse of hymnody: 'Here hangs a man discarded, a scarecrow hoisted high, a nonsense pointing nowhere to all who hurry by'.

At St George's Trentham the physical position of musicians has moved around the small building over the years. There is just enough room in the sanctuary for a small choir of eight or ten. Currently the keyboard player sits behind the congregation backing their efforts in the way of the eighteenth-century West Gallery musicians. But musicians have often gravitated to the front with ideas based on performance and ego. One insisted on being right beneath the pulpit which distracted from the sermon.

But in such a cold climate Trentham's arrangement of furniture mostly aims to keep the players and their instruments warm. In planning the induction of a new minister at another church, I finally dared to ask why the minister's chair was set pretentiously right in the front of the altar. 'Oh', they replied, 'Father Bill was too big to fit behind the altar'. In lambing season in Trentham, the sheep farmer organist was too busy to come, so hymns celebrating Transfiguration stayed on the hymnboard for weeks until they were finally sung. It is wise not to invent a whole theology to suit these local quirks. Our excellent current music maker sometimes stops playing, as Brian Wren suggests, and lets our small congregation sing a verse unaccompanied. She also notes the odd things people sometimes say to her after worship: 'Sorry we didn't sing well for you.' For you?

There are churches where the choir sits somewhere between the congregation and the sanctuary, to one side, or even behind the minister. This can reflect the idea that as you go further up and further in, it becomes holier. The modern congregational

habit of a whole band standing on a wide stage at the front recently took as its biblical foundation a single Bible verse, Psalm 22:3: 'The Lord is enthroned upon the praises of Israel'. It is worth doing an internet search of the phrase for a whole theology of worship that justifies the symbol of a large band of singers and musicians at the front of the church! This is probably another case of the practice leading the theology, but God's very presence is now said to depend on the music-makers. This may explain why such churches eschew other obvious symbols such as a cross. So much for a theology of the cross.

As I have been writing this essay, I have tried out ideas on my friends in the pews. One newcomer has said she will not go on the Bible reading roster because she has a tendency to comment as she reads. I replied that I thought Jesus would quite enjoy that, because he often questioned the status quo. But we need the new minister to be on side. We welcomed the wife of a locum clergyman by showing her to the pew where the clergy wives sat, 'in the heckling corner'. When I apologised later for some mild heckling during the sermon, the husband replied, 'Was that the best you've got?' A good dose of humour is needed in everyone who comes to church.

I have deliberately written this essay in a more chatty and irreverent style because that is how we pew-sitters speak when church is over. The style does not mean the ideas or the writer are not scholarly. I suggest we have much to learn when we realise the stamina of the people in the pew, their intelligence, their observations, the music and the words they love and need. This is the view from the pew.

ACADEMY AND OTHER REPORTS

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL REPORT

On 19 July 2022, Andrew Doohan tendered his resignation as President of the Australian Academy of Liturgy to the New South Wales Convenor and Academy Secretary, David Nelson. David then requested a meeting of the Academy Council to work out a way forward.

As Immediate Past President, I convened a meeting of the Council via Zoom on 23 July to establish a way forward for the governance of the Academy. The Council gave much thought and discussion was given to what would be best for AAL and identified completing the work toward incorporation and bringing the governance of the Academy into line with contemporary best practice as a priority. To this end, the Council resolved to appoint an Interim President whose task would be complete the work of incorporation.

I convened a further meeting on 30 July. Various options were canvassed in terms of the appointment of an Interim President. In line with Article V, No. 5 of the Constitution, the Council unanimously elected the Queensland Convenor, John Fitz-Herbert, as Interim President with the primary task of completing the work toward incorporation. While the Council acknowledges that this is a departure from the usual State-based approach to Academy governance, it was considered to be the best way forward for the good of the Academy in a somewhat unusual circumstance.

John Fitz-Herbert is a Roman Catholic presbyter of the Diocese of Brisbane. He is the pastor of the parish of Boonah, southwest of Brisbane, and was ordained on 18 November 1992 in the Cathedral of St Stephen, Brisbane. Over the past 30 years, he has served in parishes in Brisbane, Bundaberg, Mackay, and Chicago.

John has been a member of the Academy for many decades and became the convenor of the Queensland chapter in 2022. He currently serves on the editorial board of *Liturgy News* and chairs a small working party on liturgy, culture and indigenous Australians for the implementation of the Archdiocese of Brisbane's Reconciliation Action Plan. John is also a current member of *Societas Liturgica*.

I am sure you will join with me in thanking John for his generosity in accepting this appointment.

Anthony Doran, Immediate Past President.

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QUEENSLAND CHAPTER REPORT

The Queensland Chapter has continued to meet every second month in 2022. At our first meeting in February at Old Bishopsbourne, Milton (next to the iconic XXXX Brewery), Marian Free completed her sterling service as convenor of our chapter. We acknowledged Marian's leadership over the last ten or more years and wished her all the best in retirement. John Fitz-Herbert had expressed interest in stepping into the role of convenor after Marian extended a general invitation to all members at the end of last year. This was confirmed at the February meeting by those present. Our next four gatherings in April, June, August and October were held at Holy Spirit Provincial Seminary, Banyo, in Xavier Hall. We are grateful to Fr Neil Muir, rector, and the staff of the seminary for welcoming us to their place.

Our return to the Banyo site has also meant that we have been able to access Zoom technology and so include our northern members in the gatherings. It has been wonderful to have the presence and participation of members in the Atherton Tablelands, Townsville, Mackay, Caloundra and Grafton. We have also found that some of us closer to Brisbane who have busy schedules on the day of our meeting or doing a locum in another State or concerned about COVID-19 have been able to join via for Zoom. This new format has brought increased life and vitality to our gatherings. We acknowledge and thank Dylan Asmus, a second-year seminarian, for ensuring it all works on the day, setting up a booking link for us and for preparing the meeting place.

In addition to meeting in a new location, we decided to trial meeting on Thursday instead of Tuesday. For more than a few who were turning up meeting after meeting, Tuesdays in 2022 were not working as well as in the past. COVID-19 has taught us to discover the grace of new practices in response to changed needs, so we bit the bullet and explored another day. Later in the week saw more people freer from teaching, ministerial, family and professional commitments.

We have also been delighted to welcome several newer members and some possible future members in person and via Zoom. This augurs well for 2023 and beyond. We have been encouraged to reach out to members of our respective churches and invite them to our AAL community. In moving to Banyo and also to a different day, we have had a significant focus for each gathering. So the following occurred at our bimonthly gatherings:

- April: a book review of Nick Mayhew-Smith's *Landscape Liturgies* (Canterbury Press 2021)
- June: a topic for discussion, 'How has your worshipping assembly celebrated the great Fifty Days of Easter' and responses and reactions to content in the AJL May 2022 issue
- August: guest speaker and AAL member Jennifer Wakeling spoke to her doctoral thesis, *Divine Resonance: Meaning-Generation via Instrumental Music within Christian Worship*
- October: guest speaker and AAL member Barry Craig (on Zoom from far north Queensland) shared his recent research on liturgical institution narratives.

Each gathering was excellent and there was full and active participation!

Our December gathering is always festive and gastronomic, so we are looking forward once again to assembling at David and Marcia Pitman's home. Thanks to members from participating churches for leading prayer and also to Clare Schwantes for taking notes at each meeting.

We also acknowledge the retirement of Paul Walton (UCA) from the Academy due to his changing family and ministerial circumstances. We thank Paul for his contribution to AAL over many years and wish him every blessing and grace in the future. It has been a good year for the Queensland chapter of the AAL and we look forward to 2023.

John Fitz-Herbert, Queensland Chapter Convenor

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SOUTH AUSTRALIA CHAPTER REPORT

The South Australia chapter has been delighted to welcome some new interested potential members this year. We look forward to hearing more about their interest in liturgy.

At the August meeting, discussion focused on Robert Gribben's chapter, 'The Spirit of Prayer Books Past' from Stephen Burns and Robert Gribben, eds, *When We Pray: The Future of Common Prayer* (Coventry Press, 2020). This gathering was hosted at Rosefield Uniting Church in Highgate. The June meeting included a good discussion of Charles Sherlock's chapter from the same book, 'The "Prayer Book Tradition": Back to the Liturgical Future'. We are enjoying the Australian content in this book.

Alison Whish, South Australia Chapter Convenor

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Reports were not available from the Victoria, Western Australia, and New South Wales chapters.

FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA REPORT

The Journey

The Fifth Plenary Council of the Catholic Church of Australia was celebrated in Sydney in the first week of July 2022. This is the highest level of decision-making at a national level in the Catholic Church, and the resultant decrees, once given *recognitio* by the Holy See in Rome, become binding on the Catholic Church in Australia.

The journey took over four years, and over 222,000 people joined in the consultation and over 17,457 submissions were made.¹ The first stage was the Listening and Dialogue consultation with parishes and groups all over Australia. The process included prayer, deep listening to scripture, and listening to each other in small groups. From the materials submitted, qualitative research discerned six themes relating to the question ‘What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?’ These were:

- Missionary and evangelising
- Inclusive, participatory and synodal
- Prayerful and eucharistic
- Humble, healing and merciful
- A joyful, hope-filled and servant community
- Open to conversion, renewal and reform.

Writing and discernment groups for each theme were established and then a second round of gatherings around Australia used these themes for further Listening and Discernment sessions. Once again, the focus was on prayer, scripture and deep listening to each other, and submissions from groups were once again submitted online. The fruits of this discernment process shaped the agenda of the first session of the Plenary Council, which was held online in October 2021. The agenda was unusual in shape in that it was built around six themes that had emerged from further work and writing:

- Conversion
- Prayer
- Formation
- Structures
- Governance
- Institutions

¹ Accessed 13 September 2022, <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/about-the-themes/>

These themes had a total of sixteen questions attached to them, and these were the focus for the first assembly. The first assembly engaged with these questions through prayer, scripture and deep listening as a full assembly, then in groups of thirty, then groups of ten. Although the online environment was exhausting and not ideal, the first assembly produced much valuable material that was published as the raw fruits of discernment showing the diversity of points of view among the members.

From this material, the Drafting Committee and writing groups produced draft propositions for further discernment which were sent to the 277 members of the Council in February 2022. Further reflections on the results were returned by Council members, and by June the final propositions for the second assembly were sent to all members. The Framework of Motions was distributed to all members prior to the commencement of the second General Assembly of the Plenary Council from 4 to 9 July in Sydney. The finalisation of the Acts of the second General Assembly was completed in August 2022 and the decrees published on the website: plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au.

In November the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [ACBC] will meet and the ten decrees will be sent to Rome for *recognitio*. Once returned, they will be promulgated in *Australasian Catholic Record* and the website of the ACBC will oblige six months later.

Decree on Liturgy

The document dealing with liturgical matters is called *Communion in Grace: Sacrament to the World*.² Each decree begins with an introduction which enunciates the background and wealth of discernment that emerged through the journey. There are thirteen paragraphs in the liturgy decree, and they focus on areas such as the sacramental nature of the Church,³ with the hope that the charisms of religious orders and ecclesial movements might flourish as a national network to enrich and nourish the Church.

The decree acknowledged the diversity of vocations within the Church and the need for all of them to be fostered. There has been a broadening of criteria for the ministries of lector, acolyte and catechist, which are to be encouraged for lay men and women. There was also a call for the renewal of preaching. This is underpinned by the need for formation, and one decree is devoted to formation in leadership and ministry

² Accessed 3 October 2022, [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/FINAL-Decree-5-Communion-in-Grace-Sacrament-to-the-World.pdf](https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/FINAL-Decree-5-Communion-in-Grace-Sacrament-to-the-World.pdf).

³ The Plenary Council documents use the capitalised word 'Church' whenever it refers to the People of God. This makes a good distinction from the word used to describe a building used for sacred purposes. While this is different from journal guidelines, it reflects the Vatican emphasis on the Church as the People of God.

which is crucial to our growth as a Church. The decree affirms the role of priests as those who gather the community, proclaim the gospel and preside at liturgy. As the number of priests diminishes formation and support will need further development.

The document also acknowledges the diversity of the Church through the presence of the Eastern Churches in Australia that are in communion with Rome. Using St John Paul II's image of breathing with both lungs, the differences between the Eastern Churches and Western Catholic Church are to be valued and included.

The Plenary Council affirmed the Second Vatican Council's declaration of the preeminent role of liturgy as it is the 'summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; as the same time, it is the font from which all her power flows'.⁴ This affirmation is important as the role of the Plenary Council repeatedly affirmed its union with Vatican II and the importance of focusing once again on the development called for by that ecumenical council. The Plenary Council acknowledged the need for renewal in catechesis, formation and devotion to the eucharist. To support this, the ACBC has requested an International Eucharistic Congress to take place in 2028.

Communion in Grace emphasised reception of the sacraments at key moments in the lives of Catholics. The document also acknowledged the challenge of families seeing the experience of the sacraments as cultural milestones rather than moments of ongoing faith formation. These celebrations are not just a kind of certification but moments of continuing growth through the sacraments. The Church needs to better engage with families so that the sacraments lead those who celebrate them into deeper personal relationship with Christ. The document again encourages formation for family-centred parish-based experiences in faith as a pathway toward this goal. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) was also highlighted as a way in which parish communities can grow and strengthen themselves, but with the understanding that the fostering of discipleship is crucial, and difficulties may call for sharing of resources between parishes.

Recognising the importance of the Liturgy of the Word in the eucharistic celebration, and the promotion of a living love for scripture, there must be support for promoting excellent faithful preaching. Throughout the process there was concern voiced about the state of preaching in the Church in Australia. The Council also emphasised the importance of language in liturgical celebration, with the need for translations to be faithful to the original text but also accessible and able to communicate clearly to all assemblies of the faithful.

⁴ Second Vatican Council, "Sacrosanctum Concilium: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1963), 10.

There was a call throughout the process for formation in the sacrament of reconciliation, including a call for the third form of the Rite of Penance to be used, in which 'general' (rather than individual) absolution is given to all present. Use of this form addresses in some way the decreasing numbers of priests and addresses difficulties expressed by those who have been hurt by the Church and so choose not to celebrate reconciliation individually. The final paragraph of the introduction deals with the sacrament of marriage and the urgent and clear need for a renewed catechesis on marriage and support for an ongoing 'catechumenate for life' to support married persons and their families.

Following this introductory material there is a section that begins with 'THEREFORE'. This section affirms the principal points: firstly, to promote full, conscious and active participation as required by Vatican II; secondly, to commit the Catholic Church in Australia to breathe with both lungs and to respect, foster and promote the rich heritage of both Eastern and Western traditions; and thirdly to request the Bishops Commission for the Liturgy prepare a new English translation of the Roman Missal.

The decree that concludes the document contains four articles:

Article 1: That dioceses promote exercise of and formation for the ministries of lector, acolyte and catechist.

Article 2: That in the light of the change in circumstances over the past twenty years, the ACBC review the provisions and guidelines it issued in May 2003 for lay people to participate in a formal ministry of preaching in the Latin Church, as provided for in canon 766 of the Code of Canon Law.

Article 3: That the Bishops' Commission for Liturgy institute a sustained program of catechesis of the Sacrament of Penance to promote an understanding of the conditions for, and appropriate practice of, each of the three forms of the Rite of Penance.

Article 4: That the Plenary Council request that the Holy Father consider whether the third form of the Rite of Penance might have a wider use on occasions when it is particularly appropriate, granted an understanding among the faithful of its distinctive nature and requirements.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church in Australia is not seeking radical change to the liturgy but really an affirmation of the teachings of Vatican II and the increase of formation and development as an ongoing practice. Some things can only be changed with the full

agreement of the universal Church, and they might be included in the Churchwide Synod of Bishops in 2023. The life of the Church, however, needs the life of the Spirit, and to promote a more Christ-centred and missionary focussed community will no doubt enhance the life and faith of the Church. Many other aspects of life in the Church were developed in the other decrees but this report has only centred on the decree on liturgy.

Being a member of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia was a profound experience of synodality and the pinnacle of my life in the Catholic Church. It was a privilege and an outstanding faith experience to work towards the culmination of over four years of listening and discernment and to walk together with so many faith-filled people, all embracing the challenge together in a non-hierarchical manner. The Holy Spirit was tangibly evident in many of our challenges and in the conclusion when the Council was closed as well as in the excellent prayer and liturgical environment.

Dr Angela McCarthy, Perth
Member of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia

BOOK REVIEWS

The Assembly: A Spirituality

by Gordon Lathrop

Fortress Press, 2022, xiii +160 pages

Reviewed by **Bryan Cones, Victoria**

While many authors have praised the flexibility of new forms of prayer during the COVID-19 pandemic, Gordon Lathrop stands out among their critics. First pursuing that critique in journal articles in *Worship* and the U.S. Lutheran musicians' journal *CrossAccent*, Lathrop now gives a full-throated, book-length defence of the necessity of the Christian assembly gathered at an appointed place and time to do their liturgical co-work with God.

Lathrop's audience, however, is not primarily his fellow liturgical scholars, with their debates around the meaning of embodiment, online gathering, or whether it is possible to celebrate sacraments through digital mediation. Rather, as in his 2006 book *The Pastor: A Spirituality* (Fortress Press), Lathrop seeks to address the broader church, that is, all who gather Sunday by Sunday, along with their pastors. Like the earlier book, which he at times quotes at length, *The Assembly* is broken into sections: The first is devoted to 'learning the assembly by heart', while the second offers a 'critical catechism' for the assembly, with the Lord's Prayer, the creeds, and the biblical 'ten commandments' as touchstones. Each chapter ends with a vignette—a memory of liturgical celebration, a reflection on a piece of art, a snippet of wisdom from a colleague or mentor—to ground his reflection.

Though writing from his U.S. Evangelical Lutheran and World Lutheran Federation perspective, Lathrop is ever the ecumenist, emphasizing the consistent necessity of gathering across Christian traditions, rooted in the biblical texts they share. He also signals his own commitment to the twentieth-century liturgical movement and its recovery of the assembly as the 'primary symbol' of the liturgy, especially as articulated by Robert Hovda and Louis-Marie Chauvet. As throughout his writings, Lathrop emphasizes those 'central things' shared across the churches: bath, meal, word, and preaching, among others, by which the assembly enacts its identity as 'Christ existing as community' (3).

It is in the first section in which Lathrop makes his strongest case against digitally mediated common prayer, the limits of which, he argues, reveal the fundamental characteristics of the assembly and why it is important. These include (in bullet points): the necessity of place, the centrality of word and sacrament and their

juxtaposition or interaction, the assembly's fundamentally communal and inclusive character, and the collection of goods for the poor (49-51). Some of his reasons are both liturgical and theological: 'We do not baptize ourselves; baptism always requires at least one other person' (49). Some, like screen fatigue, are practical, though they signal for Lathrop that liturgy done well draws those gathered beyond the everyday, not least beyond the distractions of our many screens. In these first four chapters, Lathrop opens with an imagined liturgical moment that anticipates his argument about the assembly: a community of shared leadership gathered around central things then to be sent in service. Lathrop completes his reflections on baptism, eucharist, and other sacramental events with attention to how they render assemblies "baked into one loaf in Christ and all the saints and, indeed, all the wretched of the world' (81).

Lathrop then turns from speaking about assemblies to speaking to them, proposing the 'classic texts' derived from or commenting on the liturgy as a 'catechism' for an assembly spirituality. This 'assembly-shared' inheritance gifted in baptism includes actual liturgical texts such as the Lord's Prayer and creeds, but Lathrop extends them to 'the Ten Commandments and perhaps some passages from Scripture that can stand for the sacraments or that are regarded as basic to the sacraments' (92). These latter include the Great Commission (Matt 28:19), the so-called 'words of institution' common in table prayers (1 Cor 11:24-25), the granting of the keys to the reign of God (Matt 18:18), and the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:30-32).

Lathrop gives each text a 'liturgical twist', circling back to his main points about the assembly. Biblical witness to ancient assembly practice serves a touchpoint admonishing today's assemblies to faithfulness. The proclaimed word enacts a sacramental presence of the risen Christ that enlightens and forgives. The Lord's Prayer, among other things, points the assembly toward the eternal fullness of the eucharistic banquet, while the creeds are communal symbols that enact the assembly's faith when prayed together. Even the commandments, which Lathrop admits rarely appear in most assemblies' liturgies, both direct and warn assemblies in their naming of God while also providing the shape of the 'love of neighbour' into which the liturgy sends those who celebrate it.

Some may quibble with Lathrop's choice of 'classic texts' (such as the commandments) or his almost exceptionless rejection of digital prayer as a replacement for the gathered assembly. The choice of the former reflects Lathrop's Lutheran heritage, of which he is (rightly) proud, and the latter his defence of a hard-won ecumenical consensus around the 'central things' he holds dear, the assembly fundamental among them. These choices perhaps signal the limits of any single author, reflected also in his cultural references, which generally suggest a European and U.S. heritage: a Dutch hymn, a Russian icon, a Danish museum, churches in Philadelphia in the U.S.A. and Lohja, Finland. Assemblies in the Global South or Aboriginal or indigenous

assemblies, not to mention Pentecostal and evangelical ones, may have difficulty seeing themselves reflected here. And yet Lathrop's clarity about his topic and forthright acknowledgment of those limits invite engagement by colleagues and fellow travellers, perhaps as a test of the universality he claims for those 'central things'. Both that clarity and the invitation it makes render this book a fine text to be used along others to introduce both the study of liturgy and to explore a spirituality that may emerge from it.

Liturgical Lockdown: Covid and the Absence of the Laity, a New Zealand Perspective

by Joseph P. Grayland

Te Heparā Pai, 2021, 260 pages

Reviewed by **Angela McCarthy, Perth**

Joseph Grayland's exploration of 'liturgical lockdown', a new term arising among others from the pandemic experience of 2020 and beyond, is within the context of a combined parish that has two metropolitan parishes and one rural parish in Aotearoa-New Zealand. As with Australia, island nations could more easily isolate and hence the impact of the pandemic was lessened. As the author outlines in his introduction, the patterns of worship and interaction were brought to an abrupt halt, and the response of the people of God is well worth assessing. There was a wide variety of responses among worshipping communities, and so it is valuable that Grayland chose to examine the community in which he works, prays and celebrates liturgy as well as providing wider responses through surveys of laity and clergy.

Grayland uses the framework of disruption and innovation, taken from Clayton Christensen's 1997 book *The Innovator's Dilemma* (Harvard Business Review Press), to hold aspects of the narrative in place (5). Grayland uses this framework in Part One to describe how COVID-19 impacted the laity, the priesthood and the church. He acknowledges that the main force of disruption has not come from the responses such as include 'virtual Mass' but from 'limiting physical gatherings and social distancing because these are seen as high-risk activities' (15). Through the loss of physical sacramental mediation, the pastoral, sacramental and liturgical lives of the people of God have been changed.

The loss of the Sunday Mass revealed that the essential means of communicating with parish members was through that gathering. Without it there was a fear of losing everyone and exhausting pastoral activism (21). The disruption of the pandemic showed that the parish's top-down, enfeebled decision-making was not working and signalled a need to change to a more relevant and productive pattern that could meet the parish demands. The social outreach group, which was very engaged pre-pandemic, was unable to work because only four of the twenty members were under 70 years of age (26). A deep concern emerged that the 'falsehood that those watching an online Mass were actually participating in it was never challenged' (29). For further exploration Grayland used two surveys, one parish-based and one sent nationally.

To explore the disrupted and innovated priesthood, Grayland also used a survey as well as 'professional conversations, one focus group, and a large variety of internationally published material on the clergy response to the pandemic' (43).

Through the responses of the clergy Grayland discovered a 'disconnect between a *theology of the liturgy* and a *theological praxis in the liturgy* but also a disconnect between the roles of presider and laity as presences of Christ in the liturgical act' (51). Functionalism proved to be one of the major motivators of the liturgical response by the clergy and Grayland offers some disquieting reflections and questions.

In Part Two Grayland presents a theology of liturgy based on the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC). This is refreshing, as there are increasing amounts of liturgical writing, particularly online, that make no reference to this foundational document. The summary of the theology of liturgy (76-85) is short but profoundly rich and completely accessible. It is followed by a theology of praxis which is also well-formulated and profoundly anchored in Vatican II teachings. 'The worship of the Church is humankind's response to the presence and action of God in the world, saving us in Christ' (94).

In the next section discussing the priesthood's operative theology during the lockdown, Grayland refers to the 'Decree in Time of Covid-19' which was published by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. This document, Grayland maintains, implies that the 'Mass is said *for the people*, but not *with the people*' (97), with an underlying assumption that the laity are not necessary for the celebration of liturgy. This is followed by a discussion around the profound understanding that the liturgy is the work of Christ, the priest who has died, risen and ascended, and that the liturgy of the church calls this to mind through anamnesis, the actual remembering that draws us all to the Father through the sacrifice of the Son in the power of the Spirit.

In Part Three Grayland examines virtual presence. Arguments continue around the difference between virtual presence and real presence, and the debate exposes a lack of understanding about the act of anamnesis and the nature of presence. Christ is truly present in the person of the priest, the consecrated bread and wine, the Word, and in the people as they pray and sing (SC, 7). There is a unity between the 'originating event and every subsequent remembrance of that event' (117). This discussion must be ongoing to clearly help churches truly understand and express in our liturgy how we understand the salvific action of God.

In Part Four Grayland looks at the impact of technology on our understanding of presence. The pandemic has changed us and our patterns. We can be present in a technological sense, but can we be present in a liturgical sense? Grayland stresses that it is not technology that is at fault but the 'operative, transactional theology' (135) that drove the use of such technology to help us view the Mass rather than being present through sign and symbol in a tangible sense in a proximate physical relationship. The issue of spiritual communion emerges throughout the book as an unrealistic

participation that has increased a lack of true understanding of liturgical reality.

Part Five concentrates on the mediated sacramental system and what alternatives are present when the priest, not considered an essential worker, cannot enter aged care homes, or hospitals, or churches, and is therefore unable to offer the sacraments in time of need. He particularly refers to the reconciliation and anointing of the sick. He concludes with comments on home eucharists.

In Part Six Grayland offers some models of liturgy with excellent discussion and development. If the model followed does not function as a participative experience of salvation, then it cannot express who we are in the redemptive action of Christ. This is followed by seven considerations for both questioning and reflection, and a concluding chapter that is not a conclusion! After all, the experience of this pandemic is not over yet, and we are still in the throes of trying to understand what we need to do and how best to do it. This book is invaluable in the way it present complex issues and its reliance on the solid background of Vatican II to support solutions.

Lighten Our Darkness: Discovering and Celebrating Choral Evensong
by Simon Reynolds
Darton, Longman and Todd, 2021, 128 pages

Reviewed by **Andrew Esnouf, Melbourne**

The traditional Anglican service of choral evensong, which was formulated during the English Reformation with the distillation of the five monastic daily offices into morning and evening prayer, is undergoing a renewal of popularity within the Church of England and beyond. If the reporting of this resurgence is correct, this popularity is largely amongst those who might be classified as ‘spiritual, but not religious,’ thriving among those who are reluctant to officially sign up to the specifics of Christian doctrine or the fellowship inherent within parish life. It is to this audience that Simon Reynolds writes his recent short and helpful work *Lighten Our Darkness: Discovering and Celebrating Choral Evensong*, the first popular level introduction to the service in decades.

The book can be divided into three sections, consisting of the two introductory chapters, a commentary on the liturgy itself (chapters three to nine), and a concluding chapter with associated end material. The first two chapters offer an orientation to the liturgy as a whole. The first, ‘Echoes of Eternity,’ introduces choral evensong’s resurgence in popularity, highlighting the connection with ancient yet living spiritual traditions, the balance of liturgical stability and change, along with the interchange between spoken and musical elements. Much is also made of the open and noncoercive nature of participation, as it is ‘an act of worship that invites rather than compels’ (25) and confronts and charms contemporary participants with the historic liturgy, which is both strange and alluring. The second chapter, ‘Roots, Shape and Flow,’ succinctly describes the long history of choral evensong, beginning with ancient patterns of worship, through the developments of monasticism and monastic communities through to the English Reformation and subsequent musical and liturgical developments. The chapter then briefly articulates the structure of choral evensong, with short descriptions of the liturgical elements.

The commentary chapters, which make up the majority of the book, illuminate the following liturgical elements: the opening choral responses, the chanting of the appointed psalm(s), the Old and New Testament lessons, the canticles, the choral prayers and collects, the choral anthem, and lastly the concluding part of the liturgy which consists of prayers of intercession, a final hymn and a liturgical blessing. Each commentary chapter introduces the element that is in focus and comments upon various historical, theological and spiritual dimensions of that liturgical movement.

The chapters conclude with 'Words for Reflection', which are various short quotations from theologians, poets, literature and hymns which succinctly summarise aspects mentioned earlier in the chapter.

At times these commentary chapters also elaborate upon the role that a particular liturgical movement plays within the broader culture of choral evensong, such as the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis canticles which follow each of the Old and New Testament lessons. These canticles are a liturgical dimension unique to choral evensong, with their paired musical setting performed by organ and choir often being an aesthetic centrepiece for the service. The choral evensong liturgy can be variously divided, and the chapters do not strictly adhere to the progression of the service, as the canticles are interspersed with the readings.

The book concludes with a short chapter outlining the locations one might find choral evensong services practised regularly in England, Ireland and the United States of America. It also identifies some key websites where readers can discover the locations and sound of choral evensong worship, such as choralevensong.org and the BBC radio websites, and makes suggestions for further reading.

This short and rich book is a fine example of what can be achieved with published introductions to liturgical worship for readers beyond the boundaries of the church pews. It is well written, thoroughly researched and considered, is easy to read and simultaneously offers deep insight for both the initiated and the regular participant. Whilst I may quibble about some minor areas of his presentation, too inconsequential for this review, Simon Reynolds is to be congratulated on this helpful and valuable contribution. I commend this book to the academy.

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