

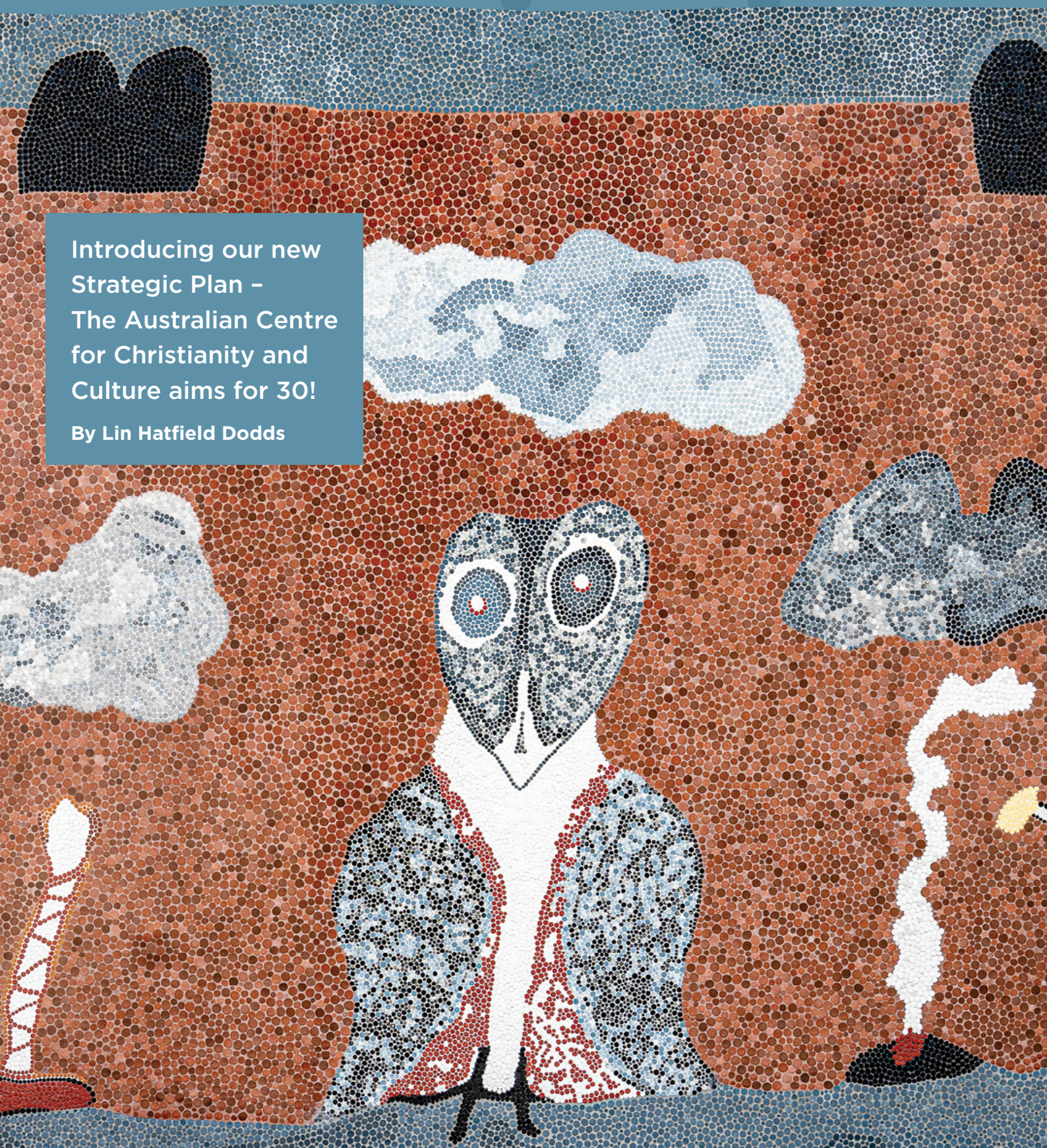
The Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture

ENGAGE

August 2025 Issue 19

Introducing our new
Strategic Plan –
The Australian Centre
for Christianity and
Culture aims for 30!

By Lin Hatfield Dodds





Great Cross, photo by Liz Jakimow

Cover image: Mural Wall, photo by Liz Jakimow

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“The ACC&C’s renewed strategy to 2030 focuses on youth mental health, Indigenous affairs and climate change—building on a legacy of ecumenical and interfaith hospitality, reconciliation, and theology that contributes meaningfully to Australia and the wider world.”

Magpie flying by Great Cross, photo by Liz Jakimow



Editorial

Jonathan Cole

Interim Executive Director

This issue of *Engage* affords us an opportunity to introduce our exciting new strategy that aims to build communities in which all of creation can flourish. This new strategy to 2030 builds on the successful quarter century legacy of the Centre that has at its foundational core ecumenical and interfaith hospitality, a desire for reconciliation with Australia's first inhabitants and research in theology that seeks to make a constructive contribution to Australia and the world beyond.

ACC&C Board Chair, Lin Hatfield Dodds, elaborates the aims and purposes of this new strategy for the Centre in our lead article. The strategy, with its priority areas of youth mental health, Indigenous issues and climate change, serves as the thematic glue for this issue, bringing together a range of articles exploring different dimensions of these priority areas, issues which are vital to the future health of our communities. We feature articles from notable CSU scholars who are associated with the ACC&C, like Prof Stan Grant Jnr, who explores the ways in which his Catholic Faith is integrated with his Wiradjuri identity and spirituality, and the importance of the Catholic Church, and Christianity more broadly, for Indigenous people in Australia, and Dr Monica Short, who shares research into youth mental health, a sobering challenge confronting Australia today.

We are also privileged to have an article from the Centre's founder, Bishop George Browning, which highlights some of the central themes that guided the original vision and partnership with CSU, such as creation, redemption and reconciliation and movement of the spirit. The Centre, he writes, is “about sharing a journey of life which leads to the abundance Jesus promised.” As Lin notes in her feature article, the Centre remains committed to its founding vision and will “continue to focus on wisdom, peace, resilience, creativity, common good, innovation and discipleship,” with a particular focus on the marginalised. The new, one might say, renewed, focus on youth mental health, Indigenous affairs and climate change, build on this foundation.

In the coming years, the ACC&C will further develop and implement the goals of its new strategy through quality research, public engagement and other activities, from music to the creative arts. We hope you will join us in this next phase in the Centre's history as we work together to understand, engage and address some of the greatest challenges confronting our society and our planet.



Olive tree in the Bible Garden, photo by Liz Jakimow

Introducing our new Strategic Plan – The Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture aims for 30!

Lin Hatfield-Dodds

ACC&C Board Chair

But first... a bit of history.

The Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture is 27 years old. Established in 1998 to study the history, diversity of expression and cultural impact of Christianity in Australian society and to be a focus for the development of contemporary Christian liturgical theory and practice, the Centre has progressed over time to now working on being a reasoned, informed, faith-based voice in national dialogues about issues of concern in today's society.

Historically the Centre has investigated (for example):

- the public value of Christianity today
- nuclear disarmament
- ageing and pastoral care
- the centrality of the Eucharistic church in an increasingly tribal world
- representations of God in art through the centuries
- understanding Girard, Mises, Bonhoeffer and others
- the relevance of "creative spiritual movements" to political, social and cultural reform
- what contributions to make to major social dialogues such as Indigenous matters, ecology and child sexual abuse inquiries
- the relationship between, and impact of cross-discipline work in, theology and economics and politics and theology.

In addition, the Centre has hosted musical performances, art exhibitions, events, conferences and seminars, ranging from the Commonwealth Day Celebration to the Anzac Eve Peace Vigil; from responses to the Anthropocene by Charles Sturt University's Circle of Creatives to piano and cello recitals; from chamber music performances with 200 people in the audience to one-on-one music lessons; from conferences on pilgrimage to discussion events on people and politics.

So... where now?

In late 2024 the Board undertook a strategic review and decided to build on the excellent work the Centre has done so far. So our future doesn't look too different to our past, just fresher and a bit more targeted.

We'll keep on creating, collating and curating research outcomes that inform our engagement in dialogues around important issues. We'll be bringing together information based on thought leadership from across Charles Sturt University and across all the expressions of the Christian church in Australia. We'll pass that on to faith communities, schools, political and community decision makers. We'll share it in conversation with others who care about the same profound social issues that we do, including Indigenous matters, climate change and young people's mental health and wellbeing. We'll be looking to apply the research outcomes and thought leadership to ways in which we can build, preserve and protect communities where we all – and all of creation – can flourish. Community, connection, cooperation – these are all critical to our wellbeing and to the way we function together in the face of the current global instability. Building stronger, positive communities is an important application of the types of research we do.

We'll continue to focus on wisdom, peace, resilience, creativity, common good, innovation, and discipleship that gives attention to those who have been marginalised, especially in our three focus issues – issues that both the key partners, Charles Sturt University and the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, really care about. These are critical, even existential, issues in which we all need to engage if we are to build a world worth living in and live well within it. Every positive contribution we make to national discussions about, and responses to, youth mental health, climate change and Indigenous matters helps to strengthen the resilience, inclusivity and harmony in our culture – and that's the vision that the Centre holds: we want to see a just and peaceful Australian culture in which we can all live and be "well." This vision is needed now more than ever as we navigate the turbulent international environment – we need Australia to be a place of safety, courage and inclusion.

One of the important changes in our new Strategic Plan is using an Integrated Action Packages approach to our work. In each of our focus issue areas we'll have plans that ensure each piece of work has multiple impacts and reinforces the others. We'll have to work collaboratively to achieve that – linking our goals with others who have similar interests so that we can multiply the impact of their work, and they of ours.

So, for example, in our youth mental health area we're working with the CSU School of Social Work and Arts on a research project looking at the role of chaplains in supporting mental

health and wellbeing for young people. In climate change, we're applying for funding for a small project that will improve sustainability on our own campus – hopefully we'll be able to share how it works so other people can replicate the idea if they want. There'll be more! Keep an eye/ear out for events, activities and projects that you might be able to support or join as we go along.

Of course the Plan also includes all those necessary administrative bits, about risk, finances, evaluation and so on. It has indicators to tell us whether we're achieving what we're setting out to do. It, along with the Board providing good governance, provides the foundations for the ACC&C's high quality and effective leadership, our engagement in the public square, our provision of a reasoned, informed, faith-based voice in the national debates of our day.

So that's it... a new Plan that leads us to build community based on the values and principles of Christianity, to take our strengths in research and speaking out into the public square, to work together for a stronger, more positive future. We hope you'll join us in this work.

In late 2024 the Board undertook a strategic review and decided to build on the excellent work the Centre has done so far. So our future doesn't look too different to our past, just fresher and a bit more targeted.



"Care for Creation: Listening to First Nations and Celtic Voices" conference, panel with climate change scarf, photo by Liz Jakimow



The Original Vision

Bishop George Browning

Founder of the ACC&C

Without a vision the people perish (Proverbs 29:18)

In the modern world, all people enjoy national identity and each nation's capital expresses, or should express, key elements of that identity and vision.

When our capital was founded, the nation's spiritual identity was expressed through provision of land representative of colonial settlement – English (Anglican), Irish (Roman Catholic), Scottish (Presbyterian) – together with lesser blocks for Methodists and Baptists and one for a Jewish synagogue. Because the English (Anglicans) predominated in the census they were allocated the largest and most prestigious block for a national cathedral.

When I arrived in 1993, I was convinced this vision was no longer appropriate (if it ever was). Denominational identity is celebrated provincially through city cathedrals. I came believing the national capital should have a strong spiritual identity, but not one denominationally based and certainly not one locked historically in the rearview mirror. I was convinced the Anglican site was a gift beyond measure which could, with vision and courage, significantly shape Australia's religious

and spiritual life for all its people. As an Anglican, my identity is incarnationally shaped, knowing that the Church that I serve and at that time led, had a responsibility to host the deep and abiding presence of God in all aspects of life. So, the vision of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture was founded on connecting and interdependent themes. Each theme was expected to find creative commitment through research, dialogue, advocacy, liturgy, the arts, and public gathering. Charles Sturt University was sought as a fitting and exciting partner in the development of this vision.

Creation. It is Christian belief that all life is interconnected. *All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being* (John 1:3). The permanent grasslands, protecting threatened species, hold prime position, never to be built on and have subsequently been brought around to wrap over the chapel. But much more significantly, it was hoped the Centre would shine wisdom and light on appropriate human engagement with the natural order, focusing religious response to climate change and environmental responsibility in general.



Mural Wall, photo by Liz Jakimow



Gathering Place and Great Cross, photo by Liz Jakimow

I was convinced the Anglican site was a gift beyond measure which could, with vision and courage, significantly shape Australia's religious and spiritual life for all its people.

Redemption and Reconciliation. *In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female* (Galatians 3:28). When Canberra was founded, its Indigenous peoples were not considered worthy of place, even of existence. We all know there remains a long journey ahead for our Indigenous people to resume their proper place and for their voice to be heard. The Centre began locally in consultation with the Ngunnawal people and nationally through the voice of Drs Lowitcha O'Donohue and Dawn Casey. The Fireplace and its 12 stones around which seven pines are planted (one by Her Majesty the Queen and one by Dr O'Donohue) remain the site's sacred centre. The Holy Spirit Wall with its depiction of the Spirit as a white owl reminds us that colonial settlers did not bring knowledge of God to this continent. The role of the Centre as a place of reconciliation must remain central to its life. Again, the role of CSU in promotion of research and dialogue is pivotal. Reconciliation is central to peace and harmony everywhere.

Movement of the Spirit. *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth* (John 16: 13). It is clear the place and role of religion in the lives of people has changed and is changing commensurately with all other aspects of human endeavour. What was known, experienced and taken for

granted by my generation is not known, let alone taken for granted by succeeding generations. Christian denominational identity is barely relevant, while on the other hand Australians are not immune from global conflicts connected to rivalry between faiths. The Centre is therefore founded on an ecumenical vision for dialogue, listening, respect, search for commonality and wisdom between people of all faiths and none. Dialogue must always be hosted. The Centre remains unapologetically Christian in its foundation. Being in dialogue with others, inviting all people of good will to seek the common good, even sharing what may have previously been considered *haram*; these are great strengths at the heart of the Centre's work. Such things are central to the partnership with CSU and its capacity for research, learning and public engagement.

The Centre is not about converting anybody to anything, but about sharing a journey of life which leads to the abundance Jesus promised. The pilgrim walk, which passes through the Bible Garden, is emblematic of this shared journey.

If humanity is going to navigate its way through another century on this planet with some semblance of joy and wonder, let alone harmony and peace, it is hard to think of any vision more important than that upon which the ACC&C is founded.



Bishop Mark Short Elected Anglican Primate

Liz Jakimow

Communications Officer, ACC&C

Bishop Mark Short Elected Anglican Primate

The Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture extends warm congratulations to The Right Reverend Dr Mark Short on his election as Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia. A member of the ACC&C Board and long-standing contributor to its mission, Bishop Mark's appointment affirms the thoughtful leadership, theological depth, and gracious engagement he has consistently shown across church and community life.

Elected by the Board of Electors on Saturday 19 July at St Andrew's House in Sydney, Bishop Mark will serve as Primate while continuing his role as Bishop of the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn. The Electors included all Diocesan Bishops, as well as clergy and laity chosen by the General Synod. A Primate must secure a majority across all three orders of vote to be elected, underscoring the shared trust placed in Bishop Mark by the Church community.

In addition to his current episcopal role, Bishop Mark brings extensive pastoral and organisational experience, having served as National Director of The Bush Church Aid Society, Rector of Turvey Park (now South Wagga), and Archdeacon of Wagga Wagga. He was ordained Deacon in 1996 and Priest in 1997 within the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, following theological formation at Moore Theological College and the University of Durham in the UK. His career began in public service and journalism, having worked as a graduate economist with the Commonwealth Department of Industrial Relations and as a journalist for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Married to Dr Monica Short, the couple have two married sons and one granddaughter. Outside of ministry, Bishop Mark is an avid bushwalker, train enthusiast and reader.

"I am honoured and humbled by this call to serve," Bishop Mark said following his election. "I look forward to working together with Anglicans across Australia to share the lasting hope we are given in the Lord Jesus Christ."

He will formally commence his responsibilities as Primate on 1 November 2025, following the conclusion of Archbishop Geoff Smith's term.

Understanding the Role of Primate

The Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia serves as the senior bishop and President of the General Synod. This includes chairing both the Synod itself and its Standing Committee, which oversees Church affairs between sessions. Although the role is influential, it does not hold jurisdictional authority over the nation's 23 dioceses, each led autonomously by their own bishops and archbishops. Rather, the Primate offers guidance and pastoral support, primarily at the invitation of each diocese.

Internationally, the Primate represents Australia in Anglican Communion gatherings, particularly the Primates' Meeting hosted by the Archbishop of Canterbury. These meetings, while not legislatively binding, serve as a vital instrument of unity among Anglican provinces worldwide.

As Bishop Mark prepares for this new chapter of ministry, the ACC&C community offers its prayers and support, confident that he will embody grace, wisdom and hope as he leads the Anglican Church into the future.



Bishop Mark Short, photo supplied by the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn

The Right Reverend John Parkes AM (1950 -2025) Executive Director ACC&C 2001 – 2002

Bishop George Browning

Founder of ACC&C

It is with considerable sadness that the Centre has learned of the death of Bishop John Parkes following a long illness. Highly intelligent, generous, charming, theologically insightful, administratively able, John fulfilled several unique roles in the life of the Church. The Centre was very fortunate to gain his presence as its interim director for a short time.

It takes considerable courage to lead a new venture in its early stages, especially one with a broad vision, high expectations and limited resources. John was never one to shrink from such a task. He was later to go on and finish the daunting task of completing St John's Cathedral Brisbane as its Dean.

In John's time at the ACC&C there was no administrative building, no seminar pavilion. John worked hard to cement fruitful cooperation between the Church and Charles Sturt University as well as building ecumenical partnerships. In his time the annual rhythm of the Centre began to emerge with events such as Commonwealth Day, Stations of the Cross etc.

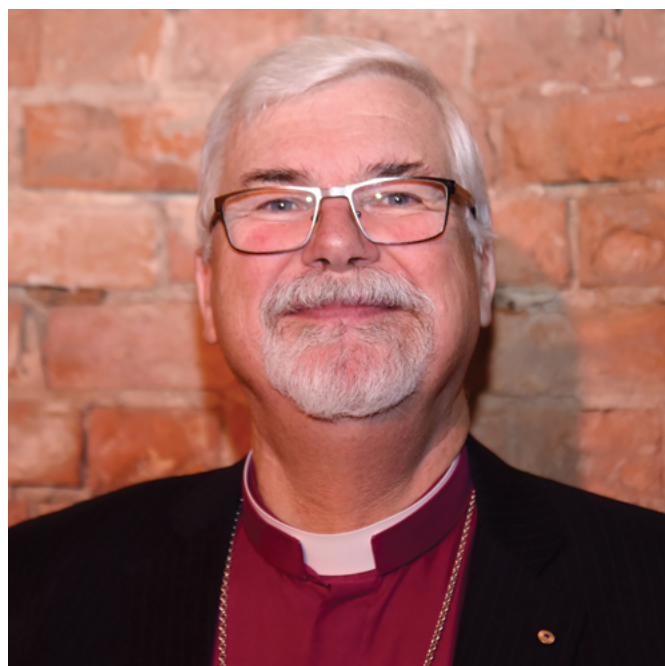
John's sense of social justice, emanating from his faith, was strong. Building the Centre firmly upon its indigenous foundations was never far from his mind.

John was very well connected within the city of Canberra and worked closely with Senator Margaret Reid, president of the Senate, who was then chair of the ACC&C board.

By profession John was a barrister, bringing considerable skills to the documents of agreement which established the Centre and its leases between the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn and Charles Sturt University.

Many adages appropriately describe John, none more so than, "if you have an important task, give it to a busy person." John fulfilled this role while retaining his position as Rector of All Saints Ainslie. He returned to his Parish, but additionally took on the role of Diocesan Archdeacon. In both roles he made the impossible hopes and dreams of the then bishop possible!

I have every reason to thank God for the love, life and ministry of Anthony John Parkes, but so does the wider Church and University which he served with dedication, distinction and loyalty.



The Right Reverend John Parkes AM

It takes considerable courage to lead a new venture in its early stages, especially one with a broad vision, high expectations, and limited resources.



Dwelling in the last sigh of Christ

Stan Grant

Director of Yindyamarra Nguluway

People regularly react with surprise when I tell them that Indigenous people are the youngest and fastest growing demographic of Catholics in Australia. At a time when faith is receding nationally, it is growing amongst sections of First Nations communities.

I can count myself among their number. I was not raised a Catholic, although it is in my DNA through my staunchly Catholic Irish ancestry. God has led me to Catholicism. In the Eucharist, the transubstantiation, I am opened to the mystery of God. Mass for me is a magical experience. I am humbled. I find the silence that is the language of love.

Among others in prayer and peace I am fulfilled as a Wiradjuri person, an Irish person and a child of God.

I was raised in a deeply Christian family. Amongst my mob the Bible is referred to as the family business.

We come from the missions of New South Wales. We passed through various denominations and in the 1970s my family was influential in the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship.

Several of my uncles were church pastors. Uncles and aunties attended Aboriginal bible colleges. My family's life was punctuated with prayer and fellowship, music, sport and food. My identity as an Aboriginal person is forged out of the church.

Our faith was the bedrock of our civil rights advocacy. We were enormously influenced and inspired by the black Southern Christian Leadership Conference in the United States. The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King junior was a prophet in our household.

Personally, I always felt a strong sense of God. I felt God's presence. I heard God's voice. I never felt alone and I experienced an overwhelming sense of divine purpose in my life.

I grew up poor and itinerant. We were essentially homeless – as in no home security – for the first 15 years of my life. Our life was spent on the road, home was more likely the back seat of a cold car on a long dark night.

My schooling was sporadic. I changed schools more than a dozen times before I reached high school. There was nothing in my childhood that would have suggested the career in journalism I have enjoyed which has taken me around the world. It was providence.

I have reported a world of suffering, the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan, the Troubles of Northern Ireland, conflict in the Middle East, terrorism in South and South-East Asia, natural disasters – earthquakes, tsunamis, fire and flood. All of it led me to ask a question that has haunted my life: where is God?

As an Aboriginal person I could never ask if God exists. I walk through God's cathedral every day when I experience the natural wonder of the world. I feel God in the touch of those I love. I hear God in music. I am drawn to the wonder of God in the mysteries of mathematics.

God is real. But God can appear so callous.

My people are Old Testament people, the book of Job, the anguished cry of Lamentations, spoke profoundly to us. When the people of the razed city of Jerusalem plead to God: "My eyes fail from weeping; I am in torment within; my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed" (Lam 2:11), we hear our own voices.

In some of the worst places on earth, I have cried out, where are you God? What I heard was silence.

After decades of reporting, I needed to find answers. I needed to go deeper. Journalism, politics, did not get me there. Philosophy fell short. In theology I found myself in the deep water.

Theologians like Jürgen Moltmann and his student, Miroslav Volf, opened me to the possibility of hope and forgiveness. Moltmann, as a young man was conscripted into Hitler's army, at the war's end he was locked in a prisoner of war camp.

There he says he heard God's voice, Moltmann's struggle with his complicity in the horror of the Holocaust. His works, *Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified Christ*, are considered among the most profound theological responses to the horrors of Auschwitz.

Pope Benedict captured why so many First Nations people are drawn to Catholicism, when he described time honoured cultures and spirituality like mine as "expectant religions" awaiting the encounter with the light of Christ. And he said, Christ waits for us.

Moltmann must ask for and offer forgiveness. Forgiveness, he said, is the highest form of sovereignty.

For Volf, forgiveness is also very personal. As a Croatian, he lived through the wars of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. He was locked up and interrogated. Moltmann asked a young Miroslav if he could embrace a Cetnik, enemy Serbian fighters.

Volf answered, "No, I cannot" – then added that "as a follower of Christ, I think I should be able to." In his classic book *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Volf writes, we are all with sin, we are "morally divided."

Sin, he says, is "both the rot deep in our souls and a prowling beast of exclusion that holds captive entire societies, cultures and communities."

Volf says, we must act with will; a will to embrace, "not as a simple switch to turn the practice of embrace on, but as a site of struggle for the truth of humanity."

That truth is forgiveness.

Volf and Moltmann are among those who have inspired me to explore the Wiradjuri gift of Yindyamarra – a spiritual practice of respect, quietness and love – to tend to our nation's soul. In Yindyamarra we find a language to speak anew to each other across Australia's divides.

While many of my teachers have not been Catholic, I have found trust and truth in their faith. Yet Catholicism is what speaks most profoundly to my soul. Saint Thomas Aquinas captures something of the essence of an Aboriginal sacred in his description of God as *Ipsium Esse* – the act of existence.

Our sacred is in what Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar in his native German calls *geschehenlassen* – the letting be that allows the fullness of love. This is the perfect love of Mary who consents to love, who answers yes to the mystery of conception.

It is obedience not from force or duty; it is being obedient to love. A choice to love. Her love redeems the world. Her love births God.

The very universe itself is feminine.

Cardinal Henri de Lubac told us that the church is our mother, "she brings beings into existence and gathers them into one whole."

De Lubac called us to embrace the *corpus mysticum*, our faith is mystical. The mysterious participation in God is the source of our unity.

As a Wiradjuri person I live in the mystical, it is where Christ is revealed to me. He holds me against a world of crushing rationality and relativism.

He is the truth.

Catholicism is a rock in the rapids of a modern world that threatens to devour our souls. It reaches into an ancient tradition that holds me against a world moving too fast, a world of technology that renders the human obsolete.

If we believe that the human sets the limit of the world, then we will find the limits of the human. We cannot surrender to all that is humanly possible. We are not sovereign, God is.

Pope Benedict captured why so many First Nations people are drawn to Catholicism, when he described time honoured cultures and spirituality like mine as "expectant religions" awaiting the encounter with the light of Christ. And he said, Christ waits for us.

He waits for our dreaming, our grace, our love. We are completed in him.

In the election of Pope Leo we renew our struggle against evil that would strip our world of the divine. We pledge ourselves to be the best we can be in our faith so that our Pontiff can be the best he can be to serve God.

At mass I pray for him. I am joined with others in my faith, gathered, not merely a building of living stones, but in a Catholic faith that I believe is the last sigh of Christ on the Cross.



Stan Grant at the Yindyamarra Fireside Oration, photo by David Beach



Visioning hope for youth and their supports in an uncertain world: An example of intergenerational psycho-social-spiritual intervention

Dr Monica Short

Adjunct Scholar, ACC&C

A youth mental health crisis is occurring within our uncertain world

A global youth mental health crisis exists, but there is hope for people under the age of 25. Mental health is closely related to our overall sense and state of well-being. The Australian Bureau of Statistics uses the World Health Organisation's definition of mental health, which is: "a clinically diagnosed disorder that significantly interferes with a person's cognitive, emotional or social abilities." The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, in their 2025 report on *The prevalence and impact of mental illness*, estimates that 14% of people aged 4-17 experienced a mental illness event in the last 12 months and highlights that in 2020-2022, 38.8% of people aged 16-24 years had a 12-month mental disorder. Many of us know a young person living with a mental illness.

Youth mental health is a key focus issue for the Centre

The Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture (ACC&C) is a partnership between Charles Sturt University (CSU) and the Anglican Church of Australia through the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn (Diocese). A key focus issue of the ACC&C for 2025-2030 is promoting youth mental health. This focus aligns with the intergenerational and multidisciplinary ministries of the Diocese, including: Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT, two residential colleges for tertiary students, 22 opportunity shops, 60 church-based parishes and ministry units, childcare centres, eight schools, Synergy Youth and youth groups, and St Mark's National Theological Centre. The focus also aligns with CSU's commitment to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, such as #3 good health and #16 peace, justice, and strong institutions. It is consistent with the teaching and research philosophy of CSU, Yindymurra Wignanaha, including: CSU leading research through the Schools of Social Work and Arts and Psychology into the recruitment, retention and well-being of rural NGO mental health workers, Rural Health Research Institute research into nature walks, School of Rural Medicine regarding better mental health for rural adolescents and Three Rivers work on mental health education for rural communities.

We at the Centre are keenly aware that global mega-trends more immediately impact people under 25 years than ever before. To be mentally healthy, young people need safety, positive connections, hope and opportunities to express hope.

What does hope look like during uncertain times?

Bishop Vanessa Bennett, at the February 2025 Parliamentary Christian Fellowship opening of the Australian Parliament Service, explained what hope is in her sermon to Federal parliamentarians, "Hope is vital to the human condition and is a far more positive motivator than fear. Hope is vital for human flourishing...Hope enables people to persevere through the most difficult of circumstances...The biblical understanding of hope encapsulates a certainty for the future. ...Biblical hope... points to a moment in time and space recorded in history—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ...It is a hope for the future but also a hope which can sustain and motivate us here and now through the uncertainties and difficulties of life."

Generating hope within intergenerational communities

Every Anglican Diocese in Australia has come together to form the Hope25 movement. Hope25 is an example of a Christian intergenerational psycho-social-spiritual intervention that promotes and generates hope, relationships and well-being. We do not know exactly how many events occurred, but we do know that the Hope25 movement was national and impactful. This 5-minute Hope25 Celebration Video shares the benefit of this intergenerational national movement <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNWEMMNQy0>.

This impact was and is made possible by the Anglican Church of Australia's significant presence in our nation. For example, according to its directory, there are over 1,250 parishes and churches nationwide. According to the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics survey, approximately 2.5 million people identify as Anglican. Alongside this, in every state of Australia, there are Anglican parachurch organisations providing services to children, youth and families, such as over 140 Anglican schools and 28 Australian-located Anglicare agencies.

An invitation:

ANGLICAN SCHOOL CHAPLAINS IN THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN

A CO-OPERATIVE INQUIRY REFLECTIVE RESEARCH PROJECT INTO HOW ANGLICAN CHAPLAINS ENGAGE WITH AND PROMOTE THE MENTAL WELLBEING OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES IN SCHOOLS.



Shared Practice: Would you like to join a grassroots conversation about the strengths and blessings of being an Anglican school chaplain?

Shared authorship

There are no participants in this project. Everyone who makes a significant contribution in some way is an author. The person who contributes the most is the first author, the second most is the second author, etc.

Share and co-design ideas

We will come together as a small group to share and co-design ideas for about an hour a week over a period of two to three months. We will collect a wide spectrum of ideas about this topic. We can meet at a time that suits all of us.

Participatory learning and writing

This is kind, no guilt research. Doing what we can when we can as often as we can. We will research and write together, and everyone's writing is good enough.

The aim of the research is to reflect on practice and help us all improve our support for young people. This project is a strengths-focused, person-directed conversation and is designed to contain no risk.

Interested?

Contact Dr Monica Short from the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, the CSU School of Social Work and Arts and Gulbali at mshort@csu.edu.au

For information about Monica's research, please visit:

https://scholar.google.com.au/citations?hl=en&user=ldt-4GcAAAAJ&view_op=list_works&sortby=pubdate

or

<https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/en/persons/mshort07csueduau/publications/>



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE



Hope25 movement promoting psycho-social-spiritual wellbeing

From Easter to Pentecost 2025, youth events, preaching series on hope through Jesus, chapel services, prayer activities, providing food and other essential services, family picnics, Alpha courses, story writing, songwriting, artwork, and other grassroots initiatives have occurred throughout Australia. For instance, in All Saints Anglican Church School, Shepparton, Victoria, children, youth, teachers and staff performed “*Hope Renewed*”, singing that, “In a world of trials hope lights our way... Hope in Christ, His love ever renews.”

We at the ACC&C are keen to engage with and, from social work, sociological, theological, and other perspectives, understand how social structures, religious activities and cultural movements, such as Hope25, impact young people and their ecologies while promoting psycho-social-spiritual wellbeing.

It can be tempting not to listen to young people or to minimise their mental health and spiritual needs. However, as Maslow highlights in *A Theory of Human Motivation*, young people need food, shelter, medicine and much more. A Biblical perspective recognises that we can all benefit from being in a community and experiencing love, hope, and faith (1 Corinthians 13:13). By listening to, partnering with, co-designing and holistically meeting the psycho-social-spiritual needs of people under the

age of 25 and those connected to them, we can together cultivate hope and wellbeing. At the ACC&C, we are engaging in research that helps generate good mental health through hope in an evidence-based way.

So, what’s next?

We are designing a research project, a co-operative inquiry, into the essential role of Anglican Chaplains in schools and how they support the mental health and wellbeing of children and youth and their families.

How to get involved with this applied research?

Dr Monica Short is the Centre’s lead for the mental health focus area. For those who pray, please pray for people living with a mental illness and their families and supporters. Also, please pray for Monica in this work, and that God’s will be done with this work. If you would like to support the research that Dr Monica Short is doing in some way, such as joining the email list for updates, providing insights and/or helping fund the research (such as for a part-time research officer), then please contact the ACC&C.

Acknowledgement

Thank you to Meg Richens, Bishop Mark Short and Chaplain Fiona McGregor for their insights.



Great Cross from Labyrinth, photo by Liz Jakimow

We at the ACC&C are keen to engage with and, from social work, sociological, theological, and other perspectives, understand how social structures, religious activities, and cultural movements, such as Hope25, impact young people and their ecologies while promoting psycho-social-spiritual wellbeing.



Pilgrim poles, photo by Liz Jakimow



In the face of chaos, where lies hope?

Russell Rollason

Former diplomat and founding member of the Australian Peace and Security Forum

Our world is in chaos.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres described the past year as “a masterclass in human destruction,” in his address to the 2024 Climate Change summit in Azerbaijan.

Guterres painted a stark portrait of the consequences of climate breakdown that had arisen in recent months. “Families running for their lives before the next hurricane strikes; workers and pilgrims collapsing in insufferable heat; floods tearing through communities and tearing down infrastructure; children going to bed hungry as droughts ravage crops,” he said. “All these disasters, and more, are being supercharged by human-made climate change.”

A recent study of heat related deaths in 43 countries estimated that more than 100,000 deaths were due to the impact of global heating. In the Black Summer of 2019-20 in Eastern Australia, 33 people were killed by fire, 400 plus died from smoke related complications, thousands were hospitalised and there were long term mental health impacts. A study of the 2022 Queensland floods estimated the total financial impact at \$7.7 billion, including “the toll that the SEQ floods will have on mental health, disease and social impacts, estimated to be long-lasting, and cost approximately \$4.4 billion.”

The immediate impacts of such disasters are localised, but the flow-on impacts are felt across the community. For example, food prices rise in response to supply shortages and insurance premiums skyrocket, driving up inflation and interest rates with consequences for new homeowners and those hoping to become a homeowner.

Inflation aside, inequality is undermining global social cohesion at an alarming rate. Eighty-one billionaires own almost half the world’s wealth, while the bottom half own just 0.75% of the world’s wealth. Oxfam Australia reported in July 2024 that Australian billionaires are \$120 billion richer since 2020 (a 70% increase) and 74% of Australians support a wealth tax on individuals with over \$50 million.

Extreme poverty reduction has slowed to a near standstill, with 2020-30 set to be a lost decade for reducing poverty. Australia, as one of the richest countries on earth, can “Close the gap” for First Nations people and provide safety and security for migrants like our ancestors received when they arrived here to settle. What is needed is the political will to do so.

Scientists, commentators and others are increasingly using the language of possible collapse of civilisation. Our political

leaders are struggling to respond adequately. Too often the public media seeks to avoid describing the scale of the problem lest they create fear in the community. Instead, they try to distract our attention with trivia and the activities of the celebrities and elites of our society. Social media and the increasing use of AI has spawned an avalanche of misinformation and disinformation, leaving many bewildered about what to believe.

For many young people, the future holds little hope. Rates of mental ill health among young people are on the rise. Between the years 2020 and 2022, 39% of Australians aged 16 to 24 had a mental disorder in the previous year, compared to 26% in that age range in 2007, and 27% of those aged 18 to 24 in 1997.

One of the main reasons suggested by researchers is that young people are distressed because the world is in bad shape and getting worse. Facing climate emergency, unaffordable housing, precarious employment, and rising inequality, they are canaries in a societal coalmine.

Rediscovering our common humanity

Followers of Jesus are called to be engaged in our world and with our neighbours. We believe God created this world, and our responsibility is to look after it. We know the world is finite and natural resources are limited so we must live the prayer we say every Sunday “share with justice the resources of the Earth.” Sharing resources is key to how we live out God’s love for all and critical to reducing inequality and preventing conflict.

Jesus showed humanity that transformation is possible. Jesus called us to re-orientate our whole way of seeing, what the apostle Paul called “putting on the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16) or “being transformed by the renewing of the mind” (Rom 12:2). The Good Samaritan reminds us not to walk by on the other side of today’s suffering and challenges. We pray “your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven,” so the hope that we offer is for the here and now, by renewing relationships with other people and caring for the stranger and marginalised in our midst. If all we offer is a promise after death, then we will be ignoring today’s suffering and death and be of little help or hope to our neighbours or our grandchildren.

Where should we be as followers of Jesus? In the inner air-conditioned sanctum of privilege or in the outside world of poverty, need and suffering. Any casual reading of the life of Jesus makes it clear where Jesus stood and how he invited us to follow.



Bottlebrush plant, photo by Liz Jakimow

What are the practical grounds for hope?

For hope to triumph, action is needed at the personal, community and international levels. Bushfires have shown that individuals can do much to prepare for a bushfire and to protect their home. But a community fire fighting force is critical to protect life and property. As fires become frequent and extreme, international action is essential to reduce carbon emissions and stop global warming.

At the personal level we can change our day-to-day living to consume less and reduce our carbon emissions. We can take steps to protect biodiversity in our suburb/town – protecting wildlife, planting trees and native plants – both securing the garden of creation. Equally, we can respond to people in need, whether family, friends or strangers and provide caring support.

As a multi-generational community-based organisation, local church congregations have a strong foundation to nurture sustainable caring networks. As members of a community, we can take collective action and support and encourage each other – a key to hope for the future. What we need is the conviction to work together for a better future and the courage to resist the self-serving criticisms of those captured by the sparkling god of consumerism, wealth and power.

Professor Anne Poelina, a Nyikina Warrwa woman from the Kimberly region of Western Australia, has described how the people of the Kimberley refer to “waking the snake.” The metaphor means to wake up the consciousness of the people to restore the ancient wisdom of our places through an ethic of care and love.

“Across Australia, Indigenous nations recognise a serpent as a creator spirit of rivers and waterways, which remains to protect water and First Law”, says Dr Poelina. “Waking the snake restores obligations of stewardship and enables practices that increase awareness and consciousness that vital landscapes are animate, active, agential, inspirited and communicative. We *feel* sentient places when we care for Country through solidarity. There is hope because *you* are part of this story now,” she explains.

We must act together as part of the story to influence the choices that our society and Parliaments make. We need choices that enhance life for all and not just the few. Growing inequality can lead to crime, mental health problems and loss of social cohesion.


Tax systems can change the distribution of wealth and ensure sharing of the world’s limited resources. Taxes are the primary source of funding for social housing, health care and hospitals, education, aged care and overseas aid. As Australia begins a national discussion about tax reform, will we make clear our views on how to “share with justice the resources of the Earth?”

Internationally, we need stronger cooperation between countries and a more effective United Nations. This year the UN will celebrate its 80th anniversary. It is also reviewing its peacebuilding programs and Australia has a seat at the table of the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

The world needs communities with vision for a better world and the energy to support one another as well as take collective action for peace and justice. For those who follow Jesus, now is the time to *live* that faith and *act* for all, as we are all made in the image of God.



Photo by Liz Jakimow



*For hope to triumph, action is
needed at the personal, community
and international levels.*

Ryrie Park, Braidwood, photo by Liz Jakimow



Nature to Nurture

Dr Nicole Snowdon

Post doctoral researcher, Rural Health Research Institute, Charles Sturt University

We know that being in nature - a walk in the forest, time by the beach, a stroll in the park - usually makes us feel better. With nearly half of Australians experiencing a mental health issue at some point, harnessing nature to help those with a mental illness has seen a resurgence in recent years.

Recently, my colleague Professor Julaine Allan and I tested this idea through Nature Walking Groups. We partnered with a community mental health service to run a 12-week program of weekly one-hour nature walks for people with severe, long-term mental health conditions.

Sixteen participants with diagnoses such as bipolar disorder, PTSD and schizophrenia joined the group. The walks were guided by trained mental health clinicians who incorporated mindfulness activities and offered support. Importantly, this was an addition to the participants' regular treatment, not a replacement. We arranged transport to local parks and bushland so that everyone could take part, which was a new experience for many.

The results were heartening. Each walk had an immediate uplifting effect – participants typically rated their mood around 6 out of 10 before the walk, which improved to 8 out of 10 afterward. Over the weeks, we saw overall improvements in wellbeing, and formal questionnaires showed a drop in

psychological distress from a “moderate” level before the program to “mild” after.

One participant who used to experience panic attacks almost weekly reported having only one panic attack during the entire 12-week program. Even those who were sceptical at first became enthusiastic. “I was surprised at how much it did help,” one person admitted about the calming power of the walks.

Beyond mood and anxiety, the social connection fostered by the group was powerful. Many participants had felt very isolated. Walking side by side in nature helped them relax and open up. People told me how comforting it was to be with others who understood what they were going through, leading to a sense that “you are not alone” in your struggles.

New friendships formed, confidence grew, and some participants even started revisiting those nature spots on their own. Something they wouldn't have imagined doing before.

Implementing this program taught us practical lessons too. In the first few weeks we had some hiccups (like coordinating transportation and managing different fitness levels), but we learned and improved as we went. We found that careful planning and organisational support are key to making nature-based interventions work smoothly.

Beyond mood and anxiety, the social connection fostered by the group was powerful. Many participants had felt very isolated. Walking side by side in nature helped them relax and open up.



Puckeyes Estate, photo by Chris Karindjias, mental health clinician

The positive outcomes have encouraged our team to broaden this approach. We've begun training more mental health professionals to use the Nature Walking Group model in other communities, and we have developed a "how-to" guide so that any service interested in trying nature-based therapy can do so with confidence.

For me personally, seeing this project unfold has been inspiring. It reinforced that something as simple as a walk in the park can have profound benefits when done thoughtfully. These structured nature walks are not a cure-all, but they are a potent complement to traditional treatments - one that is accessible, low-cost, and enjoyable.

The participants in our study not only improved their mental health; they also rediscovered hope and connection. In the words of Florence Nightingale, "Nature alone cures. What nursing has to do is to put the patient in the best condition for nature to act upon him."



Rhododendron Gardens, Wollongong, photo by Chris Karindjias, mental health clinician



Snowdon Falls, photo by Chris Karindjias, mental health clinician



Multifaith leaders at the Commonwealth Day celebrations, photo by Liz Jakimow



An old connection

Kantilal Jinna

Chair, Commonwealth Day Celebration Committee

My association with the now Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture began at St Mark's Library in February 1966 where the National Library of Australia ran its School of Librarianship, and when Sir Harold White, the National Librarian, invited me to Canberra as a trainee librarian from the newly formed Library Service of Fiji. The National Library moved from several buildings around Kingston to their current premises at the end of 1967.

As an aside, in 1995, Charles Sturt University established a School of Theology based on the adjoining St Mark's National Theological Centre (established as the St Mark's Library in 1957). The Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture was established in 1993 under the auspices of the National Council of Churches.

In 2007, the President of the Royal Commonwealth Society of the ACT Dr Hugh Craft OAM, in discussions with Emeritus Professor of Theology Dr James Haire of Charles Sturt University, Canberra, and Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, agreed to restyle the Commonwealth Day Celebration into an all inclusive multifaith, multicultural event along the lines of Westminster Abbey. I have been associated with this initiative since its inception.

With the exception of the Canberra Day Centenary and Covid, Commonwealth Day has been held at the ACC&C Chapel annually on the second Monday of March.

The vision of the ACC&C included the need for a meeting place in the national capital for significant national ceremonies and events which would express shared Australian experiences and values.

The ACC&C, under the resolute leadership of its boards and executive directors and its affiliation with Charles Sturt University, over the last 30 years, has stood proudly for its purpose. The ACT and the Australian community have been impressed by its commitment to "The Common Good"

through its Multifaith and Multicultural objectives, its concern in community directions in theology and spirituality and as a beacon and centre for inclusion.

In an article in The Sydney Morning Herald, the Governor-General, Ms Samantha Mostyn AC, referred to the Commonwealth Day celebration held at the ACC&C, saying "When I attended the Commonwealth Day celebration in Canberra this year, it was so striking that all of the religions of the world have at their core kindness and care, compassion, concern for others. If you strip away the differences, it's about caring for each other and showing kindness."

Kindness and care, compassion, concern for others - these are the values we aim to show in the Commonwealth Day Celebrations - and they are values demonstrated by the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture as well.



The Governor-General and Kanti Jinna arriving for the Commonwealth Day celebrations. Photo by Liz Jakimow

The vision of the ACC&C included the need for a meeting place in the national capital for significant national ceremonies and events which would express shared Australian experiences and values.



Photo by Liz Jakimow



2025 Anzac Eve Peace Vigil

Sarah Stitt

Corporate Services and Events Officer, ACC&C

This year, on the eve of Anzac Day, A Chorus of Women and Wayfarers were joined by many friends in the Canberra community for a beautiful candle-lit vigil in its new venue in the grounds of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture. The Vigil has been held every year since 2011 on top of Mount Ainslie, except for in 2020 - when Covid struck, the women imaginatively took it online, where they were joined by people from around the world as well as Canberra.

From the first Vigil 15 years ago, the ceremony has attracted many people giving expression to their longing for peace and lamenting together the tragedy of war. We seek to remember all the victims of war and violence and to respectfully re-imagine our commemoration of Australia's war history. The Vigil generates a peaceful, warm, friendly atmosphere as dusk falls and the lanterns brighten.

Since 2018, the Vigil has been included in the ACT Heritage Festival program and has become an integral part of the Canberra events calendar.

You can watch the online vigil on A Chorus of Women's website:

www.chorusofwomen.org/Anzac-Eve-Peace-Vigil-2020



Ceremony continues, photo by Sarah Stitt



Ceremony begins, photo by Sarah Stitt



Dusk sets in, photo by Sarah Stitt



A Chorus of Women and Wayfarers, photo by Sarah Stitt



Towards the River

Maria Bakas Booker

Community Support Volunteer, Braidwood Life Centre

All living beings belong in the flowing River of God's Love. Through prayer, contemplation and reflection, we can open our hearts to connect and sense this love. Religious systems—Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Sufi—stem from writings passed down after the prophets lived. These are helpful means, assisting us in entering the whole river.

The issue for me is I feel that the streams supporting these practices have been mistaken for the entire river. While our practices help us grow in love, we must recognise that all such streams, when shared with the intention of love, support people in understanding and faith. They aim to live through the grace of love and the character of Jesus, connecting with humility and withholding comparison and judgement.

Contemplating and walking in the footsteps of Jesus, we find many examples in the Gospel of his beautiful, inclusive love and his courage to walk this incredible way without hesitation, knowing the love of God through every moment of life. Exclusion, comparisons and the belief that one way is the only way divide, harm and fragment lives and society.

David Bohm's concept of wholeness emphasises that reality is an undivided, unbroken totality rather than a collection of separate parts. He invites us to a coherent, harmonious interconnected approach to life, emerging as a response to the whole.

My sense has always been that in the Life River flowing everywhere, every living being belongs, including humans. To come together and learn, we manifested streams of practices. These contemplations and practices were intended to lead people into the Great River. However, we became stuck in the streams, named them, and forgot about the River. Names like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Sufism created division and fragmentation, no longer within a whole river where all are held.

Another cultural manifestation is the belief that Jesus, the son of God, died on the cross so that humanity's sins would be forgiven. While this realisation is significant, it needs to go further. As Jesus lived in a human body to lead us into unconditional loving presence through great suffering, we who love his way and character must walk this way without fear.

Jesus, in his human body, deeply suffered in dying, inviting us all to wake up. I want to understand the steps of Jesus' character and be unafraid to walk in his steps. Growing up, I read the children's Bible my Nanna gave me. Jesus showed me what goodness meant. His actions pointed to goodness in life, and even amidst conflict, my heart opened to seeing good and loving his way.

Now, I feel a loving responsibility to respond as Jesus would. We are the Jesus we are waiting for. We are all broken and know suffering. Why not bring acceptance and loving kindness? We all respond to such offerings.



Photo by Liz Jakimow



Photo by Liz Jakimow

Now, I feel a loving responsibility to respond as Jesus would. We are the Jesus we are waiting for. We are all broken and know suffering. Why not bring acceptance and loving kindness? We all respond to such offerings.

Maybe a new human can emerge, one not afraid and holding on to possessions, but meeting one another and the Earth with care. To weave together a new way and belong within an interconnected holiness. It seems ridiculous, in times of war, to see each side asking God to let them win. Aren't we all God's children? Which of his children will he save?

Understanding what Jesus lived and died for, and his character in the actions he took, we can learn to love unconditionally and freely. Not seeking recognition or a transaction with God for doing good. To stand up for justice, ensuring all have food, shelter, and kindness. Without measures.

Letting go and freeing ourselves from cultural conditioning. Striving to look after just ourselves and family, without seeing if our neighbours are hungry. We fear the known, not the

unknown. Walking into the unknown, our hearts may open in love of our interconnectedness, opening our arms to each other. This is the example of life and God. We breathe air together with the trees, the rain offers water, the sun shines warmth and nurture. Awareness and gratitude are required. We are each other.

May we love life, our Holy Ones, and Jesus, seeing ourselves in each other, living with the trees, sun, moon and rain. Free to stand up as instruments of peace and love. As the breath of Life sustains us, we awaken into the character of Jesus. Unconditionally, without fear, knowing we have enough within us. The breath of God will sustain us, offering love and forgiveness. Everything is in relationship, connected with his Love and one another, into a relational consciousness.



Theology Matters – and not just for church

Liz Laidlaw

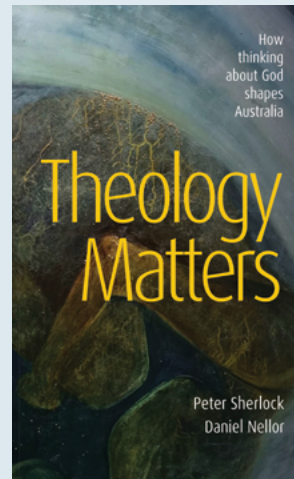
Executive Officer, Yindyamarra Nguluway

This is how Peter Sherlock and Daniel Nellor's book, *Theology Matters*, introduces itself, and it was a theme that created thoughtful and rich discussions in the book launch last week at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture in Canberra. Following the introduction to the book by co-author Peter Sherlock, a panel discussed the book's ideas and how their own experience of theology had mattered in their own work outside of the church.

Panellists Stan Grant Jnr, Richard Refshauge and Robyn Whitaker, in a conversation facilitated by board member Genevieve Jacobs, each spent time reflecting on the lessons from the book connected to their own experiences, touching on ideas such as theological literacy, how the Bible appears in contemporary discussion, and the challenges of feeling that we need to divide ourselves into our secular selves and our faith-based selves and how to reconcile the two.

This was followed by a conversation between the whole panel and a Q & A, covering a wide range of territory, including thinking again about what the church offers our society, whether faith can exist without theology, the connections between theology and the arts, the challenges for emerging leaders in theology beyond 2030 and how we can broaden our theological imaginations.

For a cold Canberra night, everyone left warmed as they were reminded of the importance of the vitality of humanity and why theology matters in all parts of our lives.



Book overview

In the twenty-first century, religion is often seen as divisive, church membership is in decline and religious institutions have been forced to reckon with their own sins. Yet theology still speaks deeply to many people in Australia, both inside and outside the Christian churches.

This book presents a series of conversations with prominent Australians about how theological ideas and religious practices inform their contribution to public life. Through their stories, it asks the ultimate question: what difference does theology make?

The interview participants: Deborah Barker, Rufus Black, Frank Brennan, Libby Byrne, Julie Edwards, Dan Fleming, Stan Grant, Sean Lau, Anne Pattel-Gray, Tony Rinaudo and Kevin Rudd.

Theology Matters can be purchased here
<https://coventrypress.com.au/Theology%20Matters>



Peter Sherlock, photo by David Beach



Panel with (l to r) Peter Sherlock, Stan Grant, Robyn Whitaker, Richard Refshauge and Genevieve Jacobs, photo by David Beach



Photo by David Beach



Photo by David Beach



Review of *Murriyang* by Stan Grant

Dominic O'Sullivan

Professor of Political Science, Charles Sturt University and ACC&C Board Member

Murriyang: song of time is autobiographical, a tribute to Grant's father, and a deeply spiritual reflection on time and place. It is a reflection on Yindymarra which, he says, is "a way of being Wiradjuri. It means to be quiet, respectful, kind and forgiving... not a philosophy but a theology, a way of contemplating God." With this in mind, Grant asks the reader to: "Open at any page and I hope you can find your own place of peace."

The book is a call to quietness, respect, kindness and forgiveness. Then, Grant says, we may think and act beyond politics with its division, chaos and assault on human beings. This, Grant explains, was his observation as a foreign correspondent, but also his experience of Australia. He uses lamentation to reflect on his story, as a foreign correspondent and as Wiradjuri man and journalist. Lamentation connects his father's story to his own and is used to propose a kinder, more respectful world.

Grant begins his chapters with a short memory of his father. There is love, admiration and sorrow that contextualise his reflections on God's presence and speaking to the human condition. He separates God from the colonial image of missionary, with Bible in one hand and gun in the other, simply by saying that that is politics. The worst of Christendom may be distinguished from the best of Christianity. Faith comes from God's presence on Country. Biyaame was always there.

"We were not made for chaos. We were not made for war. We were not made for greed. God is love."

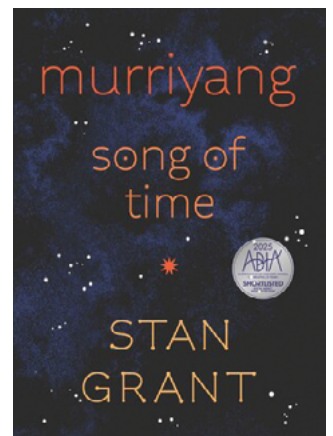
Grant says that he wrote this book "more as a poem seeking silence and warmth and shelter from the noise of modernity." War, conflict, racism, vitriol and hate are the substantive noises. Reality TV and Uber Eats, with their triviality and disconnection, also reflect human impatience and aversion to the silent spaces where God is found.

Time and waiting are two of the book's central themes. Grant thinks of St John of the Cross "drawn into a pit of despair to be stripped of his soul so that he might find God." He recalls Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, saying that the "pit" is the contemporary world in which: "We don't quite know what knowing is for." For Grant, Yindymarra is a contrasting gift to humanity – "the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in."

Knowing is more than "things to be measured and counted." One finds knowledge in the silence of God's love, which, Grant says, are deeper than recognition, reconciliation and justice. "Those," he says, "are things of politics and law." But is justice not the fulfilment of God's law? Reconciliation not the correction of a fractured relationship with God, through the correction of broken relationships among people? Politics, perhaps, takes words and concepts from their theological meaning; giving them a twisted secular purpose. Nevertheless, Grant's challenges to the human condition and values are clear. They are important and well-justified according to the personal experiences that the book recounts. They are experiences that will resonate with many readers. For people of faith there is a path, in this book, from human frailty to hope.

The book invites personal reflection and to summarise its argument: "Enough of identity; enough of modernity: I want nothing more of it. Thankfully, it won't last. We are watching the end of this five-century experiment of the celebration of the self. I know it won't last because human beings crave the divine."

That, however, is also a question of politics.



Grant says that he wrote this book "more as a poem seeking silence and warmth and shelter from the noise of modernity."



Review of *An honest faith: the possible friendship of Athens and Jerusalem* by Keith Mascord

Liz Jakimow

Communications Officer, ACC&C

In *An Honest Faith*, Keith Mascord invites readers into the space between two cities: Athens, (representing reason and philosophy) and Jerusalem, (representing faith and religion). These cities are not adversaries, but companions, each offering something vital to the other. Mascord proposes that theology flourishes when Athens and Jerusalem are in conversation. Jerusalem needs Athens' willingness to ask hard questions and offer reasoned critique. Athens needs Jerusalem's reminder of transcendence and mystery.

Mascord's philosophy is shaped by his emphasis on reason, evidence and intellectual coherence. After years teaching at Moore Theological College, his philosophy led him to reject many supernatural claims in the Bible, including the resurrection of Jesus. For Mascord, faith must be morally credible and intellectually honest, even if that means letting go of long-held beliefs. The conclusions he comes to when approaching faith with reason and philosophy are not views that all Christians would agree with. Even those who take an inquiring and reasoned approach to faith may still decide that the events in the Bible did happen, and that there is a supernatural element at work in the world that cannot be proved by science or reason.

One of Mascord's most compelling contributions is his affirmation of a hermeneutics of love, an interpretive lens that places compassion and justice at the heart of theological reflection. This allows him to critique harmful readings of Scripture, especially those that support exclusion or violence in the name of God. As Mascord himself suggests, most Christians believe they are acting out of love. They just have different ideas of what that love means. But at a time when we know how much hurt has been caused by various interpretations, to start from a hermeneutic of love seems like a good idea.

Mascord also has a panentheistic view of the world, seeing God both beyond and within creation. Drawing on voices like John O'Donohue and Jürgen Moltmann, Mascord presents a vision where the sacred is not distant but woven into the ordinary fabric of life. Despite the various ways his faith has been challenged and he has rethought Christian dogmas, this panentheistic view of the world allows him to keep his faith and his hope.

Mascord encourages theological openness and the importance of asking questions, as well as uncertainty and the mystery of God. He names theology, philosophy and science as "progressively and endlessly correctable," disciplines that are constantly evolving through dialogue and revision.

Mascord points out rightly that faith is always evolving. We see this evolution in the Bible itself. Even the "answers" that we find in the

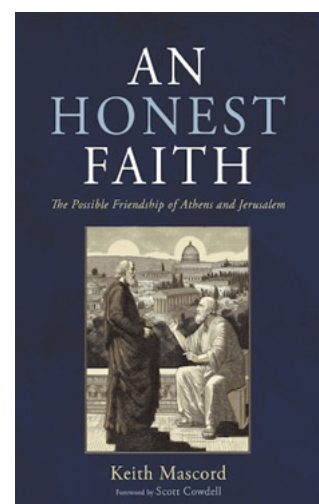
New Testament come from questions that the early Christian Church was asking. He also points out that none of us can know we are right, for "none of us is God."

Yet Mascord's openness to inquiry appears uneven, inviting questions that challenge a supernatural worldview, but make less room for those who want to hold onto traditional or supernatural beliefs. If theology must remain open to correction, then that openness should also include the possibility that supernatural events (even if they seem to go against the scientific view) might yet reveal something true. Could Jesus have risen from the dead? Mascord rejects the idea, yet a truly questioning faith must also leave room to ask whether he might be wrong.

Mascord has made a vital contribution—offering a faith that resists both rigid dogma and disenchanted secularism, that has a hermeneutics of love, is open to questions, and accommodating of different views. His final fictional conversation between Socrates and Paul ends with the invitation:

"Let's keep the conversation going."

And so we shall. Because, as Mascord reminds us, faith is never finished. It is a dialogue, always evolving, always listening, always brave enough to ask again - even when the answers are uncomfortable.



One of Mascord's most compelling contributions is his affirmation of a hermeneutics of love, an interpretive lens that places compassion and justice at the heart of theological reflection.

► Upcoming Events

Spiritus Short Film Prize Awards Event

Afternoon (time to be confirmed)
9 November
Dendy Cinemas



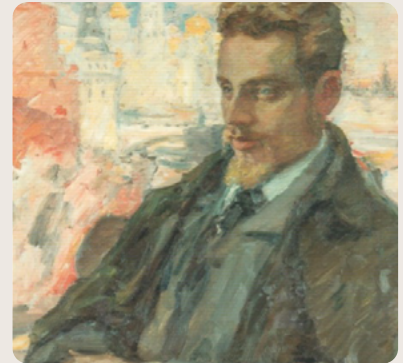
Finding Wholeness with Julian

Quiet Day with Mark Burrows
9.30-3pm, 15 November,
The Chapel



Afternoon Retreat with Rilke's Poetry

With Mark Burrows
1-5pm, 16 November
The Chapel



The Centre is unique in Australia. It began in 1998 as an ecumenical venture for engagement with Australian culture and the issues of the day. It was established through a partnership between Charles Sturt University and the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn. It is situated at the eastern edge of the Parliamentary Triangle in Canberra on a 99-year lease to the University which currently provides the major source of its funding.




Charles Sturt
University

www.acc-c.org.au

<https://www.facebook.com/acccfourpillars/>

Spiritus SHORT FILM PRIZE

 **2025 Spiritus Short Film Prize: Submissions closing soon!**

What does your spirit have to say?

Let it speak. Let it breathe. Let it shine.


The *Spiritus* Prize invites filmmakers and storytellers to create short films (under 12 minutes) that explore the human spirit with bold creativity and thoughtful reflection.

What we're looking for:

- ✦ High artistic quality
- ✦ Wisdom for the common good
- ✦ Human and planetary flourishing
- ✦ Universal impact
- ✦ Inventive expression

Run in partnership with the Canberra Short Film Festival, this is more than a competition, it's a platform for stories that reach beyond the ordinary and resonate with meaning.

 **Submissions close: 31 August 2025**

 For more information or to apply, click [here](#)

