

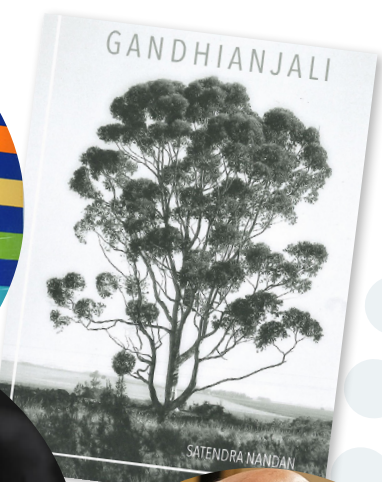
ENGAGE

September 2020 Issue 4

Locked Down but not Locked Out

Creative Engagements During COVID-19

During the lockdowns and social distancing, the ACC&C has moved into cyberspace to continue our mission to promote religious dialogue, hospitality and wisdom seeking for the common good.



RACISM & EDUCATION

JOIN US FOR OUR SECOND ONLINE CONVERSATION IN A SIX PART SERIES ON RACISM IN AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY. IS THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM DOING ALL IT CAN TO CHALLENGE RACISM? WHAT IS GROUP PREJUDICE? DO THINGS NEED TO CHANGE?



Elizabeth Lee MLA
Shadow Minister for Education ACT



Prof Michael Platow
ANU



Rev Karen Kime
Anglicare Australia



Genevieve Jacobs
Region Media



Charles Sturt
University

MONDAY 31ST OF AUGUST 19:00 - 20:00
Register on Eventbrite [Here](#)



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE
WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Contents

E-bulletin is Published by Australian Centre for Christian and Culture

Editor-in-chief: Stephen Pickard | Editors: Lauren Bartley & Sarah Stitt

Address: 15 Blackall Street, BARTON ACT 2600

Graphic Design: Justin Huehn | Published: September 2020

The e-bulletin will be published triannually. For enquiries contact acc-c@csu.edu.au

Welcome to Zoomland



This Engage newsletter comes to you at the beginning of Spring in the southern hemisphere. In Canberra, Spring is truly a sign of life, budding flora, sunny days and a sense of relief that winter has come to end (at least one lives in hope). In the calendar of the Church of God we are mid-way through the post Pentecost season. In earlier times it was referred to as Ordinary time. It

was ordinary in the sense that it was the time for living, working creating and delighting in the world created, redeemed and enlivened by God. Appropriately the colour is green as a season for growing. However, the reality is that the last thing we live in right now is 'ordinary time'. COVID time is disrupted time, testing time, strange time.

Is COVID-19 time destined to become the new ordinary time? At the Centre a lot has been happening behind the scenes so to speak: developing protocols and policies for the work of the ACC&C; in clean up mode re administration, organisational matters, sorting out office spaces and storage; attending to major insurance matters related to the destructive hail storm in January this year; acquiring and curating new art work for the November exhibition; planning for 2021 especially in the area of new programs on leadership (both locally and internationally). For my part it's been a productive time on the writing front with papers arising out of earlier consultations and conferences hosted at the Centre on the Anthropocene and theology; Gandhi and non-violence; ageing and spiritual life (a topic so critical in the current context). Of course, in a Centre focussed on engagement of faith with the issues of the day, most of our work is in collaboration with other groups, networks and organisations, much of this on the inter-religious front as you'll see from the newsletter reports. We've had to become friends with Zoom. This has been both a blessing and a curse: blessing because it has meant connections with disparate groups and persons has been maintained and, in some respects, strengthened; a curse in that Zoom can be exhausting and all consuming. Zoomland is one of those new strange places our society and especially organisations, have travelled to in COVID time. I suspect it will become part of the new ordinary time.

For this edition of our newsletter we invited staff, scholars and supporters to share something of what they have been up to during COVID time. As you read their stories you will be surprised, I am sure, about the interesting and creative possibilities that

arise in such a disrupted and challenging time. In times such as these, which, for many have been lonely and frightening, for some strangely renewing in their resolve for a new way of life, the work of the Centre continues. Ordinary time takes on a new meaning and significance and yet something very ordinary and

timeless is woven into such times. I refer to the abiding nearness of the God of love. On the 28th of August the Christian Church remembered the famous St Augustine of Hippo, bishop and teacher (5th century). The prayer of the Church on his feast day is worth closing with:

"Is COVID-19 time destined to become the new ordinary time? At the Centre a lot has been happening behind the scenes..."

Creator God,
you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you:
teach us to offer ourselves to your service,
that here we may have your peace,
and in the world to come
may see you face to face;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Grace and Peace

Stephen

Rt Rev'd Professor Stephen Pickard

Executive Director

Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture



New Life, New Hope flyer by Judith Clingan



We have all returned to a 'new normal' of sign in sheets, protocols and disinfectant.
Photo by Lauren Bartley

Centre Shutdown and New Adventures in Learning

by Sarah Stitt

The year has been unprecedented, to say the least. 2020 will certainly be remembered courtesy of bush fires, a hailstorm, drought, flooding and COVID-19...

It is almost impossible now to remember the timeline, however, the last event held on site to a full house in the Chapel at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture was a concert/fundraiser—New Life, New Hope—organised by Judith Clingan AM, for the animals impacted by the Black Summer Bushfires. The ACC&C along with artists-in-residence, A Chorus of Women, supported this occasion.

When this event took place there was much nervousness about pending virus contagion and possible shut downs. The University had been quick to deliver and install automatic hand sanitisers, which were in place. Contact tracing had not been discussed at this point. Nor had the myriad protocols been drawn up. In mid-March we were a long way from where we are now.

Now! The Centre has been through one on-site lockdown, learnt how to Zoom and, six months on, has begun hosting events again, now with COVID-19 protocols in place.

In March everyone on site, bar one person, was asked to take their desktop computers, and register with Cisco and VM in order to access their work from home.

'The Centre Manager and the team were very busy assisting with making sure that everyone was set up and comfortable with their new situation in 'safe working from home protocols'.

The Centre Manager and the team were very busy assisting with making sure that everyone was set up and comfortable with their new situation in 'safe working from home protocols'.

A few staff members remained comfortable with to-ing and fro-ing from the work office to the home office. During this time these staff have turned filing cabinets and storerooms upside down and inside out to sort years of accumulated equipment and paper, undertake numerous tip runs—nearly all recycled materials, with a miracle taking place under the guise of a pandemic. More than likely, many work places and homes have been making the most of this opportunity, and embracing the silver lining.

The shutdown has certainly thrown up its challenges for all and has been taken very seriously. The Centre feels extremely fortunate to be located in a city and territory which has been impacted lightly by the pandemic and as this is being written, both are slowly opening up to some form of 'new' normality.

However, we are all very wary about what the future holds.

Warmly,

Sarah Stitt

*With great joy we welcome baby Bryan Waite to our ACC&C Family.
Our Communications Officer Katherine Waite has provided us with this update.*

Becoming a Mother and Learning to Nurture a Baby

by Katherine Waite

My husband Tim and I welcomed a healthy baby boy to the world at the end of May in Broken Hill in far west New South Wales. We named him Bryan James Andrew Waite after my husband's grandfather. We arrived in Broken Hill when I was 30 weeks pregnant and, within a week of our arrival, the first shutdown restrictions began because of COVID-19. Antenatal classes were cancelled and we turned to online options to prepare ourselves for birth. Many people said to me that nothing can prepare you for birth, but hearing women's birth stories and reading a lot of information was invaluable and helped us achieve our preferred birth.

Even so, it is an experience that I struggle to sum up and explain (what is the nature of knowledge?). I have never felt more alive and human during birth and relied on the help and support from others. From the early stages of birth when I was violently ill and weak and needed an intravenous drip to give me strength, to the absolute pain I felt in my hips and back during contractions, to the fears and anxieties I had, after vomiting during transition, about how I was 'going to do this' and the joy, encouragement and pride I felt as a woman when the midwife said 'I have never seen someone so determined' as I pushed him out. In that first week after giving birth I was high on adrenaline and I could barely sleep at night. I was so excited. I had given birth. I had a son.

These last few months have been a steep learning curve in nurturing my son. As Natalie Carnes writes in *Motherhood: A Confession* (Stanford University Press, 2020) 'No longer swimming in my body, you have become a land creature, like me and separate from me. When you were in my womb, my body bore the burden of care without waiting for or requiring my consent...I am being schooled in the irreplaceable school of your separateness. My hunger is no longer your hunger. I learn to tend to you—to know your cries, your expressions, your squirms. Through our separateness, I learn attunement to you.' (p16-17)

Little B, as I like to call him, is growing and developing from a boy who weighed 3655g at birth to more than 6600g. At the time of writing, he's about to outgrow his 000 clothes and make the step up to 00. Besides breastfeeding, I have also been learning how to use modern cloth nappies (MCNs as they are commonly referred to) as an effort to do my bit for the environment. Even though Broken Hill has only had two COVID-19 cases in March, regular mothers' groups have not restarted. Despite this, I have managed to meet some other mums in the community who have babies too.

Many people warned me that being a mother can be incredibly lonely. I was prepared for the feeding in the wee hours of the night and early morning and being home most of the time. I am alone but not lonely. I was warned that I would struggle to get out of the house in those first few weeks as I prioritised my baby. I lowered

my expectations and have taken it slowly. But what I have been wondering of late—after fears and insecurities surfaced—is if in those acts of love and sacrifice I have imaged myself as life-giver for my son? As Carnes reflects, our children are not our creation but God's gift to us and a source of sweet delight (p24).

Moving to the far west, buying a house, having a baby and my husband starting a new role has been a big change in our lives. 2020 has been a challenging year for many people but for us it has been an incredible blessing. Motherhood has expanded and revealed the person I am becoming and I suspect it is a journey I will be travelling for a long time.



Katherine and baby Bryan. Photo by Tim Waite.



Button Wrinklewort. Photo by Sarah Stitt.

ACC&C/St Mark's Grassland Clean Up

by Sarah Sharp, Friends of Grasslands (FOG)

On 24 June, a lovely sunny winter's day, 19 people met at the Grassland to clean up weeds and litter in this iconic natural grassland. Of these, six were FOG members, three were the landscape gardeners from the site and the remaining ten were associated directly or indirectly with the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture (ACC&C) and St Mark's Theological Centre. It was wonderful that so many people were interested in the grassland.

After providing an overview of the significance of the grassland in the natural and cultural landscape, we divided into four groups to do some work. Management of this grassland is guided by a management plan, which includes ecological burning. This working party addressed some of the other management matters such as weeds. The main weeds targeted were Flatweed and Ribwort, invasive Grevilleas and Blue Gum seedlings. One group began the task of removal of heavy bark and branch litter from under the

mature Blue Gum, that was inhibiting the growth of many species, including the endangered Button Wrinklewort population.

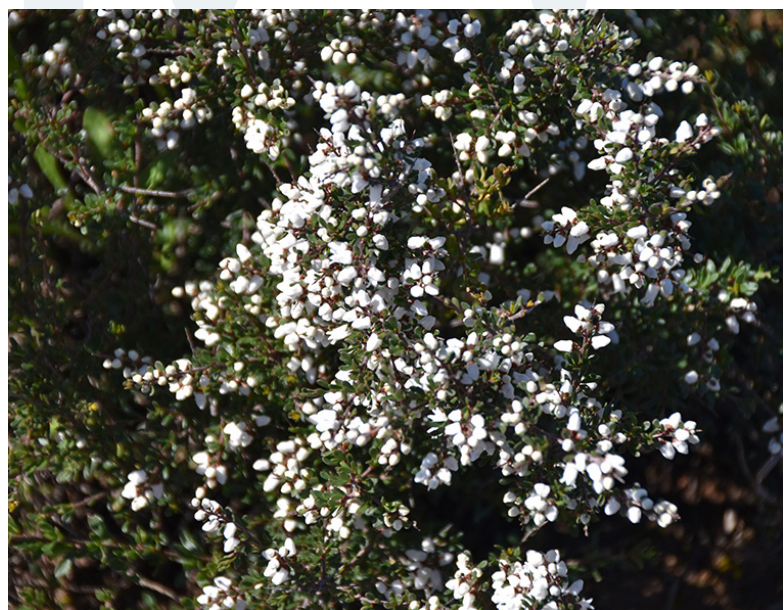
The wonderful crew agreed that they enjoyed the morning's work and learnt a lot about why the grassland is being kept, how to identify some of the rare grassland species and how to keep the weeds low.

There was a lot of enthusiasm to undertake follow-up at the site, so Margaret Ning (FOG) will be organising a second working bee; a group of volunteers will continue to remove the tree litter and take away the material removed; and a visit in spring to observe the array of wildflowers will also be organised.

If enthusiasm continues there are many other opportunities that will be pursued further with the ACC&C, St Mark's and Charles Sturt University.



Friends of Grasslands' volunteers working hard removing invasive weeds. This will allow the native grasses and plants to flourish. Photo by Sarah Stitt.



Native heather in flower. Photo by Sarah Stitt.



Prayer for Peace by Yaacov Agam. When viewed from left to right the artwork displays the Star of Islam, the Christian Cross and the Star of David. Photo by Sarah Stitt.

David and Alison Sloper Art Donations

by Sarah Stitt

David and Alison Sloper have had the good fortune to live in many countries, to visit many more, and in their travels have found pleasure and interest in the different cultures, religions and art. After enjoying their collection and now downsizing, David and Alison have kindly donated some of their collection to the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture. Arriving newly restored and framed, the works have found a welcoming home here.

The first acquisitions received were paintings from renowned Papua New Guinean artists, Apa Hugo, John Siune and Oscar Towa, whose 1999 triptych *Annunciation/Nativity/Crucifixion* will hang in the *Jesus Laughing and Loving* exhibition scheduled for later this year. Two other works are from Leonard French, *The Burial*, and a beautiful kinetic piece from Israeli sculptor and artist Yaacov Agam, *Prayer for Peace*.

Most recently, the Centre has received a woven silk ikat piece from Cambodia, known as a Pidan, depicting a story from the life of Buddha. More works are being prepared to arrive soon.

It is wonderful that these works have found a new home where their vibrancy can be enjoyed.

George Browning House: The Library Room

by Sarah Stitt

Over some years, the Centre has been bequeathed some personal libraries. During the Centre shutdown, we were able to transform a room in George Browning House into a library to house these books. We gathered bookcases from around the place, other furniture from the tip recycle and created tranquil space. It is a library come office for visiting scholars and a home for the Centre for Ecumenical Studies. It is wonderful to be able to find space for these books, which can be enjoyed by many.



The Library room 208. Photo by Lauren Bartley



We are witnessing how truth and empathy are entirely swept aside in favour of a violent conservative mythological worldview, now emerging fully-formed from its half-century incubation.

Cowdell in Lockdown

by ACC&C Adjunct Research Professor Scott Cowdell

Professor Cowdell writes about his five months of work off-campus with colleagues enjoying the vibrancy and perspectives they bring.

My weekday work-at-home routine begins with a catchup of online news and opinion from *The New York Times* and *The New Republic*. As a theologian interested in the role of rivalry and violence in creating identity, current American politics is catnip for me.

We are witnessing how truth and empathy are entirely swept aside in favour of a violent conservative mythological worldview, now emerging fully formed from its half-century incubation.

African-French-American scholar Mugambi Jouet, in his new book *Exceptional America: What Divides Americans from the World and From Each Other*, emphasises four characteristics of the American hard right: anti-intellectualism, fundamentalist Evangelicalism, market fundamentalism (anti-tax, anti-regulation, anti-welfare), and racist white grievance. All these are being celebrated during the current Republican National Convention.

The left must beware a purely reactionary response, echoing the mindless negativity of America's hard-right. René Girard, my longstanding theological dialogue partner, thoroughly analyses such dynamics of desire annexed by envy and rivalry and their pacification by cathartic violence.

I am currently working on my ninth book, under contract with the "Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture" series at Michigan State University Press (towards which I have been very grateful to receive Centre for Public and Contextual Theology (PaCT) research grants). The title will be *Mimetic Theory and its Shadow: Girard, Milbank, and Ontological Violence*.

With John Milbank's manifesto *Theology and Social Theory*, the 'postmodern critical Augustinianism' of his 'Radical Orthodoxy' began to challenge the embrace of secular methods and agendas by modern theology. Milbank traces an alternative modern tradition that

removes back-and-forth antagonism and violence from the driver's seat of history. This is not only a political theology but at heart an alternative account of metaphysics grounded in Trinitarian theology and indebted equally to the peaceful emanationism of Neoplatonism and to postmodern notions of the world created in language.

Girard serves Milbank as a guide to how fallen humanity operates, but is criticised both for the place he accords to scapegoating violence at the origins of humanity, along with a divinely sanctioned role for restraining violence in the maintenance of social stability. It is a question of ontological peace vs ontological violence, but also one of 'competing Augustinianisms' (Kerr).

America's culture wars show how desire, violence and religion intertwine.

Milbank is criticised for his pugilistic and not always discriminating annexing of intellectual history. His critique of Girard was answered by James Alison and Fergus Kerr early on. I take things further, engaging in wider theological issues.

For instance, the role of positivism in Girard's social science is challenged by Milbank, whereas I highlight Girard's theological purpose and scriptural hermeneutic. I also hope that an alternative tradition of cosmic Christology, from Bonaventure to Teilhard to Ilia Delio, might resource a mediating position between Radical Orthodoxy and Girard's mimetic theory.

America's culture wars show how desire, violence and religion intertwine. Girard sees the Gospel as enabling us to transcend such impasses. If I can reconcile two major, opposed theological movements in a higher synthesis I will have ended my Girard trilogy on a very positive note. Fifteen years of working on Girard has made me averse to self-defining agonistics.

Feature: Jesus Laughing and Loving, Art Exhibition

by ACC&C Adjunct Research Professor John Painter

In the March Edition of *Engage*, Sarah Stitt introduced us to the upcoming exhibition of our new collection

The exhibition brings to light an unusual and yet convincing set of pictures of Jesus. There is no picture or description of Jesus from his time, nor indication of his height, weight, hair or eye colour, or any other physical descriptive detail. Nothing. Instead, the paintings portray the many faces of Jesus in a way consistent with Jesus' teaching of seeing his face in the face of the neighbour in need (Matthew 25:40). Clearly the paintings are inspired by the Gospels, where Jesus is always called Jesus, and is depicted as a man, popular amongst the people, healing, feeding, and compassionate to those who were in need. Clearly, there were those who loved him and cared for him as well. Nevertheless, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, perceptively noted, Jesus was characteristically, 'the man for others.' Such a saying needs no reference, because, once made, it seemed to be self-evidently true. Such evidence certainly gives weight to the 'Jesus Loving' part of the title. What about 'Jesus Laughing'?

I suspect that it comes as a surprise to readers of the Gospels to discover that there is not one reference, or even a suggestion, of Jesus laughing in the Gospels. Two of the Gospels deal with the birth of Jesus (Matthew & Luke). The latter has one story of Jesus at twelve (2:41-51), in Jerusalem at Passover, in deep discussion with the teachers in the Temple, asking questions, to the amazement of all. We are told nothing of Jesus' normal childlike life, not because it did not happen, but because it was not the point of the Gospels. Jesus makes the point clear in this only child story, 'I must be in my Father's House' (Luke 2:48-49).

The other two Gospels (Mark & John) begin with the appearance of John (the Baptist), at the beginning of Jesus' ministry/mission. In John, Jesus begins to gather disciples who accompany him to a family Wedding in Cana of Galilee. The mother of Jesus seems to have been the connection. Perhaps extra guests led to a shortage of wine, which his mother reported to him (John 2:1-11). As a consequence, Jesus performed his first Cana Sign, which led his disciples to believe in him (2:11), that is, led them to a new level of belief. We might say that, having drunk all the wine, they had drunk enough. Certainly, this was not a matter of life and death. It clearly was a dampener on an otherwise joyful occasion, and Jesus would not have it. Consequently, Jesus created an abundance of wine, affirming a joyful celebration of a special occasion.

In Matthew and Luke, Jesus uses his Galilean creation theology to speak to his disciples about their anxiety concerning clothes to wear. He pictures the glorious adornment of the lilies of the field, with which even Solomon in all his glory could not compete, and quips, 'If God clothes the lilies like this, how much more will your heavenly Father clothe you' (Matt. 6:28-29 in the context of 6:25-34//Lk 12:24 in the context of 12:22-34). On a similar line,

Jesus gives the example of the sparrows of the field, worth only two a penny, 'but not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing.' This 'how much more you,' builds on God's concern for the sparrow (Matt. 10:29-31//Luke 12:6-7). Then, in a Markan scene (10:13-16), just one, but too good not to be found also in Matthew 19:13-15 and Luke 18:15/17. There, a 'gentle Jesus' is portrayed alongside stern disciples who would turn children away from an all too important Jesus. Jesus gently intervenes, 'allow the little children to come to me.' He blesses them and says, 'of such is the kingdom of God.' This is a warmer, much more human Jesus than the Gospels often portray. Yet, when they were shaped, Jesus was well known in his region, as were his father and mother, his brothers and sisters. There he was, just a local boy. The affirmation that God acted and spoke in this human person was all too much to take (Mark 3:31-32; 6:3//Matt 13:53-56; Luke 4:16-22). But this too is consistent with Jesus laughing and loving.



Smile with Jesus by Robert Fairley, watercolour on paper.

Is Christianity Still Relevant?

by ACC&C Adjunct Research Professor Wayne Hudson



Professor Hudson discusses his current research on the relevance of Christianity in the present day.

Is Christianity still relevant? In my work I suggest it is by removing obstacles which prevent people from understanding why this is the case.

In recent years, I have been attempting to change the way Australians understand their history, arguing that religious thought was much more important than historians used to suggest. My *Australian Religious Thought* (2016) advanced this claim, with a mass of evidence, and the point is now generally conceded by professional historians. In the process of working on Australian religious thought, however, I discovered that the standard claims that Australia was a secular society from early on was misleading and probably mistaken. Controversially, I argued that 'secular' in the nineteenth century Australia meant 'common Christianity' and that one of the most remarkable features of Australian politics and social life was a tendency towards what I called 'sacred secularity'. My work here has received strong support from recent scholarship in Steven Chavura, John Gascoigne and Ian Tregenza *Reason, Religion and the Australian Polity* (London:

Routledge, 2019). I have also been invited twice to discuss Australian religious thought on the ABC.

Consistent with this reception, in 2019 I was the invited lead presenter at an Australian Research Council (ARC) funded conference at the University of Newcastle on the political and social significance of the Reverend Charles Strong and his circle for the Australian settlement. The papers will appear in 2020 in a volume edited by Professor Marion Maddox and provide further support for my views. Further evidence for my claims about the importance of religious thought in Australia can be found in the 26 chapters of *Australian Jurists and Christianity*, a volume I have edited with the eminent Australian legal historian Justice Geoffrey Lindsay of the New South Wales Supreme Court and will appear with Federation Press later this year.

Another obstacle which needs to be removed is an uncritical embrace of

conferences with elite Russian intellectuals in Moscow and have recently published an essay on 'Another Postsecularism' in Russian and English designed to promote informed discussion in the Russian Orthodox Church. I hope to continue the link with Russian intellectuals in the future.

A third obstacle is the need to overcome the repression of human spirituality in contemporary political and social thought. To remove this obstacle, I am attempting to show respects in which critical theory and political theology need to be transformed. For some years I have played a prominent role in the leading American critical theory journal *Telos*. I gave the keynote address at the 2019 *Telos* conference in New York on Political Theology. At the 2020 *Telos* conference, also in New York, I argued for the importance of vocative or second person perspectives in contemporary social thought, a concern central to the work of the German philosopher Johann Fichte, which

is currently being revived in the United States. My presentation was part of a continuing dialogue with the French philosopher Catherine Malabou, who gave the keynote address. Subsequently, I was appointed to the Board of *Telos*, and am

now working with the Director of the *Telos* Institute, Professor Adrian Pabst, on a book on new approaches to political and social thought that take the spiritual nature of human beings into account. Obviously this is a large theme which raises many issues of practical importance. I address these issues in a series of volumes which I am preparing for publication. Here my concerns connect with recent developments in receptive ecumenism and practical theology. The way ahead is not entirely clear, but a spiritually based social thought will be crucial if Christianity is to be credible in advanced techno-scientific societies.

Is Christianity still relevant? In my work I suggest it is, by removing obstacles which prevent people from understanding why this is the case.

secularism in politics and law, one which takes no account of the transition to postsecularism in recent Western political thought. The issue is of more than historical importance, and bears on the crucial question of whether contemporary Australia should think of itself as a secular or a postsecular society. To appreciate the issue, Australians need a richer conception of the postsecular, as well as a less secularist understanding of secularity. For some years I have worked to develop a stronger notion of postsecularism and here my essay 'Religious Citizenship' has been taken up both in Australia and internationally. To promote the cause of a stronger postsecularism, I have attended



Participants at the November 2019 Roundtable held in the Chambers Pavilion at the ACC&C. Photo provided by the Australian Baha'i Community.

The Project has two main goals. The first is to bring people into a shared and unifying conversation, which we believe is a valuable process in itself. The second is to distill and synthesise the most prevalent and constructive insights into a formal Inclusive Narrative document, which is really an effort to articulate how we can, and must, strengthen social cohesion and inclusion in our country into the future

Creating an Inclusive Narrative Project

by ACC&C Adjunct Research Fellow Dr Natalie Mobini

The 'Creating an Inclusive Narrative' project, which held its inaugural Canberra roundtable at the ACC&C in November 2019, has continued to host discussions online during the COVID-19 period.

The project has hosted about 40 roundtables nationwide, bringing representatives from a range of backgrounds and sections of society into a shared conversation about who we are as a people, the values which will help strengthen social cohesion, our vision of a socially cohesive society, and how we could work towards it.

'The project has two main goals', said Ida Walker, who is leading the initiative on behalf of the Australian Baha'i Community.

'The first is to bring people into a shared and unifying conversation, which we believe is a valuable process in itself. The second is to distill and synthesise the most prevalent and constructive insights into a formal *Inclusive Narrative* document, which is really an effort to articulate how we can, and must, strengthen social cohesion and inclusion in our country into the future'.

Professor Stephen Pickard has accepted an invitation to serve on the advisory board, helping to shape the *Inclusive Narrative* document, which is due to be launched in October 2020. It will be offered as a gift to government, the media, organisations and individuals to draw on as they find it valuable to do so.

To help everyone follow the journey and benefit from the body of knowledge generated in the roundtables so far, a dedicated webpage has been launched housing photographs, podcasts and suggestions for pathways to action.

Roundtables were hosted in Canberra, at the ACC&C, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Darwin, with Adelaide, Hobart and Perth taking place in August. The final monthly roundtable for Canberra will be held online.

SIEV X National Memorial testifies that Refugee Lives Matter

by ACC&C Adjunct Research Fellow Dr Rosamund Dalziell

on behalf of the Faith Based Working Group, Canberra Refugee Action Campaign

In a peaceful grassy area of Canberra's spacious Weston Park, the SIEV X National Memorial overlooks Lake Burley Griffin at Kurrajong Point. Hand-decorated poles, arranged in gentle curves resembling the shape of a boat, commemorate the 353 refugee lives lost at sea on 19 October 2001, with the sinking of the vessel known as the SIEV X—'Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel' (a naval acronym), 'X' for name unknown. After the shipwreck, rescue did not begin for many hours, and when it did, the rescuing vessels were fishing boats. Survivors recount sightings of two military vessels coming on the scene and sailing away. Many of those who drowned were refugees from Saddam Hussein's Iraq, including wives and children of men already in Australia and unable to re-unite with their families. Next year, 2021, will be the twentieth anniversary of this tragic event.

The history of the SIEV X memorial was also more turbulent than its current calm setting would suggest. On the fourth anniversary of the sinking, in 2005, a commemorative exhibition and service was opened by then ACT Chief Minister John Stanhope at Canberra City Uniting Church. The plan for a large scale memorial was announced, based on the design of fourteen-year-old schoolboy Mitchell Donaldson. The memorial initiative originated with Steve Biddulph and Uniting Church colleagues. Hundreds of schools, church and other groups contributed to the decoration of the poles, to be ready for temporary installation at the site for the fifth anniversary in 2006. But due to bureaucratic difficulties, permission was not granted on time, to the deep disappointment of all involved.

This setback was transformed, however, due to a group of volunteers determined to mark the anniversary with a commemorative event. A procession was held, and a cohort of 600 people ceremonially raised the poles, tall poles for adult victims, shorter ones for the 146 children. Some 2000 supporters also

attended, including families and young people bringing picnics. I was there myself, overwhelmed by the moving sight of small clusters of people of different ages walking in, carrying the poles horizontally, then slowly raising them to the upright position, to honour the lives of those lost. The ceremony received wide media coverage. A year later, the memorial was set up as it is today.

With the passage of time, the hand-painted poles and signage began to show the effects of time and weathering. Paint was peeling, and plaques became loose. One regular visitor to the site, Paul Meyer from the Canberra Refugee Action Campaign's Faith Based Working Group, became concerned about the ageing of the Memorial and decided to take action. The ACT government's licence for the Memorial to remain in Weston Park was on condition that it would be maintained. Paul gathered an informal group of volunteers with skills in painting and repairing to set about restoring the poles, keeping in mind that every pole represented a life lost. The SIEV X National Memorial is looking fresh and cared for, with new signage, and appreciation expressed by many

visitors, including groups from schools, churches and other refugee advocates who gather for prayers and observances on anniversaries, on Australia Day and other occasions.

The twentieth anniversary of the sinking of the SIEV X falls on 19 October 2021, in just over 12 months. It will be a fitting time to honour those who lost their lives on that day, together with all refugees and asylum seekers whose lives are constantly at risk. Two of the memorial's founders, Steve Biddulph and the Rev'd Rod Horsfield are planning a ceremony of commemoration.

The plaque at the SIEV X Memorial signals the deep ethical symbolism of the site and the values of all those who have built, who maintain and who cherish it.

"Our message in making this memorial is that Australia is not a country defined by fear and greed. Love is stronger than fear. Kindness is stronger than greed".



SIEV X National Memorial in Weston Park. Photo by Rosamund Dalziell.

2020 David Hunter Memorial Lecture

by Dr Jeanette Matthews, CSU

The 2020 David Hunter Memorial Lecture held annually at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture was different this year, as are most events in the pandemic year of 2020. The need for a new format enabled a much larger audience as we live-zoomed the lecture from the Chambers Pavilion to an audience of over 250 across Australia and New Zealand. Professor Stephen Pickard and Aunty Agnes Shea welcomed participants in person and online, and the keynote speaker, Tony McAvoy SC, Zoomed in from Sydney where he practices law, being the first ever First Nations person to be appointed as Senior Counsel. Tony's address was entitled *First Nations Treaties: A Matter of Justice*.

Australia is the only Commonwealth country that does not have a treaty with its First Nations Peoples. Colonisation, assimilation, and ongoing attacks on self-determination, culture, languages, and lands creates urgency in calls for treaty from First Nations Australians. Tony addressed these issues from the perspective of legal justice, focusing on the recognition of wrongdoing, including the nature of 'apologies', and the need for meaningful reparation. Tony considered that a representative body of First Australians is an essential step in achieving justice. His address was cogent and direct, setting out historical injustices, the need for truth telling and treaties, and challenging governments to budget for the legal consequences arising from treaties with First Nations Australians.

The online event was hosted by Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) National as part of their seminar series on Treaty in the lead-up to a National Treaties Summit that was

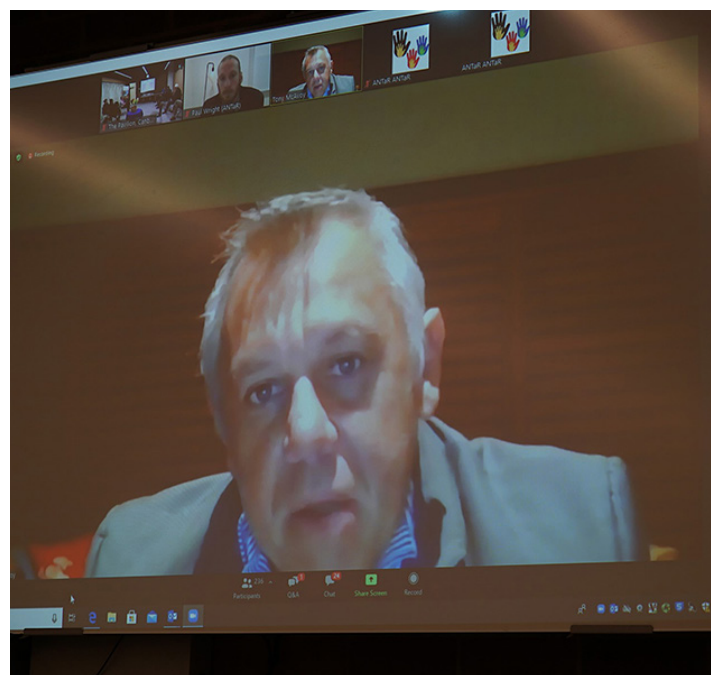
to be held in April this year but has been postponed due to the pandemic. The director of ANTaR National, Paul Wright, highlighted the seminar series and fielded the many online questions arising from Tony's address. The small audience physically in attendance responded enthusiastically to all speakers and feedback from online participants has been uniformly positive. It is likely that the 2020 experience will change future David Hunter Memorial Lectures to ensure that our impressive First Nations' speakers and the important issues they address will reach out from the Centre to embrace an audience from across the nation and internationally!



MC Rita Metzenrath. Photo by John Clarke.



Speaker Stephen Pickard. Photo by John Clarke.



Guest Speaker Tony McAvoy SC via Zoom. Photo by John Clarke.

Webinars & Online Forums

Conversations on Racism: Bluestar Intercultural Centre and the Australian Centre for Christianity & Culture have co-hosted a series of webinars on racism in relation to dialogue, education, law and interfaith issues. The purpose of the series is to engage inter-religious groups with critical issues in Australian society.

Racism & Dialogue



Professor Stephen Pickard facilitated the Racism & Dialogue panel with speakers Professor Fethi Mansouri, Rev'd Andrew Cameron and Shifra Joseph. They discussed how Racism and Dialogue initiatives contribute to discussions on race and discrimination and what they can do to better tackle these issues. Interfaith and intercultural dialogue initiatives are organised to promote tolerance and diversity and to celebrate difference and look for commonalities in humanity. These initiatives are to be celebrated and promoted, but it is also important to ask, do these initiatives and events explore real problems and issues such as racism? Do they engage in difficult or uncomfortable topics, or are they increasingly becoming out of touch with the changing world around them?

Racism & Education



The Racism & Education panel, Elizabeth Lee MLA, Professor Michael Platow, Rev'd Karen Kime and Genevieve Jacobs, questioned whether the Australian education system is doing enough to educate students about racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of prejudice? Do we need different subjects and curriculum that look at these issues openly? What can be done to ensure that students are able to connect with diverse communities and perspectives so they have a more well rounded understanding of the world in which they live? Is this a task for educators or do we all have a role in challenging prejudice?

Racism & the Law



The Racism & the Law panel, Shane Rattenbury MLA, Professor Desmond Manderson, Julie Tong OAM and Nour Haydar explored, in the context of the recent Black Lives Matter protests, the experiences of Indigenous Australians with the legal system and asked the question; 'how can we collectively dismantle systemic racism in the law?'

Ramadan Conversations

This series is produced by Affinity Intercultural Centre and deals with the current impact of COVID-19 and past experiences of Ramadan.



Professor Stephen Pickard participated in the May edition of *Ramadan Conversations: We are all in this together*. The episode was co-hosted by former ABC radio presenter, John Cleary and Dr Mohammed Aksu. Professor Pickard was joined by Emeritus Professor Ron McCallum AO, University of Sydney Law School, Associate Professor Mehmet Ozalp, Charles Sturt University, and Dr Anne Aly, Labor MP.

Webinars & Online Forums



Christianity, Disability and Indigeneity: What do these mean for person-directed practice, policy and politics in pluralist Australia?

Thursday 10 September
9.30 am – 12 noon

*Dominic O'Sullivan and Monica Short
lead two online panel discussions*



First panel includes: Aboriginal Christian leader, Wakka Wakka woman and CEO of Common Grace – Brooke Prentis; Arabana woman of South Australia, Christian leader within the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship of Australia and Community Engagement Officer – Kathryn Naden; and CSU Associate Professor Dominic O'Sullivan.

Second panel includes: chair of Embracing Ministries Committee: Janet McKinney, IRPH Radio Announcer, Jenny Wright and clergy spouse, local member of the Anglican church and public servant Karen King. All panel members identify as living with disabilities.

Public Seminars for Social Sciences week

The ACC&C in partnership with Charles Sturt University (CSU), Anglicare, Radio 1RPH, the Anglican Diocese of Canberra & Goulburn and Common Grace, hosted the online seminar 'Christianity, disability, and indigeneity: what do these mean for person-directed practice, policy and politics in pluralist Australia?'.

The seminar consisted of two lectures followed by two panel discussions. The first lecture; 'I have come in order that you may have life; life and all its fullness' (John 10: 10): Faith, indigeneity and human rights' was delivered by CSU Associate Professor Dominic O'Sullivan. The second lecture; 'Person-directedness: Empowering people who are Christians and are receiving services' was delivered by lecturer in Social Work and Human Services at CSU, Ms Monica Short.

Christians for an Ethical Society (CES) Online Forum Series

Lin Hatfield Dodds Interview – 'Australia Online post COVID-19'

On Thursday 25 June Professor John Warhurst President of Christians for an Ethical Society interviewed Lin Hatfield Dodds.

Lin is an Associate Dean of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) at the Australian National University (ANU). She is a former Deputy Secretary of Social Policy in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), National Director of UnitingCare Australia, President of the Australian Council of Social Service and Chair of the Australian Social Inclusions Board.

In the interview John explores with Lin the impact of the pandemic and the type of Australian society she would like to see emerge.

We are hoping this discussion can be continued live in the ACC&C Chapel later in the year.

Toni Hassan Interview – 'Screen Addicition & the Next Generation'

Professor Stephen Pickard interviewed journalist, broadcaster and ACC&C adjunct scholar Toni Hassan on the risks of excessive screen use to children and young people, including the phenomenon of screen addiction. Recent lockdowns have made increased screen use a requisite for education and social contact. What impact is this having on young people and how can we minimise the negative effects of increased screen use and prevent screen addiction?





Enacting a Public Theology is a book that makes a necessary contribution to public theology in our multi-faith and complex world.

Rev'd Dr Katherine Rainger. Photo supplied.

Enacting a Public Theology book launch at Dirrum Festival

by Rev'd Dr Katherine Rainger, CSU School of Theology PhD Graduate

Dirrum Festival is an annual event run by students at Radford College in Canberra. This year the festival included the launch of the book *Enacting a Public Theology* edited by Clive Pearson (2019, published by Sun Media).

The genesis of *Enacting a Public Theology* was a Global Network for Public Theology conference hosted by the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology at Stellenbosch University in South Africa in 2016. The theme of the conference was 'Democracy and Social Justice in *glocal* contexts.'

The 10 chapters in *Enacting a Public Theology* are a compilation of papers given by the Australian contingent at the conference: Brooke Prentis, Geoff Broughton, Katherine Rainger, Peter Walker, Stephen Pickard, Seforosa Carroll, Ryan Green, Clive Pearson and Mehmet Ozalp. These participants all received funding from the Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre (PaCT), Charles Sturt University, to attend. David Tombs from the University of Otago also contributed a chapter. The chapters cover a diverse range of topics with a shared desire to bring theological discourse into conversation with issues of justice and the common good.

A highlight of the book launch were the contributions by Year 12 students, Jacinta Davies and Ethan Priest-Willimott. Jacinta gave an insightful and moving response to Katherine Rainger's chapter on lament in the context of Israel-Palestine. Ethan's response to the chapter, 'Recognition without Dignity: The Politics and Theology of Postponement of Aboriginal Peoples' Justice in Australia', co-written by Brooke Prentis and Geoff Broughton, demonstrated deep consideration of the issues that Brooke and Geoff raised.

After Jacinta and Ethan spoke, Brooke Prentis, one of the keynote speakers at Dirrum Festival 2020, responded over the live stream. Katherine Rainger, Senior Chaplain at Radford College, then responded in person.

Enacting a Public Theology is a book that makes a necessary contribution to public theology in our multi-faith and complex world. The fact that it was launched by students is a sign of their desire to engage with these and other issues. Student engagement with the book launch, and through the Festival as a whole, is a sign of hope.

Hidden Hand

by CSU Professor of Public Ethics & ACC&C Resident Scholar Clive Hamilton, Hardie Grant Books

In his new book *Hidden Hand: Exposing How the Chinese Communist Party is Reshaping the World*, Professor Clive Hamilton argues that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is determined to mould the world in its own image. Written with German sinologist Mareike Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand* dispels the idea that the West's contest with China is unlike the Cold War with Soviet Union because China under the CCP does not want to export an ideology. The Party is hostile to democracy, press freedom, an independent judiciary, religious freedom and universal human rights and is actively promoting its authoritarian political system as superior to that of the decaying West.

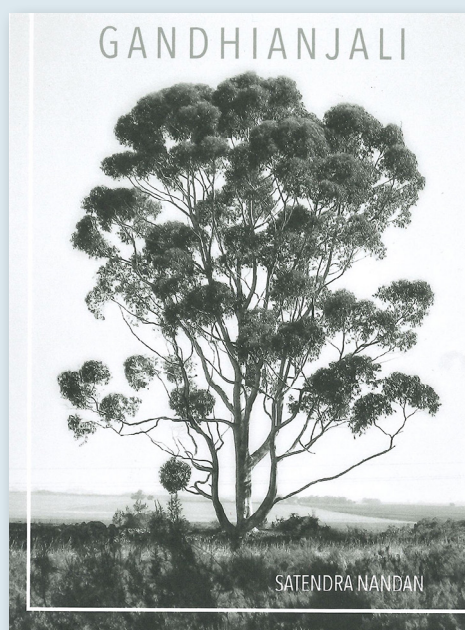
The authors describe the CCP's bitter ideological struggle with the West, and the way the Party divides the world into friends, those who can be won over, and enemies. *Hidden Hand* details the way political, business and academic elites have been lured to Beijing's corner while others are weighing up a devil's bargain. Recent cases in Australia of universities restricting academic freedom to keep Beijing happy

are chilling reminders of how even those who declare a commitment to free speech can find reasons to bend their principles.

Through its enormous economic power and covert influence operations, China is now weakening global institutions like the United Nations and aggressively targeting Western corporations and forcing them to succumb to its censorship. It is also threatening freedom of expression in the Western arts, theatre, book publishing and academic journals. Some prestigious cultural institutions in the West have been won over and now practice artistic censorship. The book documents all of this in confronting detail.

At the same time, Western security services are increasingly worried about incursions into communications infrastructure. While the role of Huawei in the 5G network has captured the headlines, investment by state-owned or state-linked Chinese companies in energy systems, ports, rail networks and surveillance technology are being closely scrutinised.

Hidden Hand, a sequel to Clive Hamilton's controversial best-seller *Silent Invasion: China's Influence in Australia*, has been published around the world, becoming an immediate best-seller.



Gandhianjali

By ACC&C Adjunct Research Professor Satendra Nandan, Ivy Press International Publishing

Adjunct Research Professor, Satendra Nandan, published his book *Gandhianjali*, a collection of poems, articles and essays celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Gandhi in 2019.

The volume was launched in Fiji, Sydney, and in Canberra. It was launched in Sydney at the University of Macquarie at the Asia-Pacific Literatures and Cultures conference by professor and poet, Dennis Haskell, Secretary-General, International PEN, Perth.

It was launched in Canberra by Professor Stephen Pickard at the International Gandhi Symposium held at the ACC&C.

Subsequently, *Gandhianjali* was launched by the Indian High Commissioner, Mr Gitesh Sharma on 15 March at the Margaret Whitlam Pavilion, the National Arboretum, ACT.

Professor Nandan is currently researching a book on some aspects of the Mahatma's life relevant to Australasian readers.



Community Engagement After Christendom: How (not) to become an extension of the state

by ACC&C Adjunct Research Fellow
Dr Doug Hynd

Community engagement as a theme covers the involvement of churches and church-related agencies in community welfare and policy and the issues they face in the English-speaking countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the UK, as the legal, political and cultural entanglement of the church with the state unwinds. Moving beyond Christendom is a process of transition in which the assumptions about the historically close connections between Christianity and society are still being carried by church leadership who find it hard to let go of that past. In addition, the increase in accepting contracts from the government raises new risks of churches and their agencies becoming extensions of the state.

The book falls into three parts.

- In Part One, over the course of four chapters, I take up the issue of how we read Scripture in a context in which churches and their agencies are still implicated in relationships of power despite the move beyond Christendom. I discuss the images we carry with us and stories from Scripture that are relevant to reimagining engagement in our new context.
- In Part Two, I take a historical approach telling the story of the Anabaptist public servant Pilgram Marpeck and how in his life and his theological argument he anticipated the possibility of community engagement by Christians after Christendom. I then take up contemporary discussion of these issues by the Mennonite church by way of providing a theological framework..
- In Part Three I draw on research from my PhD to ground the theological discussion in empirical reality of community engagement by churches and their agencies in Australia. I focus on the contracting of the church and the risk of becoming an extension of the state, as well as providing stories of the practices of advocacy, hospitality and presence on the margins.



Biography of Vernon Cornish

by ACC&C Adjunct Research Fellow
Dr Chris Ledger

For the last seven years, off and on, I have been researching and writing a biography of Bishop Vernon Cornish. This book is now rapidly approaching completion.

Vernon Cornish was born in Maleny, Queensland in 1931. He died suddenly, aged 50, in 1982. He was bishop-elect of the Anglican Diocese of Tasmania at the time.

A talented comedian, Vernon's earliest vocation was to the stage, and he was bitterly disappointed when he could not take up the offer of a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. He took up journalism instead before entering theological college in Brisbane. After about fifteen years in that diocese, his ministry took him and his young family to Perth, where he was dean of the cathedral and then assistant bishop.

The Cornish family were in Hobart only a week when Vernon died before he could be installed as diocesan bishop. His death came as a shock to the Australian church who had recognised him as a servant and leader of growing influence both within the Anglican church and ecumenically.

I have known the Cornish family since the early 1970s. Not long before her own sudden death, Vernon's wife, Dell, invited me to write this book. It has been a rare privilege to piece together Vernon's life and Dell's too and I have learnt a great deal not only about the main characters but about the context of the church in the 1930s to the 1980s.

Having a desk and a place to keep the Cornish family archives at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture has made this project possible. The company of other ACC&C scholars encouraged me along the way.

One way or another in these COVID-19 times, the book will be launched before the year is out. Watch this space for more details or contact me at clledger@csu.edu.au



“Christianity is essentially a religion of atonement and redemption. Jesus Christ came to restore fallen humanity to a right relation with God. Human beings are reconciled with God—made whole again—by a special revelation of God.”

Upcoming Events

The Spiritus Short Film Prize



The reimagining, renaming and launch of the ACC&C's Religious Short Film Prize to Spiritus is in full swing. The Spiritus Short Film Prize, for 10-minute films on life in the Spirit, has partnered with the Canberra Short Film Festival to be part of this unique event into the future. In our own small way, we know that this is going to be a big year for the prize.

A new submission deadline has been made, 30 September, judges are ready to judge in October, and the finalists' announcement will be made in late November. The viewing will take place in the evening of Monday 30 November during the Canberra Short Film Prize season (20 November – 6 December) in the ACC&C Chapel. Stay tuned for further updates.

We are looking forward to welcoming you to the Chapel for this occasion.

Jesus Laughing and Loving Exhibition

We at the Centre are very excited about the upcoming exhibition, Jesus Laughing and Loving. The works were commissioned over a number of years by Pat and Harry Wallace and Sir Maxwell McLeod.

The works are from 36 separate artists, from 17 different countries. Their task was to portray Jesus in a loving and happy manner.

The exhibition has travelled the world, was presented at the 2012 Edinburgh Festival, and now finds itself housed in Canberra at the ACC&C. We will be really happy for as many people as is possible to enjoy this exhibition, (note this in your diaries), which will take place in the Chapel from 12 November to 5 December 2020. We hope to see you then!



Detail from *The First Supper* by Alphonso Doss, oil on canvas

Hire the Centre

Are you interested in hiring the Centre's facilities for your next event?

The Centre's facilities include an indoor chapel which (in according with social distancing guidelines) can seat up to 60 people or the Chambers Pavilion which can seat up to 17 people. We welcome inquiries from groups that run events that are consistent with the vision of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture. Contact the Events' Team (Sarah Stitt and Lauren Bartley) for more information on acc-c@acu.edu.au





Winter Regeneration in the Bible Garden

**By Justin Aquilina,
Bible Gardener**

For the last couple of months, the Bible Garden has benefited greatly from the weeding and care given by some diligent volunteers. This valuable service has freed me to tend to other necessary tasks to support the garden's recovery from this year's harsh conditions, the heat and hail of summer and then the winds and storms in early winter. Some things have come up that needed attending to like the tree in this photo, on the edge of the grasslands that lost a big branch in the strong winds earlier in July.



This winter has been a mild winter in comparison to previous Canberran winters. Even so, it might seem as though there is not much growing in the garden, but there is always a need for tending to soil quality. While most trees are dormant as they wait for the warmer weather to blossom and fruit there is much background work to be done to ensure that new life will flourish once Spring awakens. The last few months in the Bible Garden have been quite busy for me, with continuous pruning of the fruit trees, olive trees and grape vines so air and sunlight can flow through, minimizing disease and creating the best opportunity for a greater harvest. I have also done some erosion control towards the furthest end of the garden so that any excess runoff is diverted onto the grassy area to water the date palms. I encourage you to take a wander down the path or simply sit and breathe in the garden and see what life you notice awakening slowly.



Stirrings of life around the bay tree. Photo by Lauren Bartley



A storm damaged Acacia tree on the edge of the grassland. Photo by Justin Aquilina.



Bell Repair and the Providence of God

by Hazel Francis, Centre Manager

One of the most recent large events held at the Centre was the Commonwealth Day service on Monday 9 March 2020. We held the preparation and practice on the previous Friday. This included preparing the bell to ring out for the 54 Commonwealth countries at the start of the ceremony.

During the briefing with the Government House staff, I was informed that the 'tongue' (clapper) of the bell had fallen out. You may guess my horror and surprise, especially regarding safety. What now? – as we would have the Governor General and Lady Hurley with all the guests and no bell for ringing.

After excusing myself, with quick thinking, I rang the lead bell ringer from St Paul's to see if there was another way we could sound out the bell and still have the gong gonging..... so to speak. She asked me what was wrong and I told her that the bell has lost its clapper; it had fallen out. Thankfully, it had missed the men who were trying to unlock the padlock and move the clapper and instead made a nice deep hole in the ground between them.

'Wait a minute!' she said, breaking into my explanation. I heard a conversation in the background and then she said; 'We will be there in 20 minutes.' When I asked who she meant by 'we', she replied; 'well you know the man who is repairing and installing the new bells in the Carillion? He is here staying with me and we can come and look at what has happened'.

And so at about 3.30 on a Friday afternoon 'the man' from the Carillion and Julie the Bell ringer arrived to look at the bell.

After looking at the bell, they told me they could fix it if I could find some strong men to help within 40 minutes. 'Sure,' I said, wondering where to find strong men at 4pm on a Friday in the middle of summer.

He took off to the Carillion to get nuts, bolts and other items and I went off to rustle up some strong men!

We both succeeded. It was a miracle and by 7pm after 2 hours of hard slog and comradery; they had fixed the bell ready for the service on Monday morning. What an exciting afternoon in the life of the Centre!

This gentle English man, who works for John Taylor & Co, had walked past our bell several times during his stay in Canberra. He mentioned in passing that he knew the location of every bell made by the foundry, except he did not know ours. He does now and in time we will need to get him back to refurbish our beautiful working bell. He will be back to complete the work on the Carillion, and we hope and pray that he will also refurbish our bell.

How to Repair a Bell

Photos by Hazel Francis



The tongue of the bell sits forlornly on the ground.



Replacing the tongue required three strong men.



Almost there!



Our bell can ring again.

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/>