

MARIAN

*Magazine of
Our Lady Help of Christians Parish, Eltham*

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*Let us renew our life.
Spring is here.*

A word from Father Kevin

In recent years I've gathered various articles from magazines, newspapers or internet publications such as the impressive Jesuit publication *Eureka Street*. I now have five files and the material is on issues I'm greatly interested in, if not passionate about – here's the

list:

- * homelessness/housing affordability
- * climate change
- * asylum seekers
- * tax justice
- * depression and other mental illnesses.

It's interesting that none of them are religious or even explicitly spiritual although I believe that an integrated and holistic spirituality is broad enough to incorporate these issues.

The first four issues can be said to come under the category of social justice and human rights. Our church has a tradition of very strong social justice teaching with papal encyclicals on topics such as the right to and dignity of work, world peace, Catholics' participation in political life and international justice. Unfortunately so much of the Church's dynamic teaching on social justice is barely known – it's rightly been called *the Church's best kept secret*; it really is a hidden treasure.

I know that some Vatican documents can be heavy going but we can access readable summaries of the church's social encyclicals. Pope Francis breaks that mould and I've found him easy to read. In 2013 he published *the Joy of the Gospel* which I've read, re-read and underlined – I found it inspiring and challenging. Though the topic is religious it has a strong, pragmatic, real-life feel about it – he devotes 50 pages to the social dimension of evangelisation and writes on current socio-political issues such as an inclusive attitude to the poor, religious freedom in a pluralistic society and the need for structural change in the community.



In 2015 Pope Francis issued an encyclical *On Care for our Common Home* with great insights into ecological and environmental issues, especially climate change.

I know we Aussies can easily hide behind the cliché that we shouldn't talk about religion or politics in polite society, but if you're passionate about something, sure, you have to pick your mark and be respectful of others, but why should we be condemned to keeping our strongest convictions to ourselves?

Similarly, people don't expect to cop politics in church but the five issues that I mentioned earlier all have obvious political aspects. I know people don't want party politics to be pushed at Mass, but I suggest there is a fine line; if a preacher firmly believes that a particular policy on say, tax fairness, housing affordability or asylum seekers clearly conflicts with basic principles of natural justice and/or the church's social justice teaching, why shouldn't he speak up? I believe we have not only the right but also the responsibility to speak out.

Jesus did say *Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God* which sounds simple and straight forward if you say it quickly, but applying it in practice can get complicated. Jesus certainly challenged and criticized both religious and civic leaders – in fact they became so threatened and saw their privileged status and entitlement endangered, that they decided he had to go.

At the top of my five issues list is homelessness/housing affordability – the right to safe and proper accommodation is a basic human right; it's a disgrace that in a prosperous, large country like Australia, that so many people don't enjoy this basic right! I've read so many articles, especially in the *Age* and *Eureka Street* with many creative and enterprising approaches. I've submitted many letters to the papers on this crucial issue; most weren't published but thankfully some were. When I retire I want to have a go at hands-on involvement with the homeless, perhaps inquiring initially with Sacred Heart Mission St Kilda and getting involved as an advocate for the homeless and being involved in social action groups on housing affordability. I'm convinced that the only long-term, comprehensive solution to homelessness is a whole-of-community approach involving federal and state



governments, councils and community interest groups.

With good-will and a cooperative approach, and learning from successful initiatives in New Zealand, England and Vienna, we

could go a long way to solving our worsening housing crisis and homelessness in particular. As the recent Saint Pope John Paul II explained, social justice isn't an optional extra or just a peripheral matter for Christians but a basic and essential part of the gospel; that means, as Christian Catholics, we have both the right and the responsibility to be committed to the basic principles of human rights and social justice. Several decades ago the universal church officially adopted a principle that was already being taught and practiced in some South American countries, namely a preferential option for the poor, meaning we're supposed to be committed to prioritizing the needs of the disadvantaged, the vulnerable and the disenfranchised in all our decisions, in our allocation of resources and our use of time and gifts.

There's powerful gospel supports for this approach – one that readily comes to mind is Matthew's gospel Ch 25, verses 31-46, the parable of the Last Day of Judgement; that's the one where Jesus separates the sheep and the goats – his criteria isn't how many Masses we attended or how "holy" we thought we were but the very pragmatic, down-to-earth one of whether we feed the hungry, visited the sick, welcomed the stranger, reached out to prisoners (not just those in jail but also those imprisoned by mental illness and addictions). Then there's the Beatitudes (Matthew Ch5, verses 1-10) where Jesus, the radical contrarian, turns society's widely accepted cultural values upside down, challenging the successful, the aggressive, the wealthy, the power brokers and praising the gentle, the peacemakers, the humble, the persecuted, the disadvantaged and the vulnerable. I could give many more examples. I suggest the general principle is incontestable even if we easily look the other way and settle back into our comfortable middle-class lifestyle.

A church community that is actively involved in social justice/human rights issues, as Eltham is, especially with regard to our pastoral care and personal interest in asylum seekers and

refugees, is not only following the gospel imperatives such as that eschatological parable and the beatitudes, but it's more energised, enthusiastic and joyful.

Father Kevin



Library News

If you haven't met Joan Chittister, you are in for a treat. For here, in Our lady Help of Christians' parish, we are blessed with ten of her books and a box of 8 CDs in our library.

Joan was born in 1936 in Pennsylvania. Should you be fortunate enough to hear the CDs you will get a sense of this fiery woman's passion for her Benedictine life. Born in 1936 she overcame the difficulty of an abusive, alcoholic stepfather, for whom she seems to hold no bitterness, and a polio bout in her early days in the convent. She is a breath of fresh air if you ever find an opportunity to hear her speak, but you will discover *the woman* in reading several of her books.

In 2001 she upset the Vatican by agreeing to speak at the Women's Ordination Worldwide conference in Dublin. She defied the direction

with the support of her Benedictine community. *You've got to love the Benedictines!*

Joan made it clear that women's ordination has never been a priority for her. Her focus is on women's roles in society, interfaith works, humility, feminism and monasticism. You will identify these qualities in her books.

All of the books and the boxed CD set will be on the top shelf throughout September.

- The Gift of Years
- For Everything a Season
- Called to Question
- Scarred by the Struggle—Transformed by Hope
- 12 Steps to Freedom
- Friendship of Women
- The Monastery of the Heart
- The Cry of the Prophet
- Welcome to the Wisdom of the World
- The Art of Life
- CD: *Like Water on Rock* a box-set of 8 cds

I have read them all and recommend them to you.

Trish Taylor

Some time ago after Mass I needed some supplies from a cupboard in de sacristy. However, it was locked. Worse, it was a combination lock. I asked father Kevin. He said that he didn't know the combination. However, he went to the cupboard. He looked up to heaven, said a prayer and opened the lock. 'That is truly remarkable' I said. 'How did you do that?' 'Oh' he said. 'It's simple. The combination is written on the ceiling.'

I asked a friend to talk about the role of Mary in her life.....

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Mum had a great devotion to Mary. As a family we prayed the rosary regularly just like the Caseys in that John O'Brien poem 'The Trimmin's on the Rosary.' At primary school in the 50s, the month of May was our chance to honour Mary in a very special way. We children took part in a procession to the church on the hill. We followed a statue of Our Lady held aloft by some older girls. She was dressed in white and blue just as St. Bernadette had described her in the grotto at Lourdes. We sang as we walked. I remember clearly some of our favourites. They will stay with me as long as I have a memory to call upon. Some titles were....Hail, Holy Queen, O Purest of Creatures and Bring Flowers of the Rarest. I am reminded of a Mary song that was reserved for our first Communion Day. It began, "O Mary Mother, Sweetest, Best," and spoke of the close relationship between children and the Mother of God.

The procession ended at the altar which in those days was separated from the body of the church by a rail of ornamental brass. The central gates were opened and the statue was carried up the stairs and placed on a flower-covered dais. My sister had the honour of placing a floral crown on Mary's head. I must admit that the magic of the moment was not enough to quell the jealousy I felt towards my sister. But she did carry out her task well!



When I was 17, I joined the Children of Mary... My friends and I attended Mass as a group, once a month. We wore blue capes and white veils and sat in the front pews always on the right hand side. I remember that some girls wore the cape over their gown and placed their bouquet at the foot of Mary's statue on their wedding day and placed their bouquet at Mary's feet as a mark of respect and devotion..

As a family, we sometimes made novenas to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. These were held in the church over nine consecutive Monday nights and brought us closer to Mary..



I believed in apparitions and was fascinated by the events at Lourdes and the story of St. Bernadette. One year, I received a book about the Lourdes story. There was a small record included, featuring the processional songs sung by the pilgrims. I loved that music. Each time I listened to it, I was transported to France and I sang along with all my heart. When our family eventually travelled to Lourdes, I packed bathers for everyone so the family could take advantage of the healing waters. To this day, I still have a small bottle of Lourdes water. (BH)

Notes from the choir.

Our Parish Choir has been serving our community for many years. And finds great joy in doing so. We sing once a month and rehearse twice a month. The rehearsals are a lively affair.

We access an online liturgy magazine to assist us in selecting songs that are appropriate to the day. Much discussion ensues and good-natured banter adds to the decision - making process. The theme of the day is naturally related to the Scripture readings and our knowledge of Scripture is enhanced in the process.

In our choice of music, we strive to acknowledge the rich musical heritage of our past. We seek to have a blend of old and new works and hope that there will something for every age group.

We thank Father Kevin and parishioners for their support and encouraging words over the years.

BH

CHURCH OF THE COVERED DISH by Thom Tapp



Prayer Cowboys



Hollywood has given us many images of wild, gun-toting cowboys shooting their pistols into the air. These loud cowboys make a lot of noise to draw attention but often end up shooting themselves in the foot.

Let's be honest, most of us Christians are prayer-cowboys. When we come together at

church, we make a lot of noise shooting off numerous, repetitive prayers to heaven – but we rarely hit the target. Often, our prayers are said simply to impress those around and draw attention to self – for when we are alone, we hardly pray at all.

On the whole, prayer-cowboys don't make good Christian soldiers. A cowboy-mentality is rarely seen as an asset in any organization – including the church. In combat, the soldier that is a cowboy is usually the first casualty. Do we talk the Christian talk but don't walk the Christian walk? Are we easily distracted by things of this world and find it hard to focus on God's plan? When we privately pray, do we consider what God wants or are we too absorbed with our own needs?

To be an effective Christian, we must stop being self-absorbed and worrying about what others think. We must start living our life before God – not people. We must consistently check our motives and align ourselves to God's will. We do all this by studying His Word and applying it. Successful prayer is always a result of a good relationship with God and knowing His will – not from endless repetition, elegance of words, or the number of people we have impressed.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 1 John 5:14