



COMMUNITY VIEW – Easter 2007

Quarterly Publication of The Christian Community in Australia & New Zealand

Views, News & Communication

Editorial

Dear Readers,

Welcome to this second edition of Community View. Reader response has been very positive and appreciative. A choice of two editions will now be available – an online edition, and a shorter version with different formatting more suited to print distribution.

Our Easter Sunday services, along with our Christmas midnight services, mark high points in the year. Generally many more people attend than usual. This is understandable, given that these are 'high' festival days. The facts of Christianity are deeply held in human souls. The high festivals have a particular awakening power which moves souls to seek Christ, even though in the normal flow of daily life, many do not find the power in their wills to see Christ in community at other times in the year. That so many people attend on Easter Sunday is a fact bearing great hope. But we can ask ourselves: What is needed to enable many more people to experience the will to seek Christ in community with others throughout the entire year? If we each ask ourselves this – and listen for an answer, no matter how tentative, we may find that there is something we can do to help. If every one of us resolved to do just one thing each week that might make it possible for another to attend an event in The Christian Community then our community would grow. By inviting someone to The Christian Community – a friend or work colleague perhaps – we are giving them the opportunity in freedom to say "no thank you" or "yes". And that 'yes' could change their life. We can be proud of what is there for the whole world within The Christian Community. Would we not want to share it?

This Easter edition includes ...

- ▶ Thoughts for Easter;
- ▶ A little about one of our 'frontier' communities: Perth;
- ▶ How valuable is our web site?;
- ▶ An essay from Lis Alington: "Doing Religion"

Please let me know how 'Community View' might be improved. And please consider submitting something for publication. If you aren't sure whether it's suitable, send it anyway – maybe we can make it suitable. All editorial contact to: thechristiancommunity@paradise.net.nz

With very best wishes for Easter,

Kevin Coffey



Easter

The word Easter is related to east, from where the rising sun appears at each new dawn. Easter is the celebration of Christ's resurrection, during which was born the transformed, spiritualised human being that cannot be destroyed by death.

On Easter Sunday morning, the women closest to Jesus went to the tomb to anoint his body, but they did not find it. Instead they were told by angels that Christ had risen and was alive before them in spirit. In his spiritual body, Christ continued meeting with and teaching his disciples throughout the forty days of Easter. This is how they became aware of what had previously been incomprehensible to them.

Every birth is preceded by conception and pregnancy. So with the birth of Christ in the human being of Jesus. Epiphany represents the conception in which the two worlds began to unite. That happened when Jesus was thirty. Until his crucifixion he lived a little longer than three years in the physical body. This was his time of pregnancy, when he transformed the human constitution. Passiontide is the laboured pain of giving birth. Easter is the joyous birthing of his new life on earth.

The birth of the resurrection body is a new creation. A spiritual body having physical qualities, it is of human shape and form but is not bound to matter. With the birth of Christ into earthly existence, the life forces of the entire earth are renewed.

Easter falls at the time of the Jewish Passover celebrating the birth of the Jewish nation following their liberation from slavery in Egypt. For Christians, this time becomes the liberation from another form of slavery; the fear of death. The process of dying is little other than the birthing of a new 'body' into spiritual life.

Because of Easter, Christ may be met today as a spiritual being in human form, radiating light and love, acceptance and peace. A personal practice for this time could be to explore where in my life I am in the process of giving birth. What new life am I creating? How might I learn to communicate with spiritual beings?

- Hartmut Borries

The Christian Community in Perth, Western Australia

For more than 18 years The Christian Community has had a growing community of members and friends in Perth. Our pioneering priest, Rosalind Pecover, helped to keep the flame burning through her visits over many years. A tribute to Rosalind's work in Perth appeared in the last issue of Community View. Rosalind has now handed over responsibility to her colleague in Adelaide, Martin Samson.

For three weeks last Advent and Christmas, the Perth community received a full programme of services and events – including the first celebration of the Christmas services in Western Australia. This was the only the third time in 2006 that a priest had visited (on this occasion, Kevin Coffey).

For those of us who are able to attend activities weekly and who can call on the services of a priest whenever needed, it might be difficult to imagine having breaks of 3 or 4 months without the opportunity to attend a service. Yet



Christmas Tableau, Perth 2006

this is a reality for those who live in the West of Australia. Four or five members manage to meet together monthly, and there are occasional

festival celebrations plus a carrying committee. The picture of the flowers in the desert which break through the earth and bloom whenever rain comes is a kind of a picture of The Christian Community in Perth. And how they bloom!!












Activities are currently held in a spare classroom at the Perth Waldorf School. This has been available for the community throughout the year. Unfortunately this is most likely to end at later this year.

There is a thought towards more regular visits to Perth perhaps up to four times a year. As usual, it remains a case of seeing how our human and financial resources can be available to meet the needs.

- Kevin Coffey

How Valuable Is Our Web Site?

The short answer is 'very'. How valuable is it for just one person to find their way to one of our communities? Several individuals are reported to have found their way to a service or event that they might not otherwise have attended. One person is known to have found their way without apparent prior knowledge of The Christian Community! (And was delighted with what they found.) At least one person was able to re-establish a long lost connection, and many visitors to our region have attended services through being informed via the web site. Outside of Australia and New Zealand, people within Germany are the largest overseas group that visit our web site. Young travellers from Europe are a particularly important group who seek local information about The Christian Community as they move around the region.

	Num	Perc.	Country Name	
▼	53	55.21%	Australia	
▼	29	30.21%	New Zealand	
▼	7	7.29%	Germany	
▼	2	2.08%	India	
▼	1	1.04%	United States	
▼	1	1.04%	United Kingdom	
▼	1	1.04%	Cote D'ivoire	
▼	1	1.04%	Netherlands	
▼	1	1.04%	Austria	

In the first year of internet presence, our site has registered over 4000 hits with over 30,000 individual pages visited! Weekly access has now grown to 1300 site pages. This represents a rate of over 60,000 individual pages accessed per year! Many members and friends around New Zealand and Australia regularly refer to programme information knowing that it is kept up to date. And many are now able to browse around to see what is happening in other congregations. Alongside this, people are increasingly referring new enquirers to the web site for initial information.

Table showing distribution of 100 visitors in Mar. 07

Currently, a Google search using the words 'christian' 'australia' returns over 41 million listings. Our web site is ranked 39th!!! A Google search of 'Christian' 'Community' 'Australia' returns over 3 million listings, and our site is number one!! Similarly, 'Christian' 'Community' 'New Zealand' returns over 1 million listings, - and we are ranked 1st!

How valuable is our web site? How valuable is a notice-board accessible to many thousands of people around the world? In the last week there were two site visits from India, and one from the Ivory Coast of Africa. Please support the site by publicising the address at every opportunity – both in print and by word-of-mouth: www.thechristiancommunity.net

- Kevin Coffey

Doing Religion – An Essay by Lis Alington

A British survey reports that religion sits in tenth place on a list of things people 'love to hate' most. Although religion is lower on the list than weapons, cell phones and parking fines, I was surprised to see it there at all. On reflection of course, it isn't surprising, given how many global conflicts are incited by some form of religious depravity.

But those survey respondents obviously aren't up to date with the medical evidence. For it's been found that people who go to church, synagogue, temple, mosque etc. on a regular basis, tend to live longer and have healthier lives in old age, than those who have no religious practice.

Lately I've been thinking about the relevance of church to modern life. Many people no longer respond to the theology of established churches. Others have been so put off by childhood experiences that they won't go near any form of religion. In our modern societies, on the other hand, people's mental as well as physical health is deteriorating at a frightening pace. Politicians proposing that we develop a 'knowledge economy' are talking nonsense. With an escalating mental health problem, a diabetes-obesity epidemic lying in the wings and the increasing consumption of drugs, both pharmaceutical and otherwise...it's difficult to see how any common-sense thinking can be possible let alone the creativity needed to forge the frontiers of new knowledge!

It might be worth re-envisioning what we mean by religion.

If religion is abandoned, then, in terms of maintaining our psycho-somatic equilibrium, what will replace it? No doubt people will continue to pick and choose from a spiritual smorgasbord without pursuing any particular path to great depth. But others, in secular society, have already lost a sense for the spiritual 'soil' that is our 'ground of being'. Therefore it might be worth re-envisioning what we mean by religion. The terms of reference – God, sin, Holy Spirit, faith, eternal life and indeed 'religion' itself, ring hollow in the ears of many contemporary people. A fresh interpretation seems to be needed – based on understanding rather than belief.

The word religion comes from '*religio*' meaning 'to bind'. The primary importance of religious practice is not that we bow down and worship something ephemeral and transcendent 'up above,' but that we embrace a method by which we can be 'bound together' or made whole. I am not whole until I become congruent in my thinking, feeling and action. Because feeling and action arise from my thoughts, these have to be of a quality that leads towards wholeness. As proven by genocide, suicide and terrorism there lives in every impassioned action, a thought that feeds the feeling. Therefore religious practice must aim to unite feeling and will with the thoughts offered to us by the spiritual beings of love and life; that these and not other beings become the inspirers of our actions. Any ideal can become 'god' and for some, Bacchus and Eros suffice. But there is only one ideal leading the will towards wholeness, and that is Wholeness itself. The three-fold human being of head, heart and hand may find its reflection in the ideal wholeness of the Trinity; represented as Father-Son-Spirit, Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva etc.

Our religious differences lie in the choices we make. With whom do we choose to align our minds? Religion is not passively going to temple or church and being told what to believe about Buddha or Allah or God or Jesus. Religion is about working with my thinking spirit. With which being of spirit will I align myself in order to receive the binding substance of my life?

Religion is practice; it's not something you 'belong to' but something you do.

I think it's naïve to propose a religion-less society. Religion is practice; it's not something you 'belong to' but something you do. Solo and collective meditative practices are essential to human wellbeing and productivity. To begin with, the amount of time we set aside for 'meeting' with the spiritual world is irrelevant. What matters is the regularity, even if it's only for a few minutes each day. Religion is a mind-gym – a place in which to exercise the muscles of thought. It helps us to bring ideals into action. In cultivating a relationship with spiritual beings, my feeling for an ideal may be kindled. My blood warms to the idea before flowing over my cold feet which then carry me to where there's work to be done. At the end of the day, religion is about action; about thoughts speaking louder than words and becoming visible in-deed. Instead of building biceps, religion strengthens our capacity for perceiving the spiritual beings who are the bearers of ideas. So if we aren't able to do much by way of solo meditation, then a regular collective practice could help us both mentally and physically.

Another reason to attend meditations in common-union with others is to be there for our friends. The ritual of the service enables our act of service. Most of us know someone who can keep a doctor's appointment for a Prozac prescription but who doesn't have much will to work with their thoughts. People suffering from depression, illness and loneliness often find it hard to maintain the regular contemplative practices that would nourish their minds and address the soul realm from where illness arises. But if they don't have to rely totally on their own effort, they may be able to

help their process of healing or 'wholing' by attending regular services in the company of others. A meditative service spoken by someone else can often make the effort manageable for them. If not entirely for ourselves, our presence at the services might be important for others.

Everywhere in the western world there is a pressing need to cultivate the soil of our minds. That The Christian Community service may be understood as meditative practice is reason enough not to dismiss the fertilising role of organised religion. Church isn't about 'believing' in some far-removed God – it's more about believing in myself; about trusting that the 'I am' in me is real enough to require nourishment. Those who want to become more self-reliant and possibly less dependent on somatic medication and psycho-therapists, may find that a re-envisioned approach to 'going to church' has something to offer.

By inviting us to engage with the life forces of Wholeness, The Christian Community offers a fresh approach to the spiritual being of the Christ. Provided we have the will to lift our bushel and let the world know we exist, then I believe The Christian Community could make a significant contribution to the healing impulses needed in our time. For that however, we must make of our religion a verb.

- *Elisabeth Alington*
