



KIWI CURSILLO

*The Magazine for
New Zealand Anglican Cursillo*

Christmas 2018

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MERRY CHRISTMAS



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FROM THE NATIONAL LAY DIRECTORS...

Cursillo and Community

Twenty years ago, when I attended my 3 Day Cursillo, I was blown away by the depth of community the team and pilgrims attained in the space of three days! It was a life changing experience for me. David and I were fortunate to catch up with some part of three Cursillo Weekends during our time visiting Cursillo groups in the North Island in September/October this year. Listening to the new Cursillistas comments made me realise the community aspect was important to many of these new Cursillistas too.

What is community? Our trusty Shorter Oxford Dictionary offers several definitions for community: a body of people having religion or profession, etc., in common; a body of people living together and holding goods in common; life in association with others.

Thirty years ago, American author Howard Snyder posed an unusual question in his book *Liberating the Church: The Ecology of Church and Kingdom*¹: “How would you go about destroying community?” He concluded that the easiest way to destroy community was to isolate people from each other, to “partition off people’s lives into as many worlds as possible.”

Isolation occurs when family life becomes fragmented, when we physically move away from our family of origin, and when our work consumes much of our time, thus isolating us from our significant others and friends. Digital technology has further enhanced and hastened the degradation of interpersonal communication. We now live in a disconnected society where self is paramount, relationships are shallow, and “friendship” is defined as the number of people who follow you on Facebook, or Twitter. Social commentator Michael Frost describes modern society as an airport departure lounge, “full of people who don’t belong where they currently

find themselves and whose interactions with others are fleeting, perfunctory, and trivial.”² The origins of many current social ills can be attributed to this fragmentation and loss of human connection.

How can we combat the corrosive effects of the breakdown of human relationships in our modern world? I believe the formation and maintenance of strong communities is an aspect of Christian life that the Church needs to share with secular society today. And I think strong 4th Day Group Reunions are ideally placed to perform this function.

In a healthy 4th Day Group Reunion, participants gain necessary support from the other members of the group as they study the environments in which they live and work, and as they act to bring Christ into those environments.

Cistercian monk Thomas Merton once noted that living alone does not necessarily isolate people, and that merely living together does not necessarily bring us into community.³ So what more do we need to establish strong communities?

Famous anthropologist Margaret Mead was once asked about the first signs of civilization. The questioner wondered if it was a clay pot, or a grinding stone, or fishhook. "No," Dr Mead answered, "a healed femur." Because someone was willing to do the injured person's hunting and feed him or her, this individual was kept alive and the bone was able to heal. According to Dr Mead, the evidence of compassion is the first sign of civilization.⁴

Community is all about caring enough to wait for bones to heal.

Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). Paul told the Galatians "the only thing that counts is faith working through love" (Gal 5:6).

Cursillo 4th Day Group Reunions are essential to our 4th Day walk – that's where we find the loving community which heals our bones and encourages us to continue on.



When the music stops, when
what is grand lingers only in parts
of the mind that touch the heart,
a voice says *continue on*.⁵

Brian Turner

Ultreya!

Glenda Prosser

National Lay Co-Director



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1. Snyder, Howard, *Liberating the Church: The Ecology of Church and Kingdom*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 113–114.
 2. Frost, Michael, *Incarntate: The Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 16.
 3. Merton, Thomas, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Books, 1972), 55.
 4. <https://myllu.llu.edu/oncampus/story/?id=3054> accessed 14th November, 2018.
 5. Brian Turner, "Continue On" in *Elemental: Central Otago Poems*, Auckland, Random House New Zealand, 2012, p128.

FROM THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ADVISOR...

THE GIFT OF EPIPHANY

My parish probably get sick of me telling them so, but I love and find great meaning in the changing seasons of the church year. Having sat deeply with humanities deepest longings of hope, peace, joy and love in Advent, and through the awe and wonder of “God with us” at Christmas we arrive at Epiphany.

Epiphany literally means “a moment of sudden and great revelation or realization” and starts with the visit of the magi, but then continues through with bible readings of profound discovery and realisation about who Jesus really is.

Unfortunately, our southern hemisphere calendar often works against us, and the season of wonder and revelation is lost as we kick off our shoes in the new year’s summer holiday.

Hopefully your Cursillo weekend was an epiphany moment for you, where your eyes were opened to the grace and call of God on your life, but more than that I pray that your life is full of such epiphany moments, where, like the magi in Matthew 2:10 were “overwhelmed with joy”, you might be truly delighted with Christ.

The glorious thing about Christ is that it is a multi-faceted Epiphany. We do not discover Jesus once. The more we dig and discover the more we find. That is why theological study (either in formal academic work, or in the form of reading theologians who can bring the story to life) can be so rewarding. There is always more to learn.

Last year I played the role of tour guide to a friend visiting New Zealand for the first time. As we drove the state highways, down many roads that are all-too familiar to me, the car was full of “wows” as my friend discovered the beauty of New Zealand for the first time.

Of course, his wonder became my wonder as I joined him in rediscovering that which I had visited many times but had become unable to see. Epiphany has that sort of perspective-awakening power.

“I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Ephesians 3:17-19

Rev Chris Darnell – NSA Cursillo



From the Editor...

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their prayers and concern over the past months.

I am now back home and have recovered well. Praise God! It has been quite a journey after being in hospital off and on since August.

Your prayers have been of great comfort and I believe that has been part of my recovery.

May God bless all of you and your families this Christmas, New Year and Epiphany Season.

De Colores, Janice



2019 Dates to diary for Waikato/ Taranaki

Set out below are the dates for Cursillo events throughout the Waikato and Taranaki Diocese Combined Cursillo. All venues for the Ultreyas are being sourced; details, and confirmations will follow nearer the dates of the events.

Ultreyas (all Saturdays)

2 March	Taranaki Ultreya	1:00 to 3:30pm (afternoon tea)
9 March	Waikato Ultreya	1:00 to 3:30pm (afternoon tea)
22 June	Combined Ultreya	Noon lunch, 1:00pm Ultreya, All Saints, Piopio
7 September	Taranaki Ultreya	1:00 to 3:30pm (afternoon tea)
14 September	Waikato Ultreya	1:00 to 3:30pm (afternoon tea)

Mini Ultreyas

It is hoped to sprinkle mini Ultreya throughout the year (not necessarily Saturdays), using a simple 2 hour format. Dates, times, and venues will be advertised ahead of time, as these are organized.

Secretariat Meetings

The Secretariat will meet, in Piopio, on **Saturday 16 February**, and again on **22 June**, prior to the combined Ultreya. The Secretariat is in regular discussion about the potential for a Three-Day Course. Details will be shared once decisions are finalized.

Ngakuru Retreat

Dates and details of an August Retreat at Ngakuru will be disseminated later.

Please diary these dates or keep a copy of this page!

**“A genuine friendship is a heavenly present.
It blesses our hearts because God’s love is in it”.**

Evelyn McCurdy

Changing Times need Changing Titles

At the recent NZACC meeting in Wellington we discussed various issues surrounding the future of Cursillo in New Zealand. The point was made that the title of 'Diocesan Spiritual Director' can be somewhat misleading.

A Spiritual Director is understood to be a person trained specifically to give quality listening and assistance in hearing God's voice to an individual who is seeking to deepen his or her spiritual journey. Those who have completed the two-year formation programme of comprehensive training in both the theory and practice of spiritual direction may then give spiritual direction with regular supervision for a further fifty hours. Once this course is completed, they then become full members of the Association of Christian Spiritual Directors in Aotearoa New Zealand (ACSD).

While some of the Diocesan Spiritual Directors of Cursillo may have been a member of this group, most are simply clergy who are Cursillistas and who have been prayerfully chosen for this role by fellow Cursillistas. Their role is not the same as a fully trained Spiritual Director. They are there to offer spiritual advice and encouragement to people in the Cursillo movement in their diocese, rather than specifically working with individuals.



For this reason, the committee have decided that in future the title will change from Diocesan Spiritual Director to Diocesan Spiritual Advisor. In keeping with this understanding, it was also decided that we shall change the title of Diocesan Lay Director to Diocesan Lay Advisor. We believe this to be a simple way to avoid confusion and to clarify these roles.

Wendy Harland
Waikato/Taranaki DSA



Book Review - **Over The Hill And Far Away** by Roger Harland

It was Cursillo that first introduced me to the idea of pilgrimage. Over time the idea grew and in 2016 I set off on my pilgrimage; not to Compostela but from Canterbury to Rome.

I had no idea of any of the difficulties involved when I set off on the 9th of June with the target of meeting Wendy in Rome on the 8th of August. It was an ambitious target and one which required me to adjust my expectations as the difficulties mounted. As they did, I grew in my relationship with the Lord, finding that, when I put my trust in him, problems were overcome or proved to exist only in my mind.

Once in Europe I had no easy way of communicating with those around me as I spoke neither French nor Italian. This was compounded by the fact that my iPad was not functioning. All this meant that I spent a lot of time on my own with my Lord. Alone in the early evenings I began to keep a journal.

In early August a confident pilgrim strode into Rome and was ready at the airport to meet Wendy as she came off the plane. Together our trip continued to include Cassino and Malta.

Eventually a wiser man returned home. I could not easily share my experiences completely with those who asked about my trip, so I have managed to turn my journal into a book which I have published on Kindle.

If you would like to read it - SEARCH https://www.amazon.com/gp/search/ref=sr_adv_b/?search-alias=digital-text&unfiltered=1&field-keywords=Over+the+hill+and+far+away&field-author=Roger+Harland&field-title=&field-publisher=&node=&field-language=&field-dateop=&field-datemod=&field-dateyear=&sort=relevanceexprank&Adv-Srch-Books-Submit.x=44&Adv-Srch-Books-Submit.y=10

Editors note: Having read the first few chapters, this book promises to be great read. At only \$8.13USD to purchase it for Kindle it is well worth it! Unfortunately, it is not in print so you need a Kindle to read it or, as I do on my computer, read it on Kindle Cloud.

Let me learn by paradox

“Let me learn by paradox
that the way down is the way up,
that to be low is to be high,
that the broken heart is the healed heart,
that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,
that the repenting soul is the victorious soul,
that to have nothing is to possess all,
that to bear the cross is to wear the crown,
that to give is to receive,
that the valley is the place of vision.

Lord, in the daytime stars can be seen from deepest wells,
deepest wells,
and the deeper the wells the brighter
Thy stars shine;

Let me find Thy light in my darkness,
Thy life in my death,
Thy joy in my sorrow,
Thy grace in my sin,
Thy riches in my poverty
Thy glory in my valley."

~ The Valley of Vision

EARLY CHRISTMAS TREE TRADITIONS



Evergreen trees were pagan symbols of life for centuries before Christians adopted them as Christmas decorations. Ancient people prayed and worshiped outside among evergreens and decorated their homes with evergreen branches during the winter months.

After the Roman Emperor Constantine selected December 25 as the date to celebrate Christmas, the holiday fell during winter for all of Europe. It made sense that Christians would adopt regional pagan rituals associated with winter to celebrate the holiday.

In the Middle Ages, Christians began decorating "Paradise Trees" that symbolized the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. They hung fruit from tree branches to represent the biblical story of the fall of Adam and Eve and hung wafers made from pastry to represent the Christian ritual of communion.

The parishioners gave small theatrical plays known as *Mysteries*. In the *Mystery of Paradise*, there was a tree covered with red apples.

Apples indeed have a deep religious symbolism and in the old calendar of saints, Adam and Eve were celebrated on December 24.

The first time in recorded history that a tree was decorated specifically to celebrate Christmas was in Latvia in 1510, when people placed roses on the branches of a fir tree. The tradition quickly gained popularity, and people began to decorate Christmas trees in churches, town squares, and their homes with other natural materials such as fruit and nuts, as well as with cookies baked in a variety of shapes, including angels.

That said, the Christmas Tree tradition was not really popular among common folks, and more of a trend for the aristocracy.

Worse, the Church of Rome considered it a pagan tradition because it was a reminder of the pagan Winter Solstice celebrations.

However, immigrants from Alsace and Lorraine introduced the German Lutheran Christmas Tree tradition in France after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870.

The tradition spread like wild fire, as the Church had lost all power since the French Revolution of 1789.

The Church was therefore very quick to adopt the use of evergreen fir trees; they were indeed ideal to symbolize life that never die, the Paradise of Adam and Eve, the knowledge of good and evil!

By the turn of the 20th century, each French household had its Christmas tree!

Tree Topper Angels

Christians eventually took up the practice of placing angel figures at the top of their Christmas trees to symbolize the significance of the angels who appeared over Bethlehem to announce Jesus's birth. If they didn't use an angel ornament as a tree topper, they usually used a star. According to the biblical story of Christmas, a bright star appeared in the sky to guide people to Jesus's birthplace.

By placing angels at the top of their Christmas trees, some Christians were also making a statement of faith intended to scare evil spirits away from their homes.

Angel Ornaments

The first angel ornaments were handmade ones, such as angel-shaped cookies or angel ornaments fashioned out of natural materials like straw. By the 1800s, glassblowers in Germany were making glass Christmas ornaments, and glass angels began to adorn many Christmas trees throughout the world.

After the Industrial Revolution made it possible to mass produce Christmas ornaments, many different styles of angel ornaments were sold in large department stores.

Angels remain popular Christmas tree decorations today. High-tech angel ornaments implanted with microchips (which enable the angels to glow from within, sing, dance, talk, and play trumpets) are now widely available.

The Star and Candles

The Christmas star symbolizes the star of Bethlehem, which according to the Biblical story, guided the three kings (or wise men) to the baby Jesus. A star is also the heavenly sign of prophecy fulfilled long ago and the shining hope for humanity. A candle, a mirror of starlight, is also a symbol representing the star of Bethlehem. Before electric Christmas tree lights were invented, families would use candles to light up the tree.

Also, at this time, two other holidays share the significance of candles and light. Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, is celebrated in Judaism, and Kwanzaa is a unity celebration of people displaced during the African diaspora, where one candle of the kinara candle holder is lit over seven nights.

Gifts and a Bow

The men who brought their gifts to honour the birth of Jesus inspired the concept of giving gifts during the holiday. According to the New Testament, Melchior, Balthazar, and Gaspar brought gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh to the newborn. A ribbon is tied around a gift to represent how we should all be tied together in bonds of unity and goodwill during the holiday season.

The Colours Red and Green

The colour red is used at Christmas to represent the blood of Jesus when he died on the cross. It's reflected in the colour of holly berries, which also had pagan symbolism during the winter solstice celebrations in ancient Rome.

Green is another popular colour at Christmastime signifying everlasting light and life. Romans decorated their houses with evergreen branches during the New Year, and the fir tree symbolized life during the winter. There is also a legend that when Jesus was born in the dead of winter all the trees around the world shook off the snow to reveal new shoots of green.

The Bell

Bells are rung during Christmas to proclaim the arrival of the season and to announce the birth of Christ. Also, the ringing of bells can be traced back to pagan winter celebrations used to drive out evil spirits.

The Candy Cane

This treat represents the shape of a shepherd's crook. Jesus, often referred to as the Good Shepherd, was born on Christmas. His birth was God's way to bring lost lambs back to the fold. The red stripe represents blood, Christ's sacrifice, and the white stands for his purity.

The Wreath

The wreath is a circular, never-ending symbol of eternal love and rebirth. Holly also stands for immortality and cedar for strength. Today the wreath symbolizes generosity, giving, and the gathering of family.



Holly

Because its red berries and prickly green leaves last all year round, holly is used as a Christmas decoration all over the world. The sharp edges of the holly leaf can remind us of the crown of thorns placed on the Saviour's head (see Matthew 27:29). The red holly berry can remind us of His blood shed for all of us. Christians have long seen these symbols. In fact, in some Scandinavian languages, the word for *holly* is "Christ-thorn."

Mistletoe

Mistletoe is a parasitic plant; it lives on the tree that it is attached to, and without it, the mistletoe would die. The plant has long been a symbol of love, and some believe that the Druids used mistletoe as a cure-all or some stories claim that it could promote fertility.

Tinsel and the Christmas Spider

If you've ever noticed a spider decoration on someone's tree, you might have

thought they had odd taste. This tradition is due to the eastern European tale of the Christmas spider, which led to the reason for tinsel at Christmas.

A modern version of the story is that a woman immaculately cleaned her house for Christmas. The house spiders were swept to the farthest reaches. They had heard of the beautiful Christmas tree and wanted a look. They saw it, loved it so much, dancing all over it. The spiders left their webs behind. Depending on the version, then, baby Jesus, Father Christmas, or Santa Claus saw the beautiful webs and miraculously transformed them into silver and gold tinsel, so the woman would not be dismayed.

In honour of that tale, people hang tinsel on their Christmas trees. It has also become a custom to include a spider among the decorations.

Streamers and Tinsel: Angel 'Hair'

After Christians began decorating Christmas trees, they would sometimes pretend that angels were actually the ones decorating the trees. This was a way of making the Christmas festivities fun for children. People wrapped paper streamers around the trees and told children that the streamers were pieces of angel hair that had been caught in the branches when the angels leaned in too closely while decorating.

Later, after people figured out how to hammer out silver (and then aluminium) to produce shiny streamers called tinsel, they used it on their Christmas trees to represent angel hair.

Christmas Balls

The Christmas Tree wouldn't be a Christmas Tree without colourful balls! People initially decorated their tree with various offerings including red apples. However, they stopped using apples after the harsh winter of 1858 when all the apple-trees died.

A glassblower craftsman from Meisenthal in the Moselle (Eastern France), however, had the brilliant idea of inventing colourful glass balls in order to replace them.

The Christmas ball was born!

Germany and Eastern European countries have since traditionally been the specialists of blown, spun and moulded glass, metal, wax or wood decorations.

Decorations include angels, Baby Jesus, miniature Santa, gifts, bows and wooden objects of all sorts amid garlands and multicoloured balls.

Submitted by Anne Gover (NS/NT)



GREETINGS ALL - FROM WAIAPU

It's been a bumper year in Waiapu and like everyone else we are looking forward to a relaxing Christmas break. Our shorter, more frequent and area focused Ultreyas were implemented this year. The aim was to draw in more of the 4th day community that are not able to be involved in a group reunion and give them the opportunity to meet on a more regular basis. This turned out to be quite successful. Next year there will be 3 Ultreya in Hawkes Bay and 3 in Bay of Plenty with a Diocesan wide Ultreya on the C8 Welcoming Day.

We had 1 Day Cursillo this year and our lovely LD for C7 Betty Atkinson has written a feedback which follows this.

A Christmas wish from Rev Mary and myself to you all

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Ultreya

Hanlie Viljoen DLD & Rev Mary Rowlands DSA



RECIPE FOR AN EXCELLENT MUESLI

We had an awesome Catering Team at C7 in September – would you believe 3 members of Secretariat gave their time and talents catering our complete weekend. It was so appreciated and without exception the results were stunning – all who attended C7 agreed.

All you healthy eaters will like this **Special Muesli Recipe**, there are quite a number of ingredients most of which are available at your local supermarket or somewhere like Bin Inn or a health shop.

2 cups Rolled oats	1 cup raw almonds, skin on, flaked or halved
1 cup buckwheat flakes	half cup sunflower seeds
1 cup millet puffs	half cup brazil nuts (chopped)
Half cup LSA (optional)	half cup pumpkin seeds

1 cup coconut chips
3Tbsp coconut oil
2Tbsp honey
1tbsp ground cinnamon
1tsp vanilla extract (optional)
1 cup tropical fruit mix or other dried fruit of your choice, chopped
2/3 cup dried apricots, chopped
Half cup raisins
Half cup dried cranberries
1 cup banana chips, halved

Method:

In a large bowl combine rolled oats, buckwheat, millet and LSA, almonds, sunflower seeds, brazil nuts, pumpkin seeds (**BUT NOT THE COCONUT CHIPS**)

Combine coconut oil, honey, cinnamon and vanilla, stir on a low heat in a small pot until melted.

Stir melted mixture into dry ingredients and combine thoroughly. Transfer to a lined oven tray and bake at 180C for 20 minutes, stirring every 5 minutes or so to ensure even baking. Be careful to stir in the edges and corners to maintain even baking.

When the baking is completed scatter the coconut chips over the top of the Muesli (don't stir in). Turn off the oven and leave Muesli in the oven for 2 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to cool.

When the baked mixture is cold, stir in the dried fruits.

Store in an airtight container.

AND ENJOY !!!

Submitted by Barbara Ollerton PCC serving on Secretariat 22/10/2018

REFLECTIONS FROM WAIAPU C7

Reflections from the Three Day Lay Director of Waiapu Cursillo Combined 7 held from 27th to 30th September 2018 at Papamoa Christian Holiday Park in Papamoa East, Bay of Plenty.

The theme for the weekend was “God’s Plan for Us” based on the scripture Jeremiah 29 vs. 11-13 “I know the plans I have for you..... “. Our weekend theme song was No. 34 from the Cursillo Songbook: “God Gives Us a Future”.

There were 10 Waiapu Diocese Cursillistas on team and we were thankful for the assistance of a priest from Wellington Diocese and two Cursillistas from Christchurch Diocese.

The weather was kind to us as we welcomed 13 pilgrims on the Thursday evening and apart from a shower or two on the Friday we enjoyed sunny days. The challenge of the dates falling on Daylight Saving weekend proved to be insignificant and all pilgrims were in chapel in plenty of time for the Mañanita, despite losing an hours sleep as well as rising even earlier than the previous two mornings!

As with all Three Day Cursillos our loving God poured out his richest blessings upon us. Warm friendships were made and faith and commitment to God and each other deepened.

The team melded together well as we met for training weekends during the year. The undergirding of the prayer support of so many during the year leading up to the weekend and on the weekend itself was evident in the strength and guidance given to team members; and in the peace and harmony that prevailed. Thanks be to God.

This was the first time Waiapu had self-catered which proved to be a blessing in many ways. Four Hawke’s Bay Cursillistas planned and prepared the meals and the food was delicious! What a wonderful Palanca from them. Some donations of ingredients from team members and other Cursillistas helped to keep the catering costs down as well as not having to hire a caterer as in past years. Several team members and pilgrims commented on how special it was to have Cursillistas in the

kitchen. Especially when it was discovered at the Sunday Eucharist that one was the Waiapu Diocesan Lay Director and the other was the Waiapu Diocesan Spiritual Director!

Five pilgrims attended the DDU held in Taupo on Saturday 3 November. This was followed by a two hour Ultreya. Those present were positive about their weekend and are continuing their fourth day as part of a local parish community. All plan to join a Group Reunion and as a result of this two new groups will be running in the Tauranga region in 2019, in addition to two existing Group Reunions.

It was a privilege for me to fill the role of C7 Lay Director. I was very aware of being upheld in prayer and of our loving God at work amongst the team during training days; as well as on the weekend itself as pilgrims responded to the touch of the Holy Spirit. I thank God for the growth in my faith as I continue to walk with Him on the path he has for my life.

All praise to our God!

Betty Atkinson - Combined 7 Lay Director



Waiapu Cursillo C7 Pilgrims and Team

After Christmas

The magi appear from out of desert sands,
Discovering an oasis beyond their dreams.
They capture our imaginations.
They arrive. From where?
Then they depart – differently – to return
To the “where” from which they came.
They raise and leave behind
All kinds of questions.
There seems to be an element of
foolishness
In their journey, so we find
An asterisk beside their name
And the footnote reads
“You too can follow a star!”
We detect in them a longing and a hope
Which makes risk worthwhile.
But why this search –
Do they want to be reinforced in what
they know
Re-secured in past traditions,
Or is there an openness to new knowledge
And new possibilities ahead?
What was it that caused the to be
“overwhelmed with joy”
On approaching the child at Bethlehem?
It was a moment of recognition
An experience of epiphany
Which opened their eyes
To the God-who-is-with-us.
Their response, we hear, was to give gifts
Placing on the straw-covered earthen floor
Astrological paraphernalia, now
redundant,
On which they had previously depended
The gold talisman; The incense to create a
mystical atmosphere; And myrrh for
magical potions.
These they surrendered to Jesus
Letting them go so that he could transform
as only he is able –

all the unnecessary baggage
they were carrying through their lives:
making gold a sign of compassionate love,
frankincense a sign of intimacy in
prayer,
myrrh a sign of healing grace.
These players in the nativity scene
Are no mere stage decoration.
They make known to us that, in this birth,
Something unparalleled
Has been revealed, disclosed, made
manifest.
But this Epiphany
Is not just their experience
Our own lives should be marked
By endless little epiphanies
As we search for the Lord of Life
moments when we too recognise
the presence of the Divine
as God’s glory breaks through.....
occasions when we are overwhelmed
by wonder and by joy.
And when these perceptions come
And surprise us, even ion the ordinariness
Of a baby (which is never ordinary),
We have the opportunity to give Jesus
The gift he longs to receive.
We can follow the Magi
And lay before Him
All that we needlessly carry,
All the burdens that cripple our souls,
And allow our lives to be transformed
By his incomparable way of love.
Then, even when our journey
Seems to be through nothing but desert,
Our embrace of that infant
Will sustain us, and others will find
An oasis of hope and joy
As they meet us.

Crauford Murray

BEFANA - An Epiphany Legend

Befana, the housewife, scrubbing her pane,
Saw three old sages ride down the lane,
Saw three grey travellers pass her door -
Gaspar, Balthazar, Melchior.

"Where journey you, Sirs?" she asked of them.
Balthazar answered. "To Bethlehem,
For we have news of a marvellous thing,
Born in a stable is Christ the King."

"Give Him my welcome!"

Then Gaspar smiled,

"Come with us, Mistress, to greet the child."

"Oh, happily, happily, would I fare,
Were my dusting through and I'd polished the stair."

Old Melchior leaned on his saddle horn,
"Then send but a gift to the small Newborn."

"Oh, gladly gladly, I'd send Him one,
Were the hearthstone swept and my weaving done."

"As soon as ever I've baked my bread,
I'll fetch Him a pillow for His head,
And a coverlet too," Befana said.

"When the rooms are aired and the linen dry,
I'll look at the Babe."

But the Three rode by.

She worked for a day and a night and a day,
Then gifts in her hands, took up her way.
But she never found where the Christ-Child lay.

And still she wanders at Christmas-tide,
Houseless, whose house was all her pride.
Whose heart was tardy, whose gifts were late;
Wanders, and knocks at every gate.
Crying, "Good people, the bells begin!

Put off your toiling and let love in."

Phyllis McGinley

WELLINGTON DIOCESE

JOURNEYING WITH JESUS

At the beginning of November my husband, David, and I set out on a marvellous adventure – walking the Milford Track and drinking in all the glorious scenery. It turned out to be more of an adventure than we could have ever dreamed: avalanches, a helicopter ride, torrential rain (as much rain on our most challenging day as London gets in a year!), hail, canyoning down torrents and crossing raging streams. And it truly was absolutely wonderful. Despite the cold, the rain and the extreme stretching of our physical limits, we did it and for me there was such a sense of God's presence and peace throughout the entire experience. I would not have changed anything.

We have been looking at the Psalms of Ascent in our church, and the experience and emotions of those pilgrims as they toiled their way up the slope of Mount Zion towards Jerusalem are beautifully expressed. Of invaluable help has been the book "A Long Obedience in the Same Direction" by the late Eugene Peterson. Peterson explores the depths of each of the 15 psalms (Psalm 120-134) so as to both challenge and encourage the traveller. Topics such as perseverance, humility, joy, hope, worship and security reminded us that God is at the centre of any journeying we do and that when we keep our hands lifted in praise then our hearts almost naturally tend to follow suit.

It was a bit like having Jesus appear on the Emmaus walk.

Our life as disciples is one long journey towards God – it is a path of obedience and worship. But, like our Milford Track experience, there can be many different obstacles thrown in to try and derail us. We had some experienced and helpful guides on our walk, but they couldn't be everywhere for all of us. There were many hours when David and I had to forge on by ourselves, relying solely on God, each

other and the knowledge that others were somewhere ahead and behind us. There was a community of travellers going through similar experiences.

Disciples can be assured that there is one guide who is with us at all times. And we, too, have a host of travellers who have gone on ahead and some who are following in our footsteps. The beauty of Christian community is that we share a common goal and are bound by our love of Jesus.

I pray that the road ahead continues to be full of surprises, that our companions share their stories of hope, perseverance and joy, and that we keep our eyes firmly fixed on drawing closer and closer to God.

Ultreya!

Rev Robyn McLay - Wellington DSA



When we allow the Bible to animate our thoughts — when God’s Word influences not just our *prayers*, but also our *perspective* — the more our requests align with what God wants to do.

It’s like we slip our hand into His, partnering with our Heavenly Father to accomplish the good things He has planned.

I don’t fully understand it, but I think this is what Jesus was getting at in [John 15:7](#) when He said, “*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.*”

CHRISTCHURCH DIOCESE

LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD

It's tempting to write a type of family Christmas newsletter, but don't worry I won't! I'll simply write about one thing looking back and one thing looking forward.

Looking back would be our Spring Ultreya at Amberley, North Canterbury where we enjoyed getting together again and the country hospitality provided. We were inspired by June Dalziel's Witness Talk where she shared how God has been with her during some major changes in her life and how she has been enabled to reach out to others. Justine Pilgrim had the excellent idea that instead of the usual Floating Group Reunion we should have an Emmaus Walk. Cursillistas relished the opportunity of enjoying the Spring weather and sharing something of our faith journey with our companions.

As to looking ahead, we will be soon be celebrating with our Advent Ultreya which we hold in the evening of the first Friday in December. We begin with a BYO tea and then our Advent Ultreya/Service. I find it very special that with all the pressures to get busy at this time of the year, we can make this a special time to celebrate together all that God has done for us. This year there is the added blessing of being able to meet in the new church buildings of 'All Souls', Merivale. It's been a long wait for the parishioners of St Mary's' and St Matthew's, but I trust that they find meeting in this magnificent new church worth the wait. So, we can rejoice with them in our God who 'does make all things new!'

De Colores and Feliz Navidad - Stephanie Johnston (DLA)



God With Us - What a Gift!

Readings: Philippians 2: 5-11
Isaiah 65: 17-25

Some years ago, the church I was part of produced a very different nativity play. There were no angels, no shepherds, no wise men, no Holy Family. Just a bare platform and in the middle an unsightly pile of damp dirt on a plastic tarpaulin. As silence fell a v. smartly dressed man walks up the centre aisle and the congregation begin to mutter "It's the Mayor! What's he doing here?" To everybody's amazement the mayor stepped onto the platform and removed his shoes and socks, rolled his trousers up and began to walk around in the mud, picking up the rubbish, cleaning up. "How unpleasant", some muttered; "What's that got to do with Christmas". Then a voice over is heard " *Jesus had always been God by nature but when the time came, he stripped himself of every advantage and became human. He lived a life of utter obedience, to the point of death*" Philippians Chapter 2:7.

God with us, trudging around in the dirt and disrepair of our lives and troubles world because he chose to come near. God with us, even though he knew it would hurt, just because he loves us. What a gift!

In the ancient world when people thought of heroic leaders, they often remembered Alexander the Great who at the age of 20 succeeded his father Philip to the throne of Macedonia and who by the age of 33 conquered the rest of the then known world. At that time, it seemed to make sense that he should be regarded as divine - in fact he himself suggested this!

In the Roman world the closest equivalent to Alexander was the Emperor Augustus, who put an end to the long running Roman civil war and brought peace to the whole known world. It wasn't long before many grateful subjects began to regard him also as divine.

If we can begin to understand this, we can also begin to see how counter-cultural was the message concerning Jesus of Nazareth - his resurrection had shown him to be Israel's Messiah and the Lord of all the world. He was in fact the reality whilst Alexander and Augustus were caricatures.

Jesus himself said "World leaders lord it over their subjects but it mustn't be like that with you; with you, the ruler must be the slave, because the son of man came to give his life a ransom for many" Mark 10: 42-45 para

Long ago Adam grasped at the chance to be like God, knowing good and evil. Alexander and Augustus were just doing what the human race has always done and through the centuries there have been rulers who seem only too happy to travel the Alexander/Augustus route. So what can be done?

Perhaps there are some things best explained in poetry - the words from Philipians read earlier answer this question and many others. There is in the poem a very clear statement of faith in who Jesus was, and what he accomplished.

In his incarnation and on the cross Jesus has done what only God can do. Here is the heart of the Christian vision of God; that within this vision of one God, creator, sustainer, we can see different self-expressions, different, but intimately related so that they can be called Father and Son.

We have a God who is know most clearly when he abandons his rights for the sake of the world - and that is the mind of Christ - the pattern of thinking which should guide us because we belong to the Messiah. *(From Tom Wright - Prison letters)*

The Christmas readings all show us God's abiding love and his intention to reveal that love by becoming human. This love is more valuable than any traditional Christmas gift but recognising the incarnation as a gift reminds us that it is free, for everyone, and it is not quite what we expected.

This gift of God to us is a particular gift given to individuals, but it is meant for every time and place. It is particular like a wrapped parcel with one person's name on the tag. There were certain shepherds on a particular hillside during a specific night and it was to these shepherds that the angel appeared. The incarnation is like that, with God becoming one particular flesh and blood person, part of a certain family, place and time. BUT whenever the writers of Scripture refer to this gift, they tell us it is for everyone. From the angels on that particular hillside, we hear that the message is *"good news of great joy for all people"*.

And the gift of the incarnation is not exactly what we expect. The incarnation's surprise is that God's power is made perfect in weakness.

The angel directs the shepherds to *"a child wrapped in bands of cloth, lying in a manger"* and Paul tells us that the Son *did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave"*

In all of these texts we see God revealing himself in our world, not by power or force, but as one who walks around in the dirt with us, cleaning the mess - becoming obedient to the point of death.



Lynnette Lightfoot, DSA Christchurch.

Life is not a competition that you have to win. It is not supposed to be a rat race. Life is a huge privilege and an opportunity. God has trusted you with gifts and abilities, which he wants you to use. Use them or lose them. He is faithful to us and he expects us to be faithful to him. *Nicky Gumbel*

A Rule of Life

by Glenda Prosser co-NLD

One of the aids for living more intentionally as a Christian suggested by the Cursillo Movement is the Rule of Life. A Rule of Life is:

a concrete promise, usually in writing, to which a person or group is willing to be held accountable for living life in a specific manner, one that is as meaningful as one can realistically imagine. (Paul Jones, *"A Table in the Desert"*)

One of the earliest and most durable rules of life is that of St Benedict of Nursia. Benedict lived in the 7th Century, and was initially a hermit near Rome. Communities grew up around him, and he devised his Rule to regulate the way of life of the monks. His Rule is not very long yet manages to cover a wide variety of themes regarding community life. For Benedict the Bible was a book to be LIVED, and his Rule is 'a simple way for beginners' to help them live the teachings of Scripture.

The Rule of St Benedict shows us that the life of the Bible is for everyone, and the simpler the instructions the better. Long rules or complicated arrangements were, and are, a distraction. Benedict believed that life should be lived in balance, with God as the focal point.

It is so easy for us to live a life that is out of balance, where work or some other aspect of life takes over. And it is tempting for us to place ourselves at the center of our own universe. Living a rule of life helps us to keep striving for balance – to be conscious of what we do and why – and it reminds us to be open to God in all aspects of our daily life.

I know this can sound a bit like New Year's resolutions. I gave up on them many years ago when I realised they had evaporated 2 days into the New Year! But New Year's resolutions are generally built on a negative image of ourselves – we decide that we are too

heavy, too lazy, too unattractive, too whatever, and we decide it's time we did something about that! We drop the resolutions, I suspect, because they continually remind us that we're 'just not good enough' in our own eyes.

A rule of life is more positive than that. We discern it in conversation with God, make **God** the focus of our rule (rather than ourselves), and we move in the directions in which we feel called. A rule of life is a response to being loved by God and being called by God.

Most balanced rules address the same basic categories: seeking God; prayer; work; study; spiritual community and worship; care of ourselves and our bodies; the use of our resources; reaching out to others; and hospitality.

A rule is meant to be a spur to growth. Like the stake used to hold up a tomato plant a rule will provide structure and support to our life and enable us to grow into the person God wants us to be. Because of this, a rule works best when it is a moderate challenge to us. A rule that we always keep flawlessly is not effective. On the other hand, a rule that is so demanding that we have difficulty even meeting its minimum standards is likely to discourage us, and therefore defeats its own purpose. The rule is not a tool to make us feel good, or feel bad, or to make us feel superior – it's a tool to help us grow in spiritual maturity.

The types of questions we will want to address in forming a Rule are:

To what kind of prayer does God call me?

How should I care for my body in a way that honors it as a gift from God?

How can I be the hands and feet of God for others in this world who need my help?

How much structure does my rule need?

How can my rule best reflect my unique relationship with God?

Not easy questions at the best of times! This is where it is helpful to talk it over with a trusted friend or spiritual director. The Christian life was not meant to be lived in isolation – neither are Rules of Life! We need our fellow Christians to help us stay accountable.

As Cursillistas we all have the beginnings of a Rule of Life. Do you remember the Commitment card we filled out on Day 3? That was a basic rule of life. We also have a means of staying accountable to our rule by sharing it with our 4th Day Reunion Group. Writing down your rule of life, and learning to live it more intentionally, is only the beginning. Following your rule deepens your relationship with God so your rule will develop and deepen as you seek God more fully.

The North American Congregation of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, an Anglican monastic order, is offering a free 6-week journey of reflection on growing a rule of life for either individuals and groups. Details can be found at <https://www.ssje.org/growrule/> This course would be an ideal Lenten study, but it can be begun at any time. Devising your own Rule of Life could be one way to intentionally grow your 4th Day journey.

God seems to honour and use each individual path. As Jesus put it, "There are many mansions in my Father's house" (John 14:2). Honestly, what else is possible? God clearly creates and allows diversity in endless forms. But it is also helpful to have reference to the common elements so that I know I am not alone and my ideas are not just my own but from the One Holy Spirit. If we can remember that we all came from God and are headed back to God, whatever circuitous route we take, I think it will help us be more humble and patient with each other. Each group and era has its own preferred symbols, rituals, scriptures, and words for things, but let's not ever let them get in the way of what they are all pointing to and leading us toward--union of the soul with God.

Richard Rohr

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