



Catholic Enquiry Centre Newsletter

*The Catholic Enquiry Centre is a work of the National Centre for Evangelisation,
an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*

FROM THE DIRECTOR



Friends, thank you for your ongoing support of the Catholic Enquiry Centre. In a year of challenges, your support has assisted our response to those seeking to discover Christ in their life.

Although many want to see 2020 come to a close, there are signs that a COVID way of life will be with us into the immediate future. During these times which require us to be physically distant from one another, we must continue to be purposeful in drawing emotionally closer to each other and spiritually closer with the Lord. With this closeness in mind, and responding to demand, the CEC has ordered a second print of its resource *Discovering Prayer: A 30 day prayer journey of encountering God and love*. The CEC is focused on helping seekers discover a relationship with God, who is driving the questions in their hearts. Prayer is the foundation of this relationship.

“Consistent prayer produces a progressive transformation, makes us strong in times of tribulation, gives us the grace to be supported by Him who loves us and always protects us.”

Pope Francis, General Audience 4th November 2020.

Discovering Prayer leads seekers and leaders alike into a regular prayer life. It will continue to be provided complimentary to seekers and is for sale on the catholic.org.au online store for local communities to use together or to give as a gift.

With thanks, and every blessing for the Advent season and 2021,

Malcolm Hart
Director



LISTENING WITH GOD: SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Mother Hilda Scott OSB

Abbess at Jamberoo Abbey, New South Wales.



Have you ever had anyone listen to you? I don't just mean hear you, I mean listen to you? I did once – and I have never forgotten it.

I came to someone laden with my very real concerns. I was young, at a crossroads and my journey could have gone any direction at all. I remember the priest concerned listened, he left spaces for silence which gave me room to think, he spoke sparingly as though he was treading on sacred ground, he asked the odd question which enabled me to speak further into my pain and finally he made a life-changing remark: “You don't want to carry that for the rest of your life like extra baggage, do you?”

Indeed I did not. This spiritual companion, in everything he was before me, his gentle acceptance, told me that I, in my lostness,

mattered to God; that God was close, even though I could not feel Him. He gave me to understand that there was a future and left me with the distinct sense of a compassionate God.

I shall never forget that night so long ago now, or the morning that followed, or the days that followed after that. Darkness lifted. This spiritual companion did not map out a way of life for me or indicate a future; he did not give me a prescription to take to a spiritual chemist; he did not recommend a book to read; he did not tell me what to do; he did not tell me how to live life; he simply heard me and because he was a man of the Spirit, he could not help but work with the Spirit in restoring my life. He did God's work and I knew that night that God had come and got

me, that He had lifted me out of the mire of my pain and shone His light into my heart. My spiritual companion left me to claim life for myself and here I am telling the story almost 50 years later.

That is the essence of spiritual accompaniment. It is a calling. It is not something one takes upon oneself; to do that is so very often to mar the work of God. How often I have found in my own ministry as a spiritual companion the damage done by undoubtedly well-meaning yet uncalled spiritual companions, who in their neediness were only able to listen to their own echoes not the souls. St Benedict tells us that the spiritual companion must be someone who knows how to heal their own wounds.

I cannot stress too strongly the need for a spiritual companion to have a healthy, transparent, consistent prayer life. As St John of the Cross points out, the spiritual companion must be firmly in touch with their own spiritual journey and be actively pursuing it. This is the sure indicator that he or she will authentically “hear” God speaking when another comes looking for Him. They will also leave the “other” free to come and go without personal ties.

People ask: “How does one accompany another?” The first prerequisite has been stated. Then God will show you. You will

do what, and be who, my first spiritual companion did and was for me. You will pray for the person who has come across your path. You will listen and you will find the appropriate direction emerging within you, according to the uniqueness of the soul in front of you.

As truly as God provides absolutely everything, perhaps we need to remember that while spiritual companionship so often does involve another person, “No man is an island entire of itself”, as the poet John Donne said. God does find other ways to accompany us—through the events of our life, a stray remark from another, a homily, whatever. God has a myriad of ways at His disposal for the seeking heart.

Thomas Merton, the famous Cistercian monk, found this so on a street corner, looking at a crowd of people. “There is no way of telling people,” he said “that they are all walking around shining like the sun. Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is, in God’s eyes.” The same vision is there for the true spiritual companion.

Image: **Daniel Hopper**, *Diocese of Wollongong*

CATHOLIC WOMEN'S LEAGUE, KIAMA, NSW: CEC DONOR

Anne Hassett

Secretary - Kiama, Catholic Women's League



The Catholic Women's League (CWL) was formed nationally in Australia in 1913, having been founded in England in 1906 by a convert to Catholicism. The CWL is today in its sixth generation of Catholic women who come together to support priests, missionaries abroad, women, families and communities. Each generation of these women has lived through a changing world and changing Church. These pioneering women had a demonstrative yet humble faith.

Supported by the parish priest, the Kiama branch of the CWL within the Diocese of Wollongong was formed in 1978. The current members draw on the legacy of previous women who worked towards ecumenical cohesion and support of evangelisation. Current activities and projects also include attending diocesan

meetings, state, national and international conferences, and actively lobbying governments of all levels on issues such as bioethics, work and family issues.

As a branch of CWL Australia, we are members of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO) and, as such, WUCWO has a seat at the United Nations. The President General of WUCWO was nominated by Pope Francis in 2020 to be a Consultor of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

The Kiama branch of CWL prayerfully and financially supports the evangelisation work of CEC. It has done so annually since its formation in 1978 and hopefully will be enabled to continue to do so.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to this Country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of Reconciliation.

Donations can be made by completing the attached slip, or online via our website.

The NCE resource, The Bridge, is now available online at <https://bit.ly/3d3hZ24>

To receive the CEC Newsletter electronically, subscribe at <https://bit.ly/2YLzXIF>

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