

# Refresh

Journal of Contemplative Spirituality  
Volume 24 Number 2  
December 2022



*The  
Hope*



Volume 24 Number 2 December 2022. ISSN: 1176-3477  
Published by: SPIRITUAL GROWTH MINISTRIES TRUST.  
125 Osprey Drive, Welcome Bay, Tauranga 3112 - 021432768

Spiritual Growth Ministries is an incorporated trust registered with the Charities Commission on 17 June 2008 (cc 26037). Donations to 03 0166 0198782 000 and on our website <https://www.sgm.org.nz/donate>

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Damien Walker's stunning painting, Ko Hāta Maria, te Matua Wahine o te Atua, Holy Mary, Mother of God, in St Mary of the Angels in Wellington. Used with permission of Siobhan Dilly, Executive Officer, NZ Catholic Bishops Conference.

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Angus – Janine Ross-Johnstone

## This time...

Advent – the time of waiting. The special season when Christians look forward to celebrating again the most amazing happening anyone could ever imagine – that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, would be born on earth, to show by his life, the face of God, the heart of God.

*'Come, Lord Jesus' is a leap into the kind of freedom and surrender that is rightly called the virtue of hope. Hope is the patient and trustful willingness to live without full closure, without resolution, and still be content and even happy because our satisfaction is now at another level, and our Source is beyond ourselves. We are able to trust that Christ will come again, just as Christ has come into our past, into our private dilemmas, and into our suffering world. Our Christian past then becomes our Christian prologue, and 'Come, Lord Jesus' is not a cry of desperation but an assured shout of cosmic hope.*

*Richard Rohr*

Because we know the end of the story, Advent for us is a time of expectant joy. But often times of waiting in our lives can be difficult, lonely, scary, with outcomes other than what we expected or desired. So how can we live honest, deep, hope-filled lives?

I believe that being part of the SGM *Refresh* community, part of this living expression of the Kingdom of God, can help.

Trish O'Donnell writes: *Refresh is where people can read what God is doing in the hearts and lives of other contemplative Christians; how they are responding to the issues of the day. The articles, pictures, poems, and photos connect me to our growing contemplative community in Aotearoa. They often rekindle my love for this whenua and its unique spirituality.* [www.sgm.org.nz](http://www.sgm.org.nz)

It helps to know that others too live with hope. My thanks to those who've trusted us to share their heart hopes.

Manaakitanga o te tumanako – Blessings of hope.

*Anna*

**Anna Johnstone** is grateful for the past, enjoying the present and confident that the future will still be held, led and blessed by the love, strength and grace of the Trinity.



# Advent

Alf Taylor

If right now, you were to write a story of your life, what would the first sentence be?

Each of our lives is so wonderfully different; each life is filled with moments of delight, wonder, moments when failure arrived, moments of loss and pain along with times of celebration.

When we take the time to genuinely look with loving and accepting eyes at our lives, we will arrive at a place where we may be asked a question:

What do we do with the little knowledge that we have of our lives?

Taking the time to pause, to look with tenderness upon our lives, is part of our Advent journey.

Advent is a season of preparation, a time to recall our hope and expectancy in Christ, as we await the coming of Jesus. It is the time of seeking to be awake, alert and, like a sentry on duty, watching. When we watch, we see what is occurring in our inside and outside worlds.

On the outside, we see what needs to be done leading up to Christmas – the presents to buy, the food preparation to undertake, cards or emails to write, maybe travel arrangements to finalise. We become strongly aware of advertising jingles and Christmas music being played. These are just some of the outward images we catch as we journey through Advent.

But there is another direction we need to keep watch – within the landscape of our soul. It's the place where we find the stories of our lives. We miss so much of the beauty and wonder of Advent and Christmas if we focus solely on the externals, without seeing and hearing the quiet voice of our soul.

Each one of us is the custodian of an inner world that we carry around with us. Other people catch glimpses of that world from the way we behave, our language and particularly the way our faces and eyes are. Truly our eyes are the doorways to the heart of the soul.

But none knows what our inner world is actually like, until we choose to reveal it in our stories to another.

Using the metaphor of pregnancy, Advent is pregnant with possibilities of wonder, renewed hope and the sacred nurturing of our inner world.

Hope is patient and willing to stay with us in the here and now. The first Sunday in Advent traditionally acknowledges hope, for we live in and with hope. Czechoslovakian playwright, Vaclav Hamel, maintains: 'Hope is a dimension of the Spirit. It is not outside us but within us.'

Hope is a potent and positive human faculty and it must be distinguished from its brother, expectation, which steals us from the present and pushes us down the path of disappointment when things don't go our way.

*Each one of us is the custodian of an inner world that we carry around with us.*

Hope is patient and willing to stay with us in the here and now. We people need hope and without hope, we die spiritually.

Julian of Norwich, English medieval woman mystic and religious writer wrote: 'Between us and God there is no between'.

If God pervades all creation, pervades us, then the barrier that needs to be torn away isn't outside us, it's within. In our own interior universe, in the cosmos we carry round inside us. God lives, moves, breathes within our inner world and universe.

In the movie, *Jakob the Liar*, Robin Williams plays a Jew living in the Warsaw ghetto in 1944 Poland. A café owner, Jakob is summoned to headquarters after being caught out after curfew. The ghetto is a gloomy place where there is at least one suicide each night.

One day, in the German headquarters, he accidentally hears a radio news bulletin telling about a battle going on only a few hundred kilometres away. The Soviet army is having some success against the German forces.

When he relates this to a friend to stop him from doing something stupid, it becomes assumed that Jakob has a hidden radio.

To fight the incredible depression and suicide throughout the ghetto, Jakob relates fictitious news items – we would call that false news today – about Allied advances against the Nazis. These lies keep hope and humour alive among the ghetto inhabitants. He is then pressed to tell more news. As long as there is news, there are no suicides in the ghetto.

They have hope that deliverance is at hand. The movie ends with the smashing of that hope, but with an alternative possibility in which all the hope is fulfilled.

Each of our lives is different, with different hopes and dreams. Our common humanity unites us so that we may look at our world with wonder.

When we pause long enough, there are grace moments all around us. Random acts of kindness shown by someone to us. A smile from someone we love warms our heart. The gracious and loving touch of another. Little grace moments reminding us that Christ is present and that despite amazing odds to the contrary, hope is present.

Often those grace moments arrive unexpectedly into the gaps and empty spaces of our lives.

Emily Dickinson, the American poet who died in 1886, wrote:

Pain – has an Element of Blank –  
It cannot recollect  
When it begun – or if there were  
A time it was not –  
It has no Future – but itself –  
Its Infinite contain  
Its Past – enlightened to perceive  
New Periods – of Pain.



This image was taken in the old city of Jerusalem. They could have been bed coverings or wall hangings. They looked stunning hanging in the street near a stall. We can only see a small part of them here. I love the fact that every individual square or rectangle is different. Together they make up a beautiful whole. They remind me of our stories, of how each one is unique, special, valued. AJ

Her first editor, Thomas Wentworth, was so annoyed by her dashes, he took it upon himself to delete them and replace them with semicolons or commas or full stops.

Scholars and literary critics are uncertain why she used dashes. I think her dashes are more than a literary style for Emily Dickinson, who knew physical pain. The dashes express the gaps and spaces of her own soul.

Lines 1 – 4: Pain is so overwhelming that it blots out our sense of ever having experienced anything but pain; the sufferer remembers the past as having consisted only of pain.

Lines 5 – 8: In the grip of pain, we see only continuing and relentless pain in the future; our lives and identities have become consumed with pain.

Yet, we are more than our pain. This is so important to remember. When we are in pain, either physical or emotional, we regularly ask the Why questions. But to many of our Why questions we have no satisfactory answers.

Philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) wrote: 'Life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived.'

Life is not something we hold together by our logic and sheer strength, for at times, these fail us. Life is an unfathomable gift in which we experience the mystery of Grace, the mystery of Love in the midst of Suffering and Death.

*God is with us, in the writing of the stories of our lives.*

Yet, nothing can separate us from the love of Emmanuel, God with us, in Christ Jesus.

This loving presence is ever with us in the gaps and spaces of our lives, when, in our grieving and loss, nothing makes sense. God is not a spectator, looking down, delighting in our human plight and suffering.

Rather, Emmanuel God with us is a participant in the messiness of what it means to be a human being, offering us courage and peace to live with the unfilled gaps of life.

This speaks of survival  
of hope beyond our time.  
In the world of eternity,  
of Spirit.  
Calling deep within our spirit  
evoking hope,  
that Emmanuel, God is with us,  
in the writing of the stories of our lives.

**Alf Taylor** was born in Liverpool UK, arriving in NZ in 1974. Married to Fleur-Marie for 53 years, with 3 children and 5 grandchildren. He is a retired Presbyterian minister, now offering pastoral supervision via zoom. Life for Alf is not a problem to be controlled or solved, rather a mystery to be lived, with gratitude, within the sacred embrace of grace.



**Pohutukawa**  
Hilary Oxford Smith®

Crimson petals  
unfurl aroha  
in the twelfth month  
expectantly.

Beauty blossoms the landscape  
of the bare heart  
warm like the breath of creatures  
healing like nectar.

Veined leaves  
rustle in the evening  
a felt underbelly of moisture  
softening.

Heartwood roots  
rest in eternity  
interweaving wisdom and story  
of our eternal Mother.

Seeds white as Ngāuruhoe snow  
float in the air  
of salt spray and wind  
sharing the ancient commandment of life.

Leaves fall  
in the wintry light  
limbs becoming bare,  
withstanding.

Ancient story  
sanctifies fragile hope  
nothing more holy  
in the ninth month.

Pohutukawa outline from stainless steel sculpture by Alfred Hassencamp

**Prayer for World Communion Sunday October 2022**  
Sylvia Miller-Hardie

God, who sings creation into life, waking the dawn with nature's birdsong of praise,  
it is good to gather in your holy presence.

Your love sings with melodies of joy into our moments of despair; you sing light  
across our darkness and hope over our grief. And so, we are here today to discover  
this divine way of living in joy – that you offer.

Your love promises that when we lose the harmony of your hope,  
you will re-tune the chords of our hearts.

When our worries and concerns stretch our composure,  
your welcoming embrace will cradle and calm us.

When we are crushed by criticism or held captive by our complaints,  
your love is the key that unlocks our joy and frees us for praise.

That is why we can say: it is good to gather in your presence!  
For you know the fears and frustrations that beset us, you know the sadness that  
lurks beneath our smile, and the conflicts which threaten our relationships.

You alone know how intensely  
brittle our world has become and  
how its people long for hope and  
harmony. Our world thirsts for  
your wellspring of hope to refresh  
us.

And so, we gather, before a cross  
and a table, symbols of our hope.  
We gather to be liberated by your  
love, nurtured by your wisdom  
and held in your care.

God of Jesus Christ, bless our  
worship and our world, with the  
joy that we find in following you.

Amen



## Hidden

Elsa McInnes

Heartache hidden in autistic soul  
Longings hidden behind the smile  
Fear masquerading as control

Lostness hidden under layers of clothing  
Insecurity hidden in order and structure  
Rejection the only warning sign  
Lostness in full view  
Distance a visible clue

Like toxins hidden in soil, polluting  
The brain trauma invisible to most  
But seeping out to contaminate relationships  
Souring love, bleeding rejection

Yet...

Potential lies dormant, hidden within  
Pray for the key to unlock it  
Hope – God’s gift to the distressed  
Plant it with encouraging words  
Nourish it with a warm smile  
Water it with generous love

Wait patiently for life to bloom  
Empathy sprouting  
Rejoice together in the greening.



*Elsa McInnes, a southerner, lives in Feilding, with four adult children scattered from Auckland to Taieri Mouth and five grandchildren. Author of *Shattered and Restored* and *A Grip on Grief*, Elsa offers spiritual direction and loves life in all its fullness.*

## Words to Ponder

The star for which the world is waiting, without yet being able to give it a name, or rightly appreciate its true transcendence, or even recognize the most spiritual and divine of its rays, is, Christ himself, in whom we hope. Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin*, 1960

My daughter, Anna, loves to say, ‘I used to think that hope was for wimps.’ Hope is not for wimps; it’s for the strong-hearted who can recognise how bad things are and yet not be deterred, not be paralysed. Frances Moore Lappe

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Hebrews 11:1

But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31

*Hope is holding a creative tension between what is and what could and should be, each day doing something to narrow the distance between the two.*  
Parker J Palmer

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. Romans 15:13

*While optimism makes us live as if someday soon things will soon go better for us, hope frees us from the need to predict the future and allows us to live in the present, with the deep trust that God will never leave us alone but will fulfil the deepest desires of our heart. Joy in this perspective is the fruit of hope.* Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Here and Now: Living in the Spirit*

In the same book, Nouwen writes:

*Optimism and hope are radically different attitudes. Optimism is the expectation that things - the weather, human relationships, the economy, the political situation, and so on - will get better. Hope is the trust that God will fulfil God’s promises to us in a way that leads us to true freedom. The optimist speaks about concrete changes in the future. The person of hope lives in the moment with the knowledge and trust that all of life is in good hands.*

## Creation and Hope

Andrew Dunn

The comment in Genesis 1:24 that 'God saw everything he had made, and indeed, it was very good' has to be a starting place in thinking about our planet Earth and what is happening to it now. Indeed, this quality of goodness and affirmation is further attested by the latest startling photographs we are seeing through NASA's new James Webb telescope. It also helps us to broaden our understanding of how large the universe is and whether or not it is endless.

A number of recent lectionary Psalms add an important element, namely that this planet Earth we live on 'is full of the steadfast love of the Lord' (Psalm 33:5). It's as if our world is penetrated by grace, and emanates the generous and wondrous *chesed* of YHWH – the active and energetic loving that is God's very nature! So it is not surprising that many people feel a presence in creation, a personal address that delights, encourages and invites.

I want to stress this as one of the ways that the hope of God's loving will be felt and acknowledged by more and more of us as time progresses.

Isaiah puts it like this: 'Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not grow faint or weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint' (Isaiah 40:28-31).

St Paul expands the vision by relating it to Christ. 'He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, .... all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together. .... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.' (Colossians 1:15-20).

Our role as residents here on this planet is to encourage its health and the growth of each and every part of creation. Earth is our only home and must be kept hospitable for all residents, come what may.

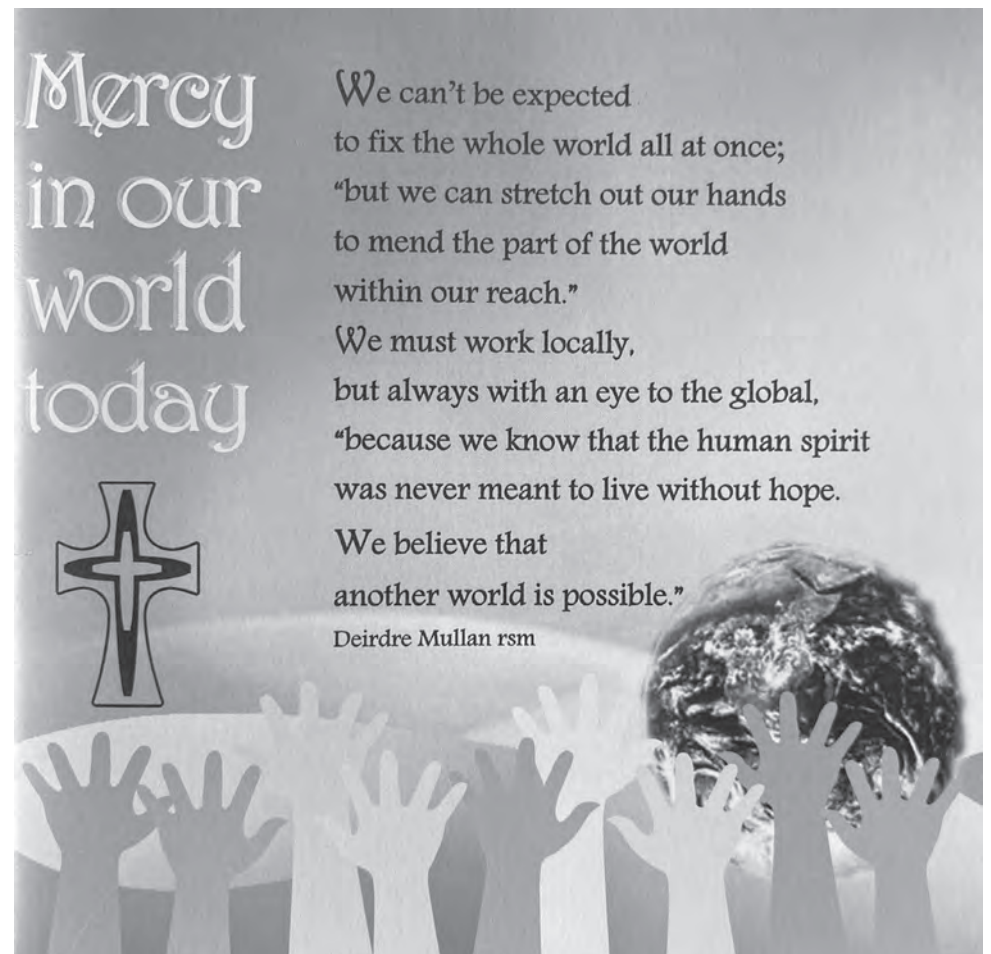
St John's vision of a new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21) has two interpretations at odds with each other. One is that they refer to complete obliteration of the current state of affairs; the other is that through Christ and his redemption, the current heavens and earth will be renewed and refreshed.

I am committed to the renewal of all things with Christ as Lord and refresher of all that is. 'See, I am making all things new.' (Revelation 21:5). That's a cause for rejoicing.

As King David wrote, 'All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you. They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your

power, to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendour of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.' (Psalm 145: 10-13).

*Andrew Dunn has recently sold Oasis and now has an apartment in Settlers Lifestyle Village in Albany. He is adjusting to a whole new way of living and is making some progress in that. Hope continues to inspire and delight.*



Cheryl Connelly rsm



## The Trinity of Calm

Marilyn Wilkinson

I've tried climbing my tree - to see Jesus better.  
I've tried stretching my mind - to increase my belief.  
I've tried filling my life - to love those in much strife.  
I've tried creating words - to answer questions not asked.

So I've grappled with Faith and Love, but never Hope.

However,  
over the years I've moved.  
Over the years I've moved on.  
Over the years I've moved in ... to calm.

The calm of the living bush.  
The calm of the soaring hills.  
The calm of the gentle rain.

The calm of silence.  
The calm of stillness.  
The calm of listening.

The calm of the Eucharistic meal.  
The calm of the gathered flock.  
The calm of trusting.

Trusting Life.  
Trusting the place where I find myself each moment of each day.

It is in trusting life that I am clothed in calm.  
It is in trusting life that I am clothed in beauty.  
It is in trusting life that I am clothed in strength.

For me this is waiting in the Presence.  
For me this is waiting in the crucible of Hope.



*Marilyn Wilkinson recently moved to a smaller house in a retirement village. The whole exercise was a challenge, however the benefits are enormous. Having fewer things and more support has liberated her to attend to the things that really matter.*

## The Garden of Hopes and Dreams

Hilary Oxford Smith

Summer is a time of abundance, colour and exuberance and a dear friend and fellow scribe, Margaret, who lives in Scotland, comes into my mind. I picture her now, standing in her remarkable garden, spectacles balanced on the tip of her nose, muddy gumboots, ready to harvest some vegetables and tie a strong cord onto a trellis so that her sweet peas can ramble. I wish Margaret were here so that she could companion and encourage this younger apprentice.

It was gardener James Kidd's imaginative creativity in 1876 that helped establish the public gardens in Oamaru on the North Otago coast where I live. Kowhai, ribbonwood and flax, lemonwood, matagouri, and piri piri, known as the forgiveness plant, grow here. Even in this Southern climate, a kauri tree stands strong and tall. *Blessed are the ones who plant trees, says the proverb, and under whose shade they will never sit; they love them for themselves, and for the sake of their children and their children's children, who are to sit beneath the shadow of their spreading boughs.*

Honeysuckle and roses sweeten and scent the landscape with apricot, lilac, cream and raspberry blooms. They echo the fragrance of other places in our world where once there was peace. Amongst the devastation and stench of cordite, fires and rubble, there will still be flowers that miraculously grow, offering the perfume of hope.

Meandering through the trees, I read a plaque on a bench seat dedicated to the memory of Norman Ellis by his wife, Betty and their children. Most, if not all of us reading this, will not know Betty or Norman or their children. Yet, somehow, this garden tells us that we do. We can discern their love of beauty and their connection with the earth. We know this was a family who loved one another and was at one with God's good creation.

In a little dell, I discover *Wonderland*, crafted in bronze by Scottish sculptor, Thomas J. Clapperton, and gifted to the children of Oamaru in 1926.

Clapperton was born in a small Borders town called Galashiels. I grew up there, and we had a dear family friend, Susie, who was his distant relative. When I was a child, she seemed very old with her white hair, rosy cheeks, and a King Charles spaniel always by her side. She lived to be one hundred. I had no idea that her ancestor had a story to tell on this far side of the world.

I amble along braided pathways and streams, which seem to have no beginnings or endings. Much of life has twists and turns and is unfinished, from symphonies to relationships. I wonder if our desire for certainty and tidy endings may disempower us to love and live creatively.



Oamaru Public Gardens - Hilary Oxford Smith

As I return to our farmhouse, a thrush sings on the branch of a high tree as he has done each day and each night for many weeks. The poet and author, Thomas Hardy, an ambivalent believer, wrote *The Darkling Thrush* in the last hours of the old nineteenth century. Leaning on a gate in a little wood under a cloudy sky and with a cold and relentless winter wind blowing, he suddenly heard the beautiful song of an ageing thrush which broke upon the grim, cold scene and the growing gloom that he felt. Hardy wondered whether the song thrush knew of some reason for hope when he couldn't find any hope...some blessed hope, whereof he knew, and I was unaware.

Once upon a time, I lived in Nice in the south of France, and sometimes my friends and I would eat at a restaurant there called Les Viviers. Since its opening in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, generations before us had sat at the same tables lit by candlelight, sharing food and a little too much wine, perhaps. They heard of wars and rumours of wars, denounced presidents and politicians, shrugged shoulders at religious pomposity; lovers gazed into each other's eyes; elderly couples ate in comfortable silence; children waited expectantly for bowls of ice cream.

This little eating place is on the street, immortalising another author, Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr. He wrote a lovely book called *A Tour Round My Garden* – a collection of letters written to his friend who was in the habit of extolling the virtues and wonders of travelling around the world. Karr, though, found beauty and solace in his garden, believing that there were more beautiful things to experience there than his friend could ever experience travelling overseas.

Flowers made love, he wrote, birds sang of their love of life, and beetles and butterflies became transformed through patience and struggle. His garden was a constant miracle, a source of wonder, a return to Eden.

Before my father, Joe, died, he asked me to scatter his ashes in the garden of a Franciscan monastery in Cimiez, a district of Nice. It is built on a high hill with a panoramic view of the city and the Mediterranean sea. With its shapes, textures and the symmetry of a monk's artistry, Dad visited there every day.

With the blessing of the Franciscan brothers and in this holy and story-telling place of vulnerability and fragility, contemplation and peace, resilience and restoration, I let them go amongst the jacaranda, mimosa, orange blossom, lavender and ancient olive trees.

How I long to return there and be enfolded by the energy, beauty and loveliness of my father's spirit in every leaf, petal and blade of grass. Such is the promise of the incarnation and the hope of the resurrection.

**Hilary Oxford Smith** is a Church of Scotland Minister, an Associated Member of the Iona Community and a published author. Hilary offers retreats in contemplative spirituality, Celtic Christianity and bereavement care and is also a Spiritual Companion.



## Mike Riddell: Horizons and Hope

Paul Fromont

No snail crosses a garden path without  
leaving a trail to mark  
its passing; a testament made silver by the  
light of the sun.<sup>1</sup>

On the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2022, my friend, Mike Riddell died. His death was unexpected, and I, along with many others, most especially his wife Rosemary and their family, was deeply shocked. Three days earlier I'd phoned him for his birthday. On the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, I'd messaged him,

Hey buddy. Hope you've eased into your next year of life. Cheering you on as always. Friday night. I'm imagining it's your pub night, and now everyone will be back at your place. Wish I was there too... Anyway, thinking of you all. Love. Paul.

There was no reply to this message.

One moment he was alive, Friday had been the usual evening gathering of friends from the 'village' for food, drinks, and conversation, and then, mere hours later, he was not.

I'm transported, back to March 2022. I'm in Oturehua, a little settlement in Central Otago. I'm sitting alone, leaning back in a chair, Mike's chair. I'm in his small studio. I'm trying to write a eulogy for him.

Looking beyond the desk, and slightly to the right, I'm looking at a framed record album cover, *Revolver*, Mike's favourite Beatles album. Also visible are his 'symbols of hope', gifted to him by Rosemary, his 'shining star' and wife of 47 years.

On the left, I'm looking at an original poster, a portrait of James K. Baxter, advertising *Impulse 72*, Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> July 1972, in the Dunedin Town Hall. There's also Nigel Brown's painting of Baxter, one of my favourites, with the word *Aroha* above his head. Nigel, Mike and Rose go back a long way. Through his art he's long been a much admired presence in their homes. Beneath are shelves, weighed down with books, multiple copies of Mike's own included. There are DVDs too, mostly of 2010's *The Insatiable Moon*, for which Mike wrote the screenplay. Rosemary directed it.

On my right, in the distance, are the gentle, snow-covered contours of the Hawkdun range. In the foreground, the hard landscaping that Mike had been doing for several months, the schist stairs, the long pergola,<sup>2</sup> new trees planted, the little stream lined with local schist, and the raised platform in the distant corner of the yard, where he would undoubtedly have sat at some point, grateful, a Central Otago Pinot Noir, or maybe a Jameson's Irish whiskey, in his hand, a big 'Central' sky stretched out above him, Rosemary at his side, content.

He'd accomplished such a lot in his landscaping project since my last visit in September 2021. That time too, I'd spent long hours in his chair, thinking, trying to write.

In March 2022, it wasn't hard *imagining* Mike, only a few days earlier, sitting where I'm sitting, in his chair, in his studio, looking to the horizon, hopeful, 'saturated with reasons not to succumb to negativity', gazing at the fruits of his labour, wondering about what lay ahead in life, searching for the right word or words, quietly reflecting, in the moment. Undoubtedly too, at times, he'd have also felt the presence of fear, of uncertainty, especially as he continued to test himself 'against the unexplored'. He daily worked to discern and partner, where he could, the Spirit at work.<sup>3</sup>

He found hope in trusting the slow, oftentimes unrecognised work of God in his life, and in the world around him, despite questions, uncertainties, and reasons for lament.

Behind me, on a blue, metal filing cabinet, is a slipcase featuring more paintings of Baxter by Nigel Brown. Within it, the four volumes of the John Weir edited *James K. Baxter Complete Prose 1949 to 1972*. Mike wrote his Otago University PhD on Baxter, titling his thesis, 'Funding Contextual Theology in Aotearoa-New Zealand: the Theological Contribution of James K. Baxter.'

Mike lived forward, not backward, and I wanted to honor that in the closing section of my eulogy for him. 'Death is the edge that is always there', John O'Donohue used to say, 'we never know how near our feet it is,' adding, 'there's a lot going on in death that we don't see at all.' We don't know where that journey is going to take us, but we trust and we hope.

Sail on, dear friend, continue the adventure, out beyond the horizon, small boat big sea, a good and gentle friend at your side, may the wind be always at your back, and at ours too.

<sup>1</sup> Mike Riddell, *Sacred Journey* (2000), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> 'Six sets of pergolas on which we will grow climbing roses. Under them, next year hopefully, we'll host an Italian 'long lunch' for all our village's inhabitants.' *Beauty, Light and Joy, Tui Motu* April 2022.

<sup>3</sup> I'm thinking here of the wonderful James K. Baxter poem 'Song to the Holy Spirit', which Mike loved.



Mike Riddell, painted by Nigel Brown. Commissioned by Rosemary for Mike's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday

No one who knew Mike would see his living as a passive yielding to forces beyond his control. They would instead see it as a consequence of a lifetime of wrestling with fate, of thoughtful responses, of hopeful choices, decisions made out of a deep-seated awareness that the universe was not against him. As he'd say of himself, Christ rose from the dead, *he* was in Christ, and Christ was in him.

*To hope is to be always moving toward our future selves.*

He would have agreed with Brené Brown, that 'hope is a way of thinking, a cognitive process...' that 'Hope is learned.'<sup>4</sup> He'd equally agree with her when she wrote that hope is 'a function of struggle... We develop hope not during the easy or comfortable times, but through adversity and discomfort.' Mike would be on the same page as Nick Cave who has said that hope is 'optimism with a broken heart.' Mike's 69-years of life bore powerful testimony to these truths.

'Earth, life, and human existence,' American theologian, John F. Haught has reflected, are situated 'within the framework of an immense cosmic drama of transformation that *is still going on.*' To accept this, as Mike did, is to preference the route of hope over the route of despair. To hope is to be always moving toward our future selves. For him, being human is not to succumb to hopeless lethargy or despair. Hopefulness, for Mike, meant always to be living towards an 'horizon of expectation.'<sup>5</sup> He wasn't what Baxter would call a 'miniaturist'; he looked over the fence, out beyond the fence.

For Mike, death was/is not the end. Death mysteriously continues to be a part of God's *creating*<sup>6</sup>. Mike is physically separated from us, but now, in John O'Donohue's words, he's 'wildly and dangerously free.' A reality I *felt* when an autumnal, golden, heart-shaped leaf, blew through the partially closed driver's side window of the car my wife and I were in, having only a few minutes earlier left Gillions Funeral Chapel, and begun our two-hour drive, the hearse ahead of us, to Blackstone Cemetery for the committal and Mike's burial.

We'd taken a similar route to the same destination on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 2018 when we buried Mike and Rose's daughter, Polly.

Mike always struck me as living toward an horizon of expectation, not always unwavering, but nonetheless hopeful for himself, and particularly for others, especially when their lives felt difficult, small, hemmed in on all sides.

4 Brené Brown, *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience* (2021).

5 John F. Haught's essay 'Teilhard de Chardin: Theology for an Unfinished Universe.', published in *From Teilhard to Omega: Co-Creating an Unfinished Universe*, edited by Ilia Delio OSF.

6 Robert Alter helpfully translates the opening sentence of Genesis 1 in this way, 'when God began to create...'. The work of creating is ongoing, is unfinished.

Mike was always a pastor,<sup>7</sup> always cared, and in so many ways was, for me, what John O'Donohue would describe as an *anam cara*, Gaelic for 'soul friend'. For a long time he had more hope in me than I had in myself. I was fearful, uncertain, and unable to trust myself, or the gifts and grace innate in me, gifts and graces Mike and Rose always saw and encouraged.

*'... live in such a way as to create hope for all those [you] meet... remind the inmates of Greytown that there is colour in the universe.'*

He encouraged, and encourages me still, to breathe, to keep rowing, to live less self-protectively, less fearfully, more trustfully, and to continue to 'stoke an enduring hope'.

Mike's first published book was *Godzone: A Guide to the Travels of the Soul*, the subtitle perfectly suggestive of its content. In it, he wrote that life 'requires adventure, experiment, possibility...' 'It is hope,' he said, 'that fuels the engine of creativity. It transforms the closed circle of conformity into a spiral of potential...It's not an empty escapist hope; ... it works with the raw material of the here and now.'

If you live in Godzone, 'live in such a way as to create hope for all those [you] meet... remind the inmates of Greytown that there is colour in the universe.'

Elsewhere he'd write, 'we need not be obsessed with *where* our spiritual voyage will take us.' What is significant, he'd often say to me, is that we learn how to make that journey *our own*, that we find the practices that enable us to settle into it, to find our own pace, and the rhythm that sustains persistence.

Mike knew, first-hand, that persistence was fuelled by hope. He was hope-filled, and always questing for a fuller, deeper, a more authentic experience and expression of his God-given humanity. He knew he had a world within him, and he engaged with it, just as passionately as he engaged with his outer world.

I think of him, now, sitting on his little yellow digger, an expression of absolute delight on his face, his smile as bright as the digger he'd bought to make easier the work of transforming his and Rosemary's backyard into the oasis they both dreamed of, a paradise garden hewn from the hard and stony Central Otago soil.

He'd write about this creative venture in what would become his final article for *Tui Motu*, an independent New Zealand Catholic publication, one that had become a longstanding and important outlet for Mike's writing and reflection. His closing paragraph included these words, words that today feel both sad and deeply poignant.

<sup>7</sup> He was, for a number of years, Ponsonby Baptist's pastor.

'Of course, one of the ironies of my attempt to make beauty where there was none, is that I've already outlived my prognosis and may never get to enjoy the garden I'm creating. That has nothing to do with it. Our mission, should we choose to accept it, is to show forth in our lives the beauty with which God has touched us.'

May Mike's life, his passion, writing, creativity, and disciplined pursuit of beauty, stoke in us an enduring hope as we, just as he did, live our own lives as fully, freely, and fearlessly as we are able, looking 'toward the distant shore', a good and gentle friend at our side, the wind at our backs.

#### Note


Unattributed quotes are taken from Mike's articles in the April 21 and April 22 issues of *Tui Motu*. All others are from his books: *Sacred Journey*; *With Every Breath...*; and *Until the End: Notes from a Small Life*.

**Paul Fromont** lives in Cambridge. He wanders far and wide, with much gratitude, throughout our amazing country, with his wife, Gita. They both feel the lure of the sea and dream one day of moving from inland to coastal New Zealand.



**Karo Wilson** lives in Oamaru, where she works in both local and national Children's Ministry roles for the Presbyterian Church. In her free time, she enjoys drumming in the pipe band, quizzing or being involved in musical theatre. (Page 25)





## The Maunga Karo Wilson

Lord, as we look to the mountain,  
the maunga that stands as a sentinel before us,  
we are reminded of your steadfast love for us.

When we are lost, tossed on stormy waters,  
our eyes return to the maunga.  
Once again we are reminded of your goodness.

When we thrash, bash through the lonely wilderness,  
our eyes return to the maunga,  
and once again we feel your spirit uplifting and upholding us.

When we are crushed, rushed by the demands of this calling,  
our eyes remain on the mountain,  
on the one who sustains and nourishes us.

When the maunga is shrouded in mist,  
when we cannot see its face,  
it does not desert us, it does not cease to be.

In the waiting, Lord, help us to keep our eyes on you,  
patiently waiting in hope, for the clouds to clear.

May our eyes always be drawn to the maunga,  
that even though we may be lost, lonely,  
may we always be,  
hopefully,  
searching,  
seeking God.

## The Gift of Hope

Elizabeth Clark

What is hope?  
How can I be hopeful when life feels hopeless?  
How can I bring hope to others?

I can't give away what I do not have!

I remember my first lecture at university when training to be a social worker. We were told that the most important gift we needed was to be able to give people hope. Wow, that was a surprise! Just sounded too simple, not academic enough for a university lecture.

*Jesus was a gift of hope.*

My learning curves about hope have come through hopelessness. I can *not* do this on my own, in my own strength. Hindsight is a great teacher. I soon learned that hope is not just a vague feeling that things will get better. Hope involves action and action is what moves us towards the things we hope for.

So how do we equip ourselves with the words of hope?

Jesus was so hopeful and such a hope giver. Jesus was a gift of hope. Jesus loved people unconditionally and valued them before they behaved differently. He believed in people, even the lowest of the low. A good example is the parable of the Good Samaritan. The lowest of the low came to the rescue.

Jesus knew how to keep hope alive. He knew that hope is a relational process. That people need relationships. Jesus did not run away from inappropriate behaviour. He influenced people's attitudes with words and actions. He could do this as he had an inner voice.

At his baptism, in his encounter with the Loving Presence, he heard, 'You are my beloved'. These words equipped him with hope and insight.

He went away to have quietness in the wilderness in a place where he would not be disturbed. Jesus' wisdom, love and inner voice came out of the silence.

My inner voice came out of my desperation and hopelessness. Two of our children were killed in a car accident. I had a voice that said, 'You cannot go on.' The feeling was total blackness. I needed help. I was hopeless and helpless. Being able to express my feelings in the quiet places I chose, I found there was then space for the presence of peace. 'Sacred One, fill me with your peace.'

Resting in the love that is God worked. I could survive a little longer. At first only for ten minutes. Then repeating the process. There was a little hope on the horizon. The silence grew.

Healing has gradually happened over the years and I can say that being in a hopeless situation has given me a path to the living Divine Presence. That silence has given me an inner voice that is very amazing in gifting me with insight, intuition and resonance that equips me in many listening opportunities. I have continually been given the words to bring hope to others. Henri Nouwen says, 'Silence helps us to discern, to know the next best step.'

Yes, contemplation and silence are gifts of hope to be worked at bringing deep rewards.

*Elizabeth Clark is happily retired, living in a retirement village in Richmond Nelson. Her experience as a counsellor, spiritual director, social worker and Presbyterian minister gives a firm foundation for everyday living with a few hundred elderly others. Elizabeth is still learning and frequently reminded never to say "never."*



White dove above Jesus' baptismal place, River Jordan: Anna Johnstone

## Hope

Valerie Roberts

**Hope** is what keeps me going when all seems lost,  
when darkness and despair have shut out the light,  
when life collapses in on itself so that I can no longer breathe.

**Hope** is the gutsy wild roar fighting its way to the surface,  
that says giving up isn't an option here.

**Hope** is the small bubbling stream joining the great river of life.

**Hope** is what helps me to believe that something, somewhere will change,  
that there is beauty to be found amongst the ashes of burnt dreams,  
that there are dormant seeds in the frozen ground  
waiting to germinate and sprout in Spring.

**Hope** says that there is goodness inherent in each hurting soul,  
that there is a bigger purpose at work in the chaos and brokenness.

**Hope** is the candle that someone lights for me  
to help me find the next step on the way.

**Hope** is the commitment of the one who stays  
with me in my fear and stuckness.

**Hope** is the arms that hold me as I yield to  
the raging storms within.

**Hope** is the one who sees what I can't  
and shows me that there is more.

May I also be a conduit of that **hope**,  
a sparkle creating light together with every other star.



Snowdrops in Moeraki – Julie Saraswati



*Valerie Roberts is a Spiritual Director living on Kapiti Coast with her husband and two cats. She is a creative contemplative who loves planning and facilitating workshops and retreats, and finds great joy in her grandchildren, nature and art. Writing is also one of her creative expressions.*



## Out of Exile – Hope is born

Caleb Hardie

What does hope look like when the ground shifts beneath our feet?

Last year, I took part in a six week online retreat entitled: 'Exile and Coming Home – An Archetypal Journey through the Old Testament'. The retreat, run by Abbey of the Arts, was excellent and helped inform my study leave topic: 'Exile and the Pandemic'.

Between 597 and 587 BCE, many Jewish people were taken from their homeland as captives to Babylon, following their defeat as a nation in the Jewish-Babylonian War and the destruction of King Solomon's Temple. This period in captivity is known as the Exile and much of the Biblical narrative draws on this experience. Many of the prophetic writings and Psalms were written through the lens of Exile, the events leading up to it, life in Babylon as an exiled and scattered people, and upon their long-awaited return to Jerusalem in 539 BCE. The Exile was a defining period in Israelite history.

In many respects, exile has been a part of the human condition since our origins and the biblical story captures something of the quest to return to a feeling of connectedness, to home, to God, and to wholeness. Over time, the term 'exile' has been used to describe the experience of any person who is forced away from their home and unable to return for legal or other reasons.

I think the present pandemic has been a kind of exile-like experience of displacement for many of us. Like the people of the Bible we have found ourselves grappling with how we might live, survive, even thrive in the strange new world of lockdowns and restrictions, mandates and mask-wearing. At first we just hoped for a return to normal, a return to the life we enjoyed before the pandemic as long as that life had been good. But as time went on, I think we began to see life differently and what we hoped for began to shift. It was as if our new exilic-state awoke us to the feelings of '*life is not as it should be*'.

Many people were, of course, already experiencing those feelings before the pandemic. Some of the resistance to the Government-led response has come out of this dissonance felt in parts of society around issues of equity and hope that were being felt long before Covid 19 arrived. We began to wonder – was there a better way possible and hope was born.

For a people of faith experiencing exile, questions began to emerge: How are we to live? What ought we to hope for and work collectively towards? Is it just a matter of returning 'home' to the life we had before or can things actually be better than they were before? Is a new kind of hope being birthed out of this experience?

I think it takes a necessary shift in perspective for this kind of hope to be born. The kind of shift Jesus called for in the first public words that he is recorded as saying: *Metanoete*. St Jerome (4th Century) translated this Greek word into Latin as *paenitenta* which means 'repent' or 'do penance', initiating as Richard Rohr writes: '*...a host of moralistic connotations that have shaped our understanding of the Gospels ever since.*' But a more literal translation of the Greek imperative verb *Metanoete*, is to 'change your mind' or as Rohr terms it: '*Go beyond your mind.*' (*The Universal Christ*).

***One of my greatest learnings is that suffering can be one of life's most astute teachers!***

How have our minds been changed through the experiences of the past two years? What has enabled us to go beyond our minds to encounter the mind of God in the midst of exile?

I wonder if you would describe yourself as a contemplative person. Given that you are reading a copy of *Refresh*, I'd say you like to think deeply about life! Perhaps this exile-like experience has given you cause to think more deeply about the direction of your life, your relationships, your hopes for our world? A key question for the contemplative is: What if there is more going on here than I think?

I'm not sure if I can call myself a contemplative but I do believe in that sense of more, of otherness, of something far greater than what I can see or understand being at work in the world. I suspect that anyone who believes in God recognises the truth of that contemplative stance, that there is more going on than we realise!

Ronna Detrick, one of the contributors to the online retreat, says that *contemplative* might better serve us an adjective rather than a noun, a characteristic more than a practice. She says it is helpful sometimes to look at antonyms, words which are in direct opposition to what we are trying to understand to give us a feel for what something looks like or means.

Antonyms of *contemplative* are words like: *ignorant, unthoughtful, negligent, shallow, rejecting, disregarding, unreflective*. I'm assuming not many of us would want to use this list of words when describing ourselves! Synonyms which help to describe *contemplative* however throw up some far more appealing descriptions: *reflective, thoughtful, attentive, pondering, ruminative* to name but a few.

As part of the invitation to occupy a more contemplative stance, retreatants were asked to consider a painful exile-like experience from their past and to share not the details of the pain, but rather the lessons that others could learn without having to endure the pain. As I began to consider this, I found myself wondering if such lessons could ever be learnt without the pain. Could these two things even be separated? One of my greatest learnings is that suffering can be one of life's most astute teachers!

But I did love the thought that my children and perhaps even others, might learn from my own mistakes.

John Valters Paintner says: *'Most of us learn the hard way in life: from our own mistakes. If we're lucky, we might learn the easy way: from the mistakes of others.'*

I wonder what you would say were your most hard-fought lessons in life? What have you learned through your exile-like experiences?

Some of the lessons/truths I have learnt the hard way:

1. Humility – an awareness of your own brokenness and not-right-ness amid broken systems and other people's failings is vital. A lack of it can lead you into exile. Learning it – can help lead you out.
2. The importance of a gentle non-confrontational approach to bringing about lasting change.
3. Face to face is the key – don't work through pain, frustration, anger or problematic issues via 'written mediums' – you have to 'see' the person so their presence can inform your response. Thank goodness for Zoom but even that has its limits!
4. Leaving may be the right thing to do – but the problems that are 'ours' will inevitably come with us.
5. Understanding our own cycles and patterns especially in response to conflict or hardship is valuable. Do I bottle things up? Do I distract myself with vices? Do I run away in search of greener pastures? Do I blame others? Do I get depressed? Do I shut down?
6. What we do impacts upon others – more than we realise. *'No one is an island unto themselves.'* (John Donne) The spread of the virus highlighted our deep connection to one another!
7. It is important to have clarity about our anger/movement energy. What is the change I am wanting? Will my responses help to bring about this change or will they lead to deeper pain and dissonance?
8. Exile/wilderness experiences are lonely, barren, hard, painful. They are also gift – places of healing, where wisdom and hope are born. Exile is the place where we are found and 'seen' by God.

I wonder what wisdom you have gained through your experiences of exile? How has hope been born within you? Contemplating our lived experience of the pandemic is a worthwhile exercise – it helps us to live deeply through and out of it, confident in what we have come to know but also able to accept the ambiguity and unknowing that is

shaping this new season we find ourselves in. It is a way of making room for the kind of change and growth that leads to wholeness as God makes a home in our hearts.

Henri Nouwen calls it choosing to hope. He writes:

*'To wait with openness and trust is an enormously radical attitude toward life. It is choosing to hope that something is happening for us that is far beyond our own imaginings. It is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life. It is living with the conviction that God moulds us in love, holds us in tenderness, and moves us away from the sources of our fear.'*

In this Advent season might we choose to hope for the kind of post-exilic world God longs to bring into being – a world that is kinder, more loving, more forgiving, more just than anything we had before. A world that says life can be as it should be for all people not just for some – that God desires wholeness for all of creation.

Out of Exile – Hope is born!

*Caleb Hardie is the Minister at Albany Presbyterian Church. He is married to Deborah and they have four teenage children. When he is not thinking about Ministry he is thinking about how to improve his golf!*



Hope - Johneen Atkinson

## Heart Song

Jo Anastasiadis

There is a song on the wind,  
Sacred Heart sings of longing, an ache so deep  
our heart's darkness is but a shadow.  
Yearning sings piercing, throbbing thirsty for us;  
for Love to be received from Giving Heart.

And heart hears the song twisting through the shadows,  
a flickering flame distant to the furthest vision;  
So far flung as to be questioned  
in the night of near drowning.  
The Black has obscured so much and left me without.

Yet Hope has been born and is held  
no matter the weakness of the grasp;  
The vision is fixed in Light's direction  
and dare not look elsewhere.

Slowly Heart Song is heard:  
Note by wavering note,  
a yearning aching through eternity.  
A Song wondrous, beautiful in its pining,  
tortuous in its ache for us.

Such a desire for Heart's Love to be truly, fully seen;  
And heard; allowed to flow into soul:

*'Oh how I have Loved you, from before the beginning of time.  
And Oh how I have waited, patiently waited  
for your heart to hear My Heart and respond.  
My Love of you is yours, it has always been yours.  
I Love you with all of My Being:  
I cannot Love you any more than completely;  
For I Am Love,  
and all My Essence Loves!  
And I cannot Love you any less than totally,  
for how could Love be any less than Love?*

*So there is nothing you can do that can  
make Me Love you more;  
nor is there anything you can do  
that could make Me Love you less.  
For My Nature is Love and you have all My Love;  
it is impossible for Me to Love any less than Totally,  
for I Am God, not people.'*

The Heart Song sings in soul  
Until heart echoes the resonance  
And Heart Song's ache finds its home in heart

And now when vision becomes dulled and Light obscured  
I stop and listen for Heart Song  
For the ache of Love stretching from eternity  
To reorient heart to Heart through Sacred Song

*Jo Anastasiadis, a spiritual director in Wellington, loves God's  
creation and seeing others grow in their relationship with God.  
She has recently rediscovered the delight of play with her young  
grandchildren and the joy of simple moments.*



Feather Heart – Janine Ross-Johnstone

## Refreshing Refresh

Bruce Maden - Convenor

Kia ora friends, warm greetings. In this edition of *Refresh* we farewell our Editor, Anna Johnstone. Anna, for the last two years, has with great passion brought her editorial skills to nourish our contemplative space. We deeply appreciate the huge time and effort Anna, aided by her husband Kerry, has lovingly poured into *Refresh*.

Prompted by Anna's retirement, SGM Workgroup has decided to conduct a review of *Refresh*, its purpose, style and how it can most effectively continue to speak into and nourish the contemplative movement in Aotearoa while taking account of the contextual transitions occurring in our society. Workgroup's Kathryn Overall and Vicki Roberts will provide leadership in this design process. They will invite reader input probably in the next issue of *Refresh* and through the website. Thanks to the gracious offer of editorial assistance from Diane Gilliam-Weeks for the Winter 23 issue we will all be able to continue to enjoy *Refresh* while our review process is conducted.

As we appreciate the new opportunities provided by our wonderfully 'refreshed' SGM website <https://www.sgm.org.nz> Workgroup has also decided to also move our Calendar of Retreats and Events into the digital space for 2023. To assist you to navigate this transition a postcard has been included with this issue of *Refresh*. We encourage you to use these postcards to invite new people or audiences to view the Calendar and our website.

As we enter Advent may 'The Hope' refresh and nourish you. Advent blessings.

*Bruce*

## Seasons

The familiar words from Ecclesiastes tell us there is a season for everything and everything has its season. My season as editor of *Refresh*, short though it has been, ends with this edition of The Hope. Sometimes it takes something to occur which opens our eyes wider and this led to my realisation that it would be better to step aside.

I never do anything half-heartedly, so for the past two years, I've lived and breathed, read and written, hoped and prayed *Refresh*. It's been all-embracing, all-encompassing and I've loved it. I've been in contact with so many people, so many of our creative, God-loving contemplative community, and others, that my life has been deeply enriched. It's been a privilege to showcase the words and images of gifted authors and artists.

I'm grateful to God and to SGM for the opportunity of these two years as editor – plus the many years proofreading *Refresh*. I shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace.

And hopefully my paints and brushes will come out from their hiding places...

*Anna*

## Hope: Insights from Landscape, Literature and Little Flying Things

Phillip Donnell

It is a long way to Hopeless Hut in Nelson Lakes National Park. There are two ways of getting there. One is to zigzag to the top of Mount Robert, trudge the windswept ridgeline beyond, drop into the Angelus Basin, sidle around Hinapouri Tarn, veer left and finally reach Sunset Saddle, a low point between two peaks. You never know what you will subsequently meet on the unmarked descent through snow basins, tarns, scree and talus.

The other route is no less arduous. From St Arnaud you skirt Lake Rotoiti, continue on up the seemingly-endless Travers Valley, hang a right at Hopeless Creek, and climb unrelentingly, dwarfed by steep slopes on either side. The uneven trail twists and turns, criss-crossing streams and sapping your energy. Rapids and rockfalls may impede your path, and the weather may take a turn for the worse any time of year.

Either alternative will take you a couple of days, and on arrival the first thing that strikes you upon entering the small six-bunk shelter is a warning notice on the wall: 'This hut is sited on an avalanche path. During times of heavy snowfall it may be unsafe to stay here.' The view of Mount Hopeless (2278m) from the window is both glorious and unsettling. For the outdoor enthusiast, there's something darkly appealing to visiting places where the name dares you to stay away, but you don't want to linger here in the winter.

Hopelessness is not a state of heart or mind that comes upon you suddenly. It is usually the end result of an extended process – a downward spiral or an upward struggle. Often that journey involves the sun setting on a long-held and earnestly-desired aspiration – a personal 'Sunset Saddle'. It is a low point in life which leaves you stumbling into an unknown future, frequently fraught with many 'dangers, toils and snares.' Hope deferred or extinguished may propel you onto a slippery slope.

Or maybe it is the consequence of protracted obstacles and setbacks in your quest to achieve peace, security, harmony, wholeness, wellbeing, happiness or whatever. You think you are 'pushing water uphill' until such time as you find yourself 'up the creek without a paddle', i.e. in a situation where you do not have the wherewithal (time, energy, resources, motivation, etc.) to make progress on any front – physical, spiritual, mental or social. Chronic affliction or adversity breeds discouragement and depression.

The eventual outcome is the same in both cases; you reach a point where the prospects seem overwhelmingly bleak and where you may well be at risk if you remain there too long. You feel exhausted, unable to continue, and very vulnerable to outward circumstances, which may shatter your equilibrium. Reaching this point is not all bad,

however, if it prompts you to trace the root causes of your sense of hopelessness, brings an awareness that you cannot continue in your own strength, and leads you to surrender in deep dependence upon God. Learning to live with not knowing, confident of the goodness of God whatever happens, is a key to restoration and renewal.

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John Bunyan's famous allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, describes the spiritual journey of a man named Christian. The 'Slough of Despond' ('swamp of despondency') is a deep bog into which the protagonist, Christian, sinks under the weight of his shortcomings, and his sense of guilt for them, before finding release at the cross.

Christian finds Faithful, also a former resident of the City of Destruction, who accompanies him to Vanity Fair, a place built by Beelzebub, where everything pertaining to human taste, delight and desire is sold. Here both are arrested because of their disdain for the wares and business of the Fair. Faithful is put on trial and executed by burning at the stake. A supernatural chariot then takes him to the Celestial City.

At this point we meet Hopeful, a citizen who has heard Faithful's self-defence at the trial and witnessed his courage during martyrdom. He is converted by the experience and decides to accompany Christian on his pilgrimage. Later, Hopeful describes more fully his conversations with Faithful, which helped him to deal with his growing sense of shame. After an inner battle, Hopeful had a vision of Christ telling him to believe, and realised that he must simply look to Christ, instead of his own failing efforts, to reform his life.

As they share a rigorous journey, it is Hopeful who steadfastly steers Christian towards trust and rest in the grace and enabling of God. They traverse the Plain of Ease, resist the temptation of a silver mine named Lucre, enter By-path Meadow, then stumble onto the grounds of Doubting Castle, where they are caught, imprisoned, and beaten by Giant Despair. At last, Christian remembers that he has a key called 'Promise', which he and Hopeful use to unlock the doors and escape.

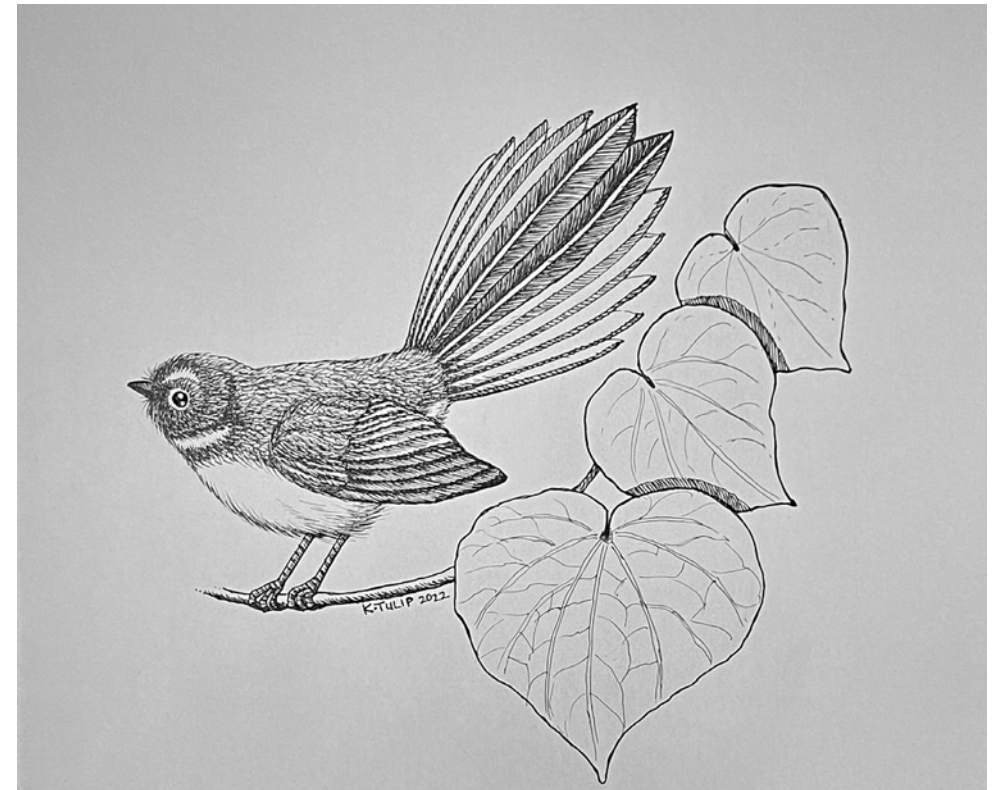
I have often found that the shining example of others, as they face difficulties, inspires faith. Moreover, the influence of a significant other has fostered hope through the most testing of times. In the first instance, that significant other is Christ, the one who never leaves nor forsakes: 'What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.' But my hope has also been animated by many human friends, loyally lending sacrificial support and assisting me towards a desired destination. Hope seldom grows in a vacuum. It needs relationship to be nurtured and maintained.

Further, the divine quickening of a biblical promise has repeatedly released me from the clutches of despair. There are plenty of them. Canadian schoolteacher Everek Storms tallied up 7,487 promises by God to people (85%). If ever there was a constantly-available antidote to hopelessness, it is this goldmine.

My favourite promise is I Peter 5:10: 'And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.' (ESV). What a prodigious promise! At a pivotal juncture, the message of that Scripture averted catastrophe.

\*\*\*\*\*

At first I thought it was coincidence. But it kept on happening. Every couple of days. Over nine months. Scores of occasions. In different locations. A fantail encounter. Sometimes flitting around my head singing a greeting. Sometimes dancing joyfully from branch to branch. Sometimes sitting still on the ground in front of me (a most uncharacteristic behaviour for this bird!). And always with a compassionate look in its eyes.



Fantail encounter - Katrina Tulip

It ultimately dawned on me that these episodes were not chance. Something was going on beneath the surface. They were divinely orchestrated. I perceived that they were God-sent messengers calling me to pay attention. A lengthening litany of love. They occurred during a dark night of the soul, when circumstances not of my making were taking their toll, and I was completely powerless to do anything about them.

Some see the *piwakawaka* as the New Zealand equivalent of the biblical dove – a tangible symbol of the Holy Spirit. Certainly that is how it appeared to me. I asked what the Merciful One wished to speak into my heart. The same inward reply came time after time: 'I know exactly where you are, what your current situation is, how you are feeling, and what you need. Do not be afraid. I am the One you can cling to when you are left living among the fragments of a story that once made sense. I am with you – always.'

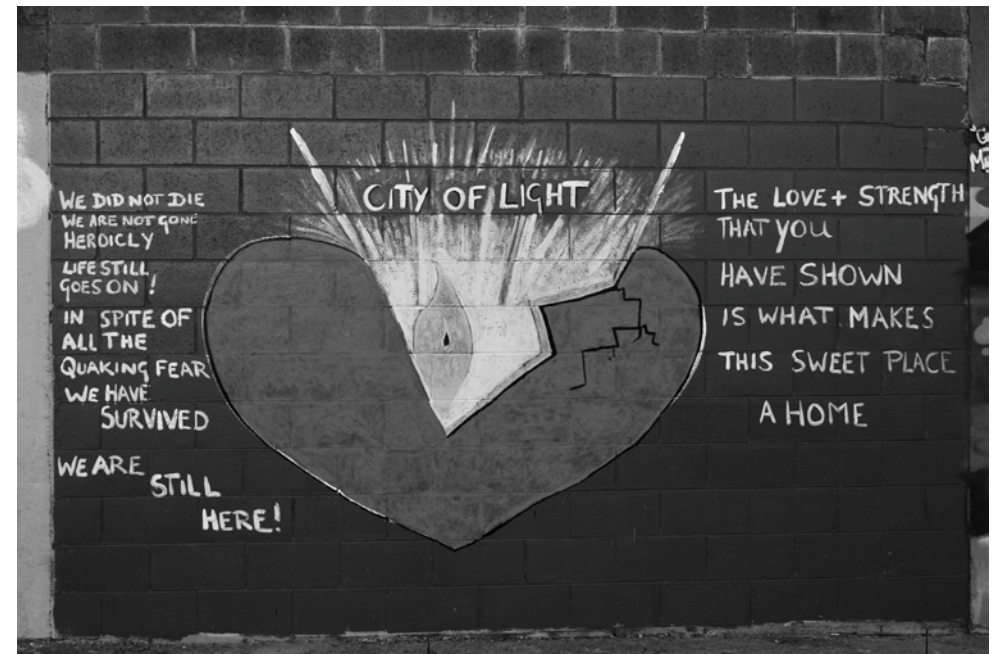
A fidgety person is described as 'a fantail's tail', because of the bird's restless movements. Inwardly I was stressed and agitated. Grief evoked many tears. At times I felt helpless, hopeless, and very alone. For me these birds were harbingers of hope, as well as cheerleaders for change. The Lord was gently indicating that part of me was being readied to come to an end, and a new season in life was about to come forth. I was regularly moved to echo the psalmist: *Why am I so sad? Why am I so troubled? I will put my hope in God, and once again I will praise him, my savior and my God* (42:5 NLT).

Have you ever been sent a harbinger of hope? It is a profoundly uplifting thought that the God of the universe cares enough about an individual to arrange such experiences, and in so doing can employ any means at hand. In my case, God utilised little flying things. For Abraham, it was a sheep in a thicket. For Noah and his family, a rainbow. Jacob saw a stairway of angels. Ancient Israelites walked beneath pillars of fire and cloud. God pointed Naaman to a non-descript waterway. Isaiah pictured a lion lying with a lamb. David contemplated the starry heavens. For Paul, it came as Ananias. John saw a New Jerusalem. For all of us, it is unchangingly, an empty tomb.

Such harbingers of hope are aspects of the Lord's ministry to those who need assurance and encouragement. They are timely and tailor-made. God knows exactly when to send them, and what kind will be most appropriate. You do not have to go looking for them. God will help you to recognise them through the inner witness of the indwelling Spirit. As you are blessed and transformed by them, my prayer for you is this: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.* (Romans 15:13 NRSV).



**Phillip Donnell**, married to Katrina Tulip, is a retired Baptist pastor living in Tauranga. He leads Footsteps Walking Club of Aotearoa NZ & New Creation NZ. His 3 children and 11 grandchildren are a major preoccupation. He enjoys writing, running, walking, kayaking, genealogy and travel.



New Brighton wall art after earthquake: Anna Johnstone

## Passionately Hopeful!

Hamish Galloway

I lived in Christchurch through the Christchurch earthquakes. There was a lot to be despondent about. People were looking for signs of hope. The signs came in lots of different ways. One that really lifted many people was the street art that sprang up on the sides of buildings. Another was the increasing numbers coming to church on a Sunday. At Hope Presbyterian, where I was a pastor at the time, we decided on a mission statement which led with 'Building Hope in a Broken World'. This seemed to strike a chord with people who were longing for meaning and hope in difficult times.

I was remembering this as I reflected on our most recent struggles. COVID weariness, an accelerating gap between rich and poor driven by out-of-control house prices and our dismay at the brutal invasion of Ukraine! Where is the hope? How does it break in?

I like the glimpse of hope in the words of Leonard Cohen:

*Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in.*

To that, we Christians add a faithful voice drawing attention to the first cracks of dawning light at sunrise on the third day that transformed the despair of the cross to something filled with hope. This faith of ours - that the resurrection transforms the seeming despair of the cross into a world-changing victory of life over death, forgiveness over sin and good over evil - remains as powerful and relevant as ever!

This Advent season maybe the hope candle is the most powerful and significant of all. We light it with the conviction that not only is there a God, but the birth of Jesus speaks of a God who cares to the point of sacrificial engagement with our broken human condition. As we recall the powerful Biblical theme of remembering, we remember that again and again, when all seemed darkness and loss, God did not abandon us, and we can confidently say with John:

*In Jesus was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1: 4-5)*



**Hamish Galloway** is Moderator of the Presbyterian Church. Based in Christchurch at Cashmere Presbyterian church, Hamish is married to Anne with three adult children and four grandchildren. He has enjoyed a long and varied ministry in the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand and in churches in Australia, Canada, USA and London. In addition to his passion for faith and family, he loves gardening, golf and a good novel!



Nelson Cathedral: Kerry Johnstone

## SGM News

Bruce Maden

Tena koutou e whānau o SGM,

Ka nui te mihi aroha ki a koutou. With some trepidation, I tread in the gifted footsteps of Jane Wilkinson who resigned as Convenor at our September Workgroup hui along with Trish O'Donnell. Both Trish and Jane have made huge contributions to SGM with a combined tenure on Workgroup of 34 years!

But as with all transitions, as well as acknowledging our sense of loss, we also had a sense of new hope and direction as we welcomed to Workgroup two new members, Kathryn Overall and Donald Scott. Kathryn continues to amaze us with her imaginative ideas of how to further develop our website and our online digital presence. We look forward to content creations of 'blog' interviews and highlighted excerpts from some of our special interest projects. Donald was thrown in the deep end at our September Workgroup as he ably conducted the whaikōrero on our behalf as manuhiri at Te Maungarongo Marae at Ohope.

Workgroup being held at Te Maungarongo Marae (Te Aka Puaho - the Marae of the Māori Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand) is a further step on our journey towards becoming a Te Tiriti-informed organisation and in our ongoing desire to build greater connection between our kaupapa of Christian contemplative spirituality and Te Ao Māori.

We deeply acknowledge with gratitude Vicki Roberts' (Ngā Ruahine, Te Atiawa) ongoing guidance and sharing of Mātauranga Māori as we embrace this holy invitation. We also acknowledge Diane Gilliam-Weeks' deep relational connections with Te Maungarongo that allowed us to be so warmly welcomed and hosted. There was a special imaginative and hope-full energy infusing our kōrero and we sensed a holy presence blessing our endeavours within the Wharenui.

May we be inspired by this *Refresh* to be true 'Hope bearers' this Advent season.

Iti rearea, teitei kahikatea ka taea - Although the rearea is a small bird it can ascend the lofty heights of the Kahikatea tree.

Ma te Atua ki a koutou e manaaki - God's blessings be upon you all.



*Bruce Maden lives in Palmerston North. He and his wife Elizabeth have been deeply committed to solidarity with disadvantaged communities and being an incarnational presence within them. He also provides leadership mentoring, spiritual direction and supervision.*

## SDFP Report

Fran Francis – Coordinator

It's a busy season for the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme. Interviewing applicants for the coming year is one of the highlights of my role. The unique window into the personal story of life and faith that our process provides places me on holy ground over and over. I see, from the accounts people provide, and hear, as they tell us in person, of the many things they have faced in their lives, how they have found grace. I see their generosity of spirit in service, and how, at the right time, the contemplative path offered them a new and grounded way of being with God, themselves, and others. Their own spiritual directors often play a significant role, but some come with little or no experience of receiving direction so this is the time for them to begin. Our mantra is, 'you can't give what you haven't received' and so their personal adventure of finding and confiding in an *anam cara* or soul friend, begins.

This time of year is also when we reach the end of the formation journey with the Year Two participants. 2021 was a big cohort with people who, due to Covid, found themselves with time to do the course. They were not as affected by the lockdowns and online learning as the previous year. Our local facilitators led workshop days when lockdown prevented me from leaving Auckland. A silver lining of the pandemic has been the involvement of our additional facilitators who stepped up, sometimes at short notice, to fill my rather scary shoes!

As I look ahead to 2023, I'm looking forward to working with Bruce Maden as the new Convenor of SGM Workgroup and also with Donald Scott and Kathryn Overall as they join us. We hope to see the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme continue its gentle evolution. It has been going 34 years and, incredibly, I'm only the sixth person to helm it and, now, six years in, I think it reflects wonderfully on the vision of SGM, the calibre of people involved and the goodness of God.

If you asked me, 'Fran, what can I do to support this work?' I'd say, 'We need money.' We don't have funding, we want to provide scholarships, we have people to pay. You may know of a fund we could tap into, or you may have a fund you can share – that would be amazing! You can certainly tell people about the programme and direct them to our new website. I hope you've visited it! [www.sgm.org.nz](http://www.sgm.org.nz). It is for you too. And you can pray. That is what we are doing. Let's do it together.

Ngā mihi nui.

*Fran Francis leads the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme and enjoys curating spaces in which people can encounter God. She is hugely excited, with her husband, Vic, and whānau, to be welcoming her first grandchild in November.*





## Next time...

### **Winter 2023 Refresh**

**Theme 'Contemplative gifts for the future of the Church'**

**Deadline March 28, 2023**

Next time... Karl Rahner once said, 'The Christian of the future will be a mystic, or he will not exist at all.' Yet during the era of institutionalized Christendom, it was possible to neglect the teaching of contemplative disciplines. How did that impoverish the Body? How many have left or will leave disillusioned? Who will faithfully remain to reclaim Christianity's contemplative roots? Who will 'stay out loud' to do the formational work and the just action required – to undo the harm done in Jesus' name? What role will spiritual directors take in birthing renewal?

In the 21 century and beyond, how might contemplative disciplines help answer the question, 'How then shall we live?'

What new and renewed forms will our worship take? How will contemplative action – grounded in deep listening to others and for God – encourage our relationship with all humanity and all Creation?

What difference is contemplative spirituality making in your church family, their understanding of God, and who God loves? What do you see happening?

**Acting Editor Diane Gilliam-Weeks [dianegw@outlook.com](mailto:dianegw@outlook.com)**

### **Guidelines for writers – please, please, please!**

*keep contributions to fewer than 2000 words*

*use single quotation marks*

*be conversational in style*

*use conjunctions wherever possible*

*use endnotes instead of footnotes*

*use inclusive language wherever possible*

*ensure any images you send are larger than 2MB.*



## Resources

**Awhi Mai Awhi Atu** Women in Creation Care, edited by Sylvia Purdie. This extraordinary book tells the stories of 30 women living in Aotearoa New Zealand from many cultures, who are leading in environmental action. Through their experience a powerful story emerges of God at work in a rich diversity of ways. Awhi mai - receive God's love, awhi atu – share God's love. A book of hope! Philip Garside Publishing LTD.  
www.pgpl.co.nz

**Jane Goodall:** *The Book of Hope*

**Jan Richardson:** Poem - Blessings of Hope

**Emily Dickinson:** Poem - Hope is the thing with feathers

**Kathleen Norris:** Christmas Eve Vigil, *God with Us: Rediscovering the Meaning of Christmas*, ed. Greg Pennoyer and Gregory Wolf (Paraclete Press: 2007), 121, 122–123.

**Elaine Hagenberg:** You Do Not Walk Alone  
<https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=you+do+not+walk+alone>

**Elaine Hagenberg:** All Things New  
<https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=aal+things+new+hagenberg>

**Johannes Brahms:** A German Requiem  
Note by John Bawden MMus (University of Surrey, UK): Editor of *A Directory of Choral Music*:

In the third movement, the baritone soloist and chorus begin by pondering the transience of human existence. The soloist then asks 'In what shall I hope?' and the reply, 'My hope is in thee', wells up from the depths in a rising crescendo of affirmation. This leads seamlessly into a broad, imposing fugue, remarkable for its omnipresent pedal D which, whilst creating considerable tension during the fugue itself, also provides an unshakable foundation for the final resolution.

Judgement day is not the focus, but the resurrection.

*It was an explosion of joyful hope! The first time I heard Brahms German Requiem, years ago, it blasted through me, flooding me with heart-lifting joy. Anna*

## Sincere Thanks to Other Contributors

**Siobhan Dilly** Executive Officer, NZ Catholic Bishops Conference, for permission to use Damien Walker's stunning painting, as our cover. Fascinating details can be found at <https://www.tearaamaria.nz/artwork>

**Janine Ross-Johnstone** for her beautiful images of the sleeping baby and the heart feathers <https://www.jphotographic.co.nz>

**Rev Alf Taylor** for permission to reprint his thoughtful Advent reflection given when he was Interim Minister at Albany Presbyterian Church.

**Rev Sylvia Miller-Hardie** for allowing us to use her hope-filled prayer for World Communion Sunday.

**Julie Saraswati** for the beauty of the snowdrops image.

**Right Reverend Hamish Galloway** for so graciously adapting his Easter message, given as Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand, so that it leads us into Advent.

**Cheryl Connelly rsm**, Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa, Sisters of Mercy New Zealand, for allowing us to share two of her beautiful images.

**Alfred Hassencamp & Johneen Atkinson** - Albany Presbyterian Church family - for the use of their beautiful art works.

**Raewyn Johnstone** for the striking image of her favourite maunga, Te Aroha, taken when she lived in Mountain View Road.

**Steve Johnstone** for the gift of your time and skills in designing my covers, centrespreads, Last Words and other pages and for all your support. I couldn't have done this without you and your Dad.

**Kerry Johnstone** – man of my heart, for your loving partnership in this memorable *Refresh* journey. You gave so much.



