

# Newsletter

## Progressive Christianity Network SA

### Exploring the journey of faith together

#### Faith Friendliness – the New Imperative!

In the West, anxiety about migration continues to dominate public discourse in Europe, the USA and closer to home. People feel their way of life is under threat from new arrivals. Religious difference is part of this equation.

As a people largely uncomfortable with faith in the public sphere, we have been caught unprepared to adequately respond to religious pluralism. The reaction of fundamentalists, whether ‘Christian,’ ‘Muslim,’ or atheist, to the threat of religious pluralism is predictable. On the other hand, Blair, Obama and others recognise that religion can be a force for good or for evil and therefore governments ought to support the good.

How these issues have worked themselves out in the Religious Centre at Flinders University over the last twelve years provides a case study for Christian Public Theology today. A Charter for Faith Friendly Communities, valuing faith in the public sphere, will be presented and discussed.

Geoff Boyce has been the Uniting Church chaplain to Flinders University for twelve years. He is married to Sandy, presently deacon at Pilgrim Church in the city. They have three adult children.

Geoff has built a collegial model of chaplaincy among chaplains and associates from the major faiths, working cooperatively within the rubric *nurturing spirit, building community*. The chaplaincy to the university also acts as a community resource regarding religious pluralism.

Geoff is a board member of *Project Abraham* and the Uniting Church’s national *Relations with Other Faiths Working Group*. He is convenor of a think tank to nurture ‘faith friendly’ communities in South Australia and author of a soon-to-be-published book, *An Improbable Feast – the surprising dynamic of hospitality at the heart of multifaith chaplaincy*.



Geoff Boyce

#### Friday Forum

23 July 2010, 7.30 pm

Effective Living Centre,  
26 King William Road Wayville

Cost: \$12/\$10

Bookings: Effective Living Centre

Ph 8271 0329 Mon, Wed and Fri 10am–3pm

## COMMUNITIES OF FAITH

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#### SEAFORD UNITING CHURCH/CHURCHES OF CHRIST

The Seaford congregation works within an ecumenical context, being one of four worshipping communities that meets at the Seaford Ecumenical Centre. We have about 45 people, and our worship space is suited to congregational participation in dialogue.

The congregation has been through some challenging times over the last few years. The first challenge came when Rev Geoff Collins became minister. His support for the gay and lesbian community brought polarisation, and some people left the congregation. Those who stayed were supportive, and Geoff also helped the congregation to embark on a journey of theological reflection. Following Geoff’s death, which was the second challenge the congregation had to face, I continued the theological reflection within worship.

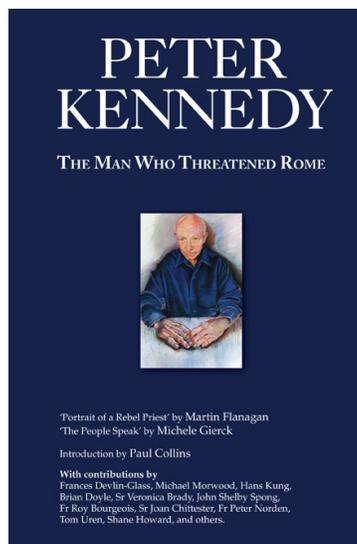
Seaford uses the Seasons of the Spirit worship material weekly. As a way of introducing themes, we utilise visual resources to stimulate thinking and active discussion in the service. We have used visual art either from the Seasons material or from the internet. We have also used personal photographs regarded as ‘sacred’ to explore places and experiences. At one stage we used a photo from the Hubble space telescope. One response heard was ‘My God is too small.’

Theological reflection has become part of the weekly flow of worship. Comments made by Diana Butler Bass were encouraging for us. There is always vibrant engagement as people offer comments. It is very much a journey of thought and reflection as we expand our insights into the mystery of the divine and life experiences.

*Rev David Ingleton*

## Book review

### *Peter Kennedy: The Man Who Threatened Rome*



In February 2009, as was widely reported in the media at the time, Peter Kennedy was dismissed by his archbishop from his position as priest of St Mary's Catholic Church, South Brisbane, for contravening aspects of Catholic doctrine. He and many members of the congregation subsequently relocated to the Trades and Labour Council building in South Brisbane as St Mary's-in-Exile.

This book, with a title that suggests it is a biography of Peter Kennedy, is actually a collection of essays about St Mary's – the nature of this community, and the issues that were involved in relation to Kennedy's sacking. It provides a fascinating and illuminating case study of what distinguishes progressive Christianity from more traditional and conservative forms of Christianity.

Paul Collins, in his Introduction to the book, identifies the following as some of the factors that attracted people to St Mary's: 'the strongly participative liturgy, the highlighting of the role of women, the acceptance of all comers, and the inclusive nature of the celebration', as well as the community's 'strong social-justice orientation' (p 7). He goes on to say that Peter Kennedy's personality was also important.

There is a contemplative feel about him, as well as a simplicity and honesty which is disarming. His admission about his own uncertainty concerning basic beliefs...reflects the kind of confusion that many of us feel today...

All that Kennedy has done is to have the honesty and integrity to admit his questions, and that is precisely why he is so effective a pastor. Nowadays mature Christians don't need to be told the answers. They need the freedom to explore the questions. (pp 8–9)

The book is bracketed by two short profiles of Kennedy written by journalist Martin Flanagan: 'Portrait of a Rebel Priest' at the beginning of the book, and a piece called 'Second Meeting' at the end. Kennedy spent seven years in the Navy and six years as a prison chaplain in Queensland. He was appointed to St Mary's in 1980.

In a section entitled 'The People Speak' by Michele Gierck, the individual stories are told of eleven people who have been associated with St Mary's: how they came to be part of the congregation, what their involvement has been, and

what the community has meant to them. The stories vividly depict the kind of congregation St Mary's has been and the spiritual nurture, inspiration and challenge it has provided for the people who were attracted to it.

The largest part of the book, entitled 'Essays and Reflections', consists of 21 brief essays by various authors. Some essays relate directly to St Mary's and the events surrounding the sacking of Kennedy. Others deal in a more general way with some of the issues that are crucial for progressive Christians, such as the leadership of women in the church and the church's attitude towards homosexuality. A couple of essays consist of addresses delivered by visiting preachers at St Mary's. Well-known authors who are represented in the book include Michael Morwood, Hans Küng, Veronica Brady, John Shelby Spong, Joan Chittister, Noel Preston and Tom Uren.

One essay, by Neil Ormerod, Professor of Theology at the Australian Catholic University, critiques the theology and practices at St Mary's and defends Archbishop Bathersby's action in dismissing Kennedy. In upholding the authority of the institutional church and its doctrines, Ormerod says:

Christianity is a faith built on an authoritative witness, the witness of the disciples of Jesus Christ risen from the dead. This is a more than human authority; it is a revelation from God. As such some beliefs are simply non-negotiable to Christian identity. (pp 132–3)

For progressive Christians the book is encouraging in its depiction of a church that has had a positive influence in the lives of many people by adapting its message and practices to new circumstances and people's actual needs. But it is also painful in showing how resistant the institutional church can be to change and how strongly it can feel the need to maintain control.

Underlying the book's contents are the personal stories of the contributors and the people involved – their passion and conviction, their pain and joy – and this is what makes reading the book an engrossing and often moving experience.

Reviewer: John Pfitzner

Available from Pauline Books \$29.95, or One Day Hill Publishers, [www.onedayhill.com.au](http://www.onedayhill.com.au)

**'...painful in showing how resistant the institutional church can be to change and how strongly it can feel the need to maintain control...'**

**Would you like to be listed on the PC Net database to receive the newsletter electronically or would you like to update your details? Do you know of anyone who might like to receive the PC Net newsletter?**

Phone the Effective Living Centre, 8271 0329 Mon, Wed or Fri, or email [pcnet@effectiveliving.org](mailto:pcnet@effectiveliving.org) with your contact details.

## Impressions from Common Dreams 2 Melbourne, 15–18 April 2010

JOHN PFITZNER

As progressive Christians we have much to celebrate said Fred Plumer, president of the Center for Progressive Christianity USA, in his keynote address early in the conference. In USA there has been growth in the number of progressive groups and seminaries. Cause for concern, however, is that the progressive movement is having limited impact on the mainline churches. Most people in the pews don't want to change, even though significant painful change is required if these churches are to make a positive impact on people's lives.

Plumer suggested three areas where radical change needs to occur. First, we need a new paradigm for understanding God. Second, we need to publicly reject the doctrine of substitutionary vicarious atonement, which has had a harmful effect on the lives of many people. And third, we need to listen to young people, for whom the old patterns of faith and practice are no longer meaningful but who still look for forms of spirituality and community that connect with their everyday lives.

Val Webb, in her keynote address, spoke knowledgably and eloquently about the value for progressive Christians of engaging with other religious traditions. We progressives, she said, have more in common with the wisdom in other religions than with fundamentalist Christians. However, we have often been slow to recognise this. Our exclusivity, she said, dies hard. We can enrich our own tradition by actively engaging the sacred across religious traditions.

When Margaret Mayman became the minister of a Presbyterian church in Wellington, New Zealand, the local paper carried the headline: 'Lesbian leader divides congregation.' In her keynote address she emphasised the need, in progressive Christianity, for maintaining two poles: on the one hand, the prophetic practice of justice, based on theological reflection and study, and, on the other hand, the spiritual practices of liturgy, worship and rituals. A fully rounded progressive faith needs openness to emotion and imagination (ritual) together with intellectual

rigour. Our passion for justice is nourished in spiritual practices.

In an outstanding presentation at the end of the conference, Greg Jenks spoke about how the Bible is likely to be viewed and used in the churches of tomorrow and in a post-Christian world. He illustrated how biblical texts, other ancient texts and modern study resources are now readily available in digital form online. Paper Bibles, he suggested, will become rare. However, it is the conservatives who are enthusiastically embracing the new technology, and progressives, at present, are not being heard in the internet chatter. We progressives, with our particular way of reading the Bible with an eye on the questions we face today, need to reclaim the Bible.

Other keynote speakers included Hugh Mackay, Jo Lane (Unitarian minister from SA), Francis Macnab, Aviva Kipen (female Jewish rabbi) and Sherene Hassan (Muslim woman). Gretta Vosper, founder and chair of the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity, gave two addresses in which she spoke of the challenge progressive thinking is making to the church and of the journey of her own congregation in developing new practices and new language to more accurately express what they believe and stand for.

Workshops were included in the conference program, with participants able to choose from a variety of topics.

An important part of a conference is the opportunity to make contact with people from other places and share stories, ideas and resources. This is an aspect of Common Dreams 2 I thought could have been developed more fully. I would also like to have seen more opportunities in the program for discussion about the state of progressive Christianity in our country and ways in which we could enable our progressive voice to be heard more widely and clearly. I would also like to have seen more women involved in roles such as introducing speakers.

**'A fully rounded progressive faith needs openness to emotion and imagination (ritual) together with intellectual rigour.'**



**DVD Study: First Light** *First Light* is a 12-session DVD study of the historical Jesus and the kingdom of God, with two of the world's leading Jesus scholars, John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg. The study is being led by John Pfitzner and Maureen Howland at the Effective Living Centre. **The second series for the year will be on August 16, 23, 30 and September 6, 13, 20.** Cost of \$30 for 6 weeks includes reading materials and supper. Book through ELC.

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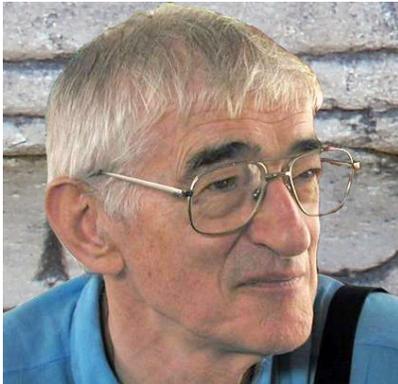
# OUR PRAYER

*From West Hill United Church, Toronto*

As I live every day,  
I want to be a channel for peace.  
May I bring love where there is hatred  
and healing where there is hurt;  
joy where there is sadness  
and hope where there is fear.  
I pray that I may always try to  
understand and comfort other people  
as well as seeking comfort  
and understanding from them.

Wherever possible  
may I choose to be  
a light in the darkness  
a help in times of need  
and a caring, honest friend.  
And may justice, kindness, and peace  
flow through my heart forever.  
Amen

*Gretta Vosper and Scott Kearns  
(c) 2005 West Hill United Church*



## **John Dominic Crossan**

Melbourne August 27– September 10, 2010

Esteemed and accessible biblical scholar John Dominic Crossan, lauded for his books and presentations, will be in Melbourne from 27 August 2010 until 10 September 2010 for a series of lectures and public addresses. More details of exact events will be forthcoming. For now, mark the dates for this not-to-be-missed opportunity. [www.pcnvictoria.org.au](http://www.pcnvictoria.org.au)

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## *Progressive resources*

### **Progressive Christianity Network of SA**

c/- Effective Living Centre  
26 King William Road  
Wayville, 5034  
Ph 8271 0329  
Mon, Wed, Fri 10am – 3pm  
[pcnet@effectiveliving.org](mailto:pcnet@effectiveliving.org)  
[www.effectiveliving.org/  
pages/pcnet.htm](http://www.effectiveliving.org/pages/pcnet.htm)

### **2010 Committee members**

Meg Butler  
Christine Garner  
Ruth Gates  
Maureen Howland  
Sue Jarrad  
Caroline Pearce  
John Pfitzner

### **Resource members**

Scott Magann  
Michelle Coram

### **New study resources**

The Progressive Christian Network of Victoria Inc is developing a new DVD study series for small groups. The first DVD is an interview with Dr Val Webb by Rev Dr Christopher Page. It was recorded in March 2010 and contains an Introduction and sections entitled Embracing Doubt, Thinking Theologically and Rethinking the Bible. The cost is \$30. It can be obtained by emailing [info@pcnvictoria.org.au](mailto:info@pcnvictoria.org.au) or phoning 03 9571 4574. A second interview, with Lloyd Geering, is being prepared. More will follow.

### **Children's curriculum**

The Center for Progressive Christianity (TCPC) in USA is developing a progressive Christian resource for children, called Inner Wisdom. The first material, for ages 6–10, was launched at Common Dreams 2. You can find out about it and look at samples by going to their website, [www.tpc.org](http://www.tpc.org), and following the links to Children's Curriculum.

### **Morialta Library**

Morialta Uniting Church Library at 26 Chapel Street, Magill, has a growing collection of books in the progressive Christianity category. The library is available to PCNetters. You can visit the library on weekdays when the church office is open. The times are Monday, Tuesday and Thursday 9 am to 1 pm, and Wednesday 9 am to 2 pm, Friday 9 am to 12 noon. On each Wednesday, Lorraine, the librarian, is usually on site at 11.00 am, and you can also have a low-cost lunch at Coffee Corner from 12 noon.

For more information email Lorraine at [jipowers@yahoo.com](mailto:jipowers@yahoo.com)