

## **EDGE OF THE SACRED – ALICE SPRINGS, JULY 2016**

### **CONFERENCE SUMMARY**

Our Vicar, Glenn Loughrey, along with Peter and Judy John son attended this wonderful conference titled “Edge of the Sacred” or “Deep Listening to the Spirit of Place”. It was held at held White Gums @ Honeymoon Gap”, a lovely property in the MacDonnell Ranges west of Alice Springs.

The conference had a strong indigenous focus and the ways Aboriginal people listen to what they call the sacred Mother Earth.

Driving into the West MacDonnell Ranges and attending the conference prompted us with the thoughts that we are so privileged to live in the oldest country in the world, with the oldest continuing culture that exists globally. We are so lucky!! But do we always appreciate the gifts and opportunities that this brings?? We suspect not!!

There were a number of academic presentations on aboriginal culture and the importance of what they call “togetherness”, of “belonging”, and their practices of “deep listening” to the people and the land as their form of spirituality. It is very similar to what we might call meditation or contemplation.

The conference was blessed with a whole morning with presentations by two famous aboriginal women, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr and MKTurner who have managed to live in the two worlds of the Aboriginal and the western culture. They shared with us their Aboriginal traditions and love of the land in their concept of country. They believe the earth, animals, plants, people, rain, stars, sun and creeks are one shared and interconnected existence. The highlighted the concept of “Dadirri” or deep listening to the earth they love and want to share with all Australians.

We also heard some beautiful singing by the 30 or 40 strong Central Australian Aboriginal Women’s Choir whose members come from communities which span some 1500km around Alice Springs and travel extensively to come to choir practices. They had shared the stage in Alice Springs the previous night with the world famous Soweto Gospel Choir from South America. They themselves had been on a tour of Germany last year supported by the Lutheran Church. Their singing in wonderful harmonies of traditional songs in their tribal languages as well as hymns was very moving.

Glenn spoke to the conference on his life journey as an indigenous man growing up in a country area of NSW where the indigenous community structure had been lost and much of the traditional lands had been destroyed. He made the point that many indigenous people are somewhere in this place of exile between two cultures, but which with luck they can emerge to find a better life. Miriam-Rose and MKTurner shared the view that it is important for aboriginal young people to learn and be strong in both western and aboriginal ways to have the best chance of a satisfying life.

There were many other conference attendees from around Australia involved in the teaching of spirituality and/or the traditions of aboriginal people which will inform our social justice and indigenous programs at St. Oswald's.

An extended set of notes and more details of the full conference program are being prepared and will be made available to all shortly. In addition Glenn's thoughts on the conference and his presentation "Fenced In – Fenced Out" can be found at [www.redshoeswalking.com](http://www.redshoeswalking.com).

Peter & Judy Johnson

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