



Newsletter for the Province of Asia-Pacific

The Third Order, Society of St Francis

www.tssf.org.au

Easter 2023

Transforming suffering into joy

**Mandy Wheatley,
Provincial Minister
Asia-Pacific**

Beloved Third Order sisters and brothers,
I am writing as the current Resident Priest (until June 2023), at the Old Monastery, Stroud, preparing to visit Papua New Guinea (22 – 31 March) and later hold TSSF Chapter here (15-18 June). Please pray for these events, as well as for the work of the Brothers, friends and retreatants who continue to meet here by the grace of God, loving, praying, working, studying and enjoying the silence.

To see more about the Old Monastery, go to:
<https://tinyurl.com/Stroud-History/>

Ted Witham, in the 2010 Easter Newsletter, wrote:

Lent is 40 days in length (or 42, depending on how you count it!) but Easter, the great season of joy, is 50 days in length. God's giving to us is so much larger than our giving: God's gift of Creation continues to replenish our bodies, minds, spirits and souls... This is why the Cross stands as the border between Lent and Easter, and why St



The Rt Rev'd Jeremy James tssf was installed as Bishop of Willochra on 25th February 2023 at the Cathedral of St Peter and Paul, Port Pirie. The Diocese of Willochra covers about 90% of the State of South Australia, including many small outback communities, small towns and regional cities such as Whyalla, Port Augusta and Port Pirie.

R-L: The Rev'd Mandy Wheatley, Provincial Minister; Bishop Jeremy James; Jeannie Minnis; Sandra Jackson

Francis constantly invited us to contemplate the Cross. The crucified Christ draws us to himself, and we learn how to begin giving of ourselves.

For Francis and the apostle Paul, Easter was not a one-time event, but a journey, a process: *'All I want to know is Christ and the power flowing from His Resurrection!'* (Philippians 3.10).

Francis was transformed by the Easter journey. His enthusiasm for the things of God, his unique relationship with creation, his peace-making skills, as well as his illnesses, disappointments, pain, betrayal and misunderstandings gave him a new perspective.

He saw that by them, God was making all things work toward an eternal good, an eternal Easter. As he contemplated and imitated Jesus' poverty and humility in his own life and death; as he sought to feel in his body the pains of the Passion and to open his heart to the love which urged Christ to die for sinners, Francis unlocked a deeper, truer joy beyond the suffering. The wounds he bore were signs of a new life in Christ, a spiritual resurrection. This union is the secret of the Little Poor Man's joy.

Francis was able to proclaim, *"If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!"* (2 Cor. 5:17). As he did, 'Alleluia' became his song.

In Francis, and by others following his example, an unexpected joy and a holy newness came into the world. So may we continue to grow as followers of Christ through the example of St Francis, declaring to the world by our words and actions, *"This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and*

be glad in it! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!" (Ps 118.24)

This Easter season, may you be open to this joyful transformation.

With all peace and goodwill,

Mandy

TSSF housekeeping:

A huge thanks to David White and his team, as most of us by now have received a new Prayer Cycle and Community Obedience Book 2023.

If you have moved or need to update or change your contact details, you can do so on our website, under Contacts, Update Membership: tssf.org.au/contacts/update-membership/ or contact David, our Communications Officer.

Chapter advises that annual subscriptions for all novices and professed are now due and asks that they be sent to the TSSF Treasurer by 31st March 2023. You can do this on our website - <https://tssf.org.au/subscription-invoice/> or ask your Regional Minister to send you a printed copy.

Thanks also to all those who have sent in their Annual Reports to their Regional Ministers (and Regional Ministers to the Provincial Chaplain) in November. It is still not too late to do so and perhaps a good Eastertide discipline if you haven't yet sent them in!

On board for a Quiet Day!

The SA group had a Quiet Day held on Simon Waters' paddle steamer, berthed on the River Murray, near Mannum.

From Left to right: Louise Townend, Simon Waters, John Candy, Wendy Candy, Jeannie Minnis, Margaret Holt, Wayne Philp, David McAvenna.

Photo supplied: Jeannie Minnis



P(r)aying attention

Sr Cara Grenham-Hancock nSSC

I would like to propose a working definition of 'being a contemplative' as being one who pays attention to God, out of love for him. We let this paying-attention transform us and the ways in which we perceive and treat those around us as being part of God's gift to us.

Every baptised Christian, from the moment when they make their promise to 'turn to Christ', is called to seek the Lord in prayer, to, in the words of the psalmist, 'My soul waits in silence for God, from whom comes my salvation'.

Prayer is very concretely about showing up and paying attention. We, by presence and attention and trust, may offer a space in which the holy spirit of God can pray. Ruth Burrows writes that prayer is essentially what God does for us; our part is to be there and entrust ourselves to his presence.

Prayer in this model is not at all to do with somehow transcending the moment in time and space where we find ourselves, as though we need to get away from reality, but in fully committing to dwell in it, trusting it to be God's providential gift for us in that instant.

The present moment is the only time when we are ever available to meet with him, even with all its disappointments and distractions and competing demands on our attention and our time. We still assent to dwell in it, and to keep our eyes fixed on the truest reality: God, who is the heart and foundation of all reality. This contemplative orientation then, is embedded in an attitude of thanksgiving, of praise, of love for the one we know loves us, whose eyes are fixed on us even as we pay attention to him – however that might feel.

And it doesn't usually feel like very much! The work of God upon our souls, which we make available to him by agreeing to show up, pay attention, and trust him, and be quiet, is almost always at a level too deep for our conscious minds to glimpse or grasp, but

through the eyes of faith, every moment spent in this way is true prayer, true self-offering to God, for the transformation of ourselves, of the Church and of the whole world.

St John of the Cross tells us that the proof of contemplation is that it bears in our lives the fruit of charity. It is this quality of attentiveness

which we also learn to exercise in our relationships with one another – and at this point prayer life and community life are revealed to be so mutually dependant as to be just two sides of the same coin, those two great commandments to love the Lord our God and to love our neighbour. Our vocation as a church of contemplatives is to lovingly attend to the presence of God who meets us at every moment. Let us attend.

Thanks to Paul Hawker tssf for sending in the original version of this 2022 Lenten Homily, delivered at Christchurch Brunswick in Victoria. It was titled 'Seven minutes on being a contemplative' and can be heard at <https://tinyurl.com/byv6wwhx>

Thanks also to Sister Cara for creating this shorter version.

See also: [Society Of The Sacred Cross](#)



Sister Cara

Walking in Stealth

After Pushkin

Noel Jeffs SSF

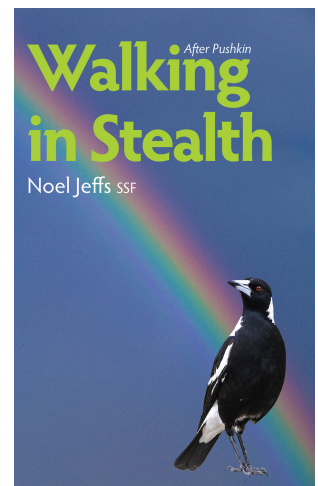
Reviewed by Ted Witham tssf

My first pass at reading Brother Noel Jeff's second book of poetry, *Walking in Stealth*, left me bewildered. I could see the beautiful edifice of the poems, but I felt I was on the outside walking around looking for a way in. These are complex and mysterious poems. Many are in sonnet-like forms, with rhymes that surprise and an attention to musicality, both in the sounds of words and the overall effect of the poems. They are best appreciated read aloud.

Writing in the *New Yorker* about the 19th Century symbolist French poet Stéphane Mallarmé, Alex Ross said, '*After only a few lines of Mallarmé, you are engulfed in fine mist, and terror sets in.*' I had a similar sense of being pushed off balance by Noel Jeff's 18 poems.

These poems were Noel's 'morning meditations as the sun rose over [his] right shoulder and dawned the day...' The way into the poems, I am finding, is to stand in imagination next to the poet and look at the dawn with him. The different elements of the morning – the sky, especially, and 'the grace of birds', 'the creating moon' don't exactly come into focus, but they float around in the beauty of the words creating an abstract painting.

As these images come into view, the concerns of the poet bubble to the surface of the words: awe before the opening sky, contrasts between the simple beauty of a 'limpid lake' and 'spokes of noise' (22), the constraints of the human body, the paradox of the beauty and the destructive power of the sun (31). Physical desire is 'Crotches burning' which 'spin this top in a world' (30). There are no final answers, just abstract shapes, beautiful Rorschach blots. It's probably no coincidence that Brother Noel trained as a psychotherapist.



A reader could hunt through these poems simply for arresting images: 'my own ram's horn to make a shawm' (18) takes me straight to Psalms and the Jewish shofar. 'try perfume lathering' (13) mixes delight into the two senses of smell and touch.

I found hints of the Franciscan Dun Scotus's theology of the 'Word'. Each creature, Scotus taught, is a little 'Word' opening itself to the viewer and telling its story of the Creator. Each word in the poems likewise opens into a celebration of the Creator. Noel Jeff's vocation as an Anglican Franciscan friar is at home in this Creation Theology.

Ultimately, however, Brother Noel's delight is in words, their beauty and how the meaning of words shape-shifts.

It was said of Mallarmé that the challenge was not to translate his French poetry into English; what was needed was a translation into French! You could say the same for these poems; they would be impossible to translate into English! And yet, they deserve time, opening yourself as readers to the play of meaning, the gambol of musical words, and finding an ineffable effect on you, drawing you back into the words.

I know too little about Pushkin to understand the link with Pushkin, but Noel Jeff's poems can be enjoyed without knowing the connections. The reader simply needs time to find a way in. They are as beautiful on the inside as on the out.

***Walking in Stealth*, published
Penrith NSW, Moshpit Publishing 2022
37 pages, paperback
\$25 online**

A visit to the European Province

Tony Poon, Hong Kong

I had an occasion to visit Edinburgh in November 2022. With the assistance of the Hong Kong Coordinator, the Provincial Secretary and the Provincial Secretary of the European Province, I managed to get in touch with the Tertiary Coordinator in Edinburgh. I suggested a brief meeting-up, saying the office together and coffee. She agreed right away.

We made an appointment to meet at St. John's Church, Prince Street at the city centre of Edinburgh in the afternoon of a weekday. When I arrived, the church was open but there was no service going on. I waited at the door for a few minutes and then the local coordinator came out from the church. We introduced ourselves to each other and she led me into the church. Five other ladies were waiting. Most of them were wearing the tertiary Tau cross. One was wearing a wooden one.

After introduction and pleasantries, we asked the sexton and were shown into the side chapel, just beside the altar. We rearranged the chairs to form a circle. Each was given a folder of material for prayer and we said the Third Order Office as in the 1992 SSF prayer book. There was one other lady in the chapel and she showed interest in what we were doing. We invited her to join and she did.

Before the Cross prayer, they put a picture of the crucifixion on the floor in the centre of the circle so that all could look upon the figure of the crucified when saying the prayer.

The daily office took about 20 minutes to complete. My hosts introduced the Third Order to the incidental participant and gave her pamphlets, which introduced the Order and invited readers to join.

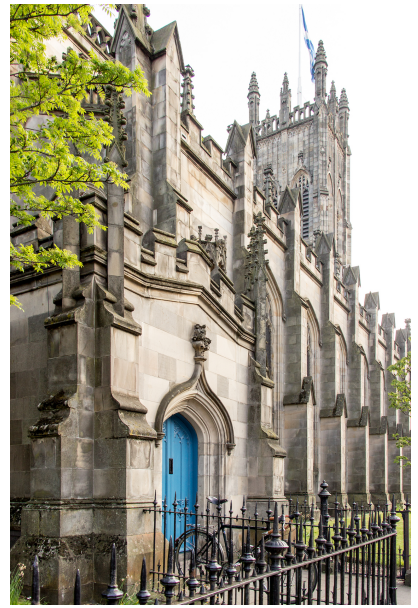
We went for coffee. My hosts appeared not too familiar with the church building and we had to find our way to get to the basement cafeteria. We talked about the activities of our

groups in our respective parts of the world, our experience of being a tertiary and current affairs. I gave them print-outs of the latest

issues of the Asian-Pacific provincial newsletter. They gave me a lovely greeting card from all of them to Hong Kong tertiaries, their introduction/recruitment pamphlet, a postcard celebrating 800 years of the Third Order in their area, and a booklet introducing the Community of the Cross of Nails (CCN) at Coventry Cathedral. According to the booklet, the CCN is a Christian network of churches and organisations drawn together by the story of Coventry Cathedral (which was destroyed during the bombing of the city in November 1940) and sharing a common commitment to work and pray for peace, justice and reconciliation.

We spent about 30 minutes over coffee and had a warm and inspiring chat. One of them accompanied me to catch a taxi. It was not easy and she sought the assistance of the doorman of a hotel nearby – in the course of which, the doorman thought that we were husband and wife. A good laugh.

I thank the Lord for this short meeting with my hosts and how the meeting went. Apart from the opportunity for sharing and mutual encouragement, it showed once again that the Third Order is a worldwide movement, the brothers and sisters are closely knit and are welcoming to one another.



St John's Church, Edinburgh
by Billy Wilson Photography,
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Vale Bishop Jeremy Ashton tssf

1930–2022

Bishop Jeremy Ashton and his wife Betty were professed as a tertiaries in 1982, while they were living in Papua New Guinea. In Australia, Jeremy was Regional Minister for Victoria / Tasmania from 1997 to 2002. Several tertiaries were privileged to attend the Service of Thanksgiving for his life and ministry in Castlemaine on 9 December 2022. Bishop Jeremy's son Ralph delivered the eulogy on behalf of Betty and the family. Some excerpts follow:

INSPIRING

“Your father was a man who marked my life profoundly. Anything good I have done derives in some significant part from him. I absolutely loved your father.”

We know from all the heartfelt messages since dad's death that many people around the world share his godson's sentiments.

THE CASSOCK AND THE MOTORBIKE

In Papua New Guinea, dad decided a motorbike was the best way to get between places to fulfil his duties as a priest. These duties required him to wear a cassock – a flowing, long-sleeved, ankle-length dress that priests wear. As dad sped by, bystanders started yelling for him to stop. He was blissfully unaware of any problem. But for everyone else, the sight of a father on fire was a step too far. The flames were extinguished, and dad continued to his next appointment undeterred by a charred cassock.

SERVICE AND MISCHIEF

Dad grew up with wealth and a tradition of humble service. He knew from a very young age that it would be through Christian ministry that he would serve. But he was not self-righteous or a killjoy.

He loved mischief and finding ways around the rules and conventions. One Christmas holidays, mum said we weren't to open the chocolates in the fridge until the following



Bishop Jeremy after presiding at a TSSF Eucharist in Castlemaine, November 2018

week, so dad bought another box to eat immediately, and we did.

BIRTH TO BURY

Dad grew up in Essex in England. He loved telling stories of his time at Trueloves, the family home. He was schooled with an array of cousins at Abberley Hall and Winchester College. He lost both parents before adulthood, and his extended family took on an even larger role in his life, which he nourished and relished until the very end.

His National Service took him to Africa. He read theology and economics at Trinity College at Cambridge University, where he was a hockey Blue. He continued theological studies at Westcott House, which opened him up to new ideas and further travel, to Israel and India, where his family has a strong connection.

He began his clerical career as a curate in Bury in industrial Northern England – miles away geographically, socially, and economically from his privileged family,

upbringing, and education. His time there was formative and provided memories he cherished for the rest of his life. His service to Bury and later achievements have been recognised with the “Bishop Jeremy Ashton Room”.

PEOPLE

Dad loved people. He was interested in everyone’s stories and ideas. He was open, non-judgemental, accepting, and trusting. Where others might have been embarrassed or proud, he was totally at ease with himself and his circumstances, which allowed him to be completely at ease with others.

He was egalitarian and enjoyed the Australian way where – unlike the England of his youth – the servant-master relationship isn’t predetermined by things like wealth and family, and isn’t permanent.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

At the age of 29, dad took ship to the Administrative Union of the Territory of Papua and the Territory of New Guinea. He arrived as a priest at Eroro, at the northern end of the Kokoda Trail. It was here he met mum, and my sisters, Victoria and Isabel, were born. They moved to Lae, where I was born, for dad to become Diocesan Registrar. This was one of many administrative and management roles dad played in the church.

With PNG’s Independence from Australia set for 1975, we moved to the capital, Port Moresby. The Anglican Church of PNG was also becoming independent, and one of dad’s tasks was to write its new constitution.

In 1976, we moved back to Lae, where dad was consecrated bishop and became the first Bishop of Aipo Rongo.

AUSTRALIA

In 1986, at the age of just 56, dad moved to Australia with mum.

Dad was never appointed to another episcopal or senior role in the church. But, as a colleague remarked, rather than a prince bishop, “Jeremy was a ‘servant bishop’, never thinking highly of himself, but focussed on serving his Lord, and the people of his God, doing whatever the call to ministry sent his way.”

So, in the following years, dad had various roles including as part-time parish priest in

Deepdene and Merlynston – two very different parts of Melbourne where he continued his understated approach to ministry.

People loved dad’s voice. He spent many years volunteering for Vision Australia, narrating textbooks for students and reading the newspaper on Vision Australia Radio, where he liked highlighting less-prominent news like women’s sport.

He was also active with the Mission to Seafarers, whose work caring for the practical and spiritual welfare of seafarers of all nationalities and faiths resonated with his ecumenical, inter-faith, and international outlook. He eventually served as its Victorian chairman.

CASTLEMAINE

Dad spent the last chapter of his life here in Castlemaine, where he continued his life-long commitment to humble service. He was active as a retired bishop, supporting the church wherever he could.

He maintained right to the end his dedication to inter-faith dialogue, the disadvantaged, and the environment. Just recently in his aged care residence, he delighted in celebrating Diwali, the Hindu festival of light.

SCIENCE AND POLITICS

Dad was curious and had a healthy dose of scepticism. He loved maths (especially prime numbers). He took a keen interest in science and participated in various medical trials.

He was ahead of his time. Before it was fashionable, he supported a much larger role for women in the church and society. In the 1970s, when Victoria said she’d like to be an air hostess when she grew up, dad said, “Why be the hostess? Be the pilot.”

WISDOM

We learnt a lot from dad. His example of integrating apparent opposites showed us how to enjoy privilege, talents, and wealth while enriching and serving others without shame or pride about what we ourselves have. We’re grateful for the opportunities he made possible for us. For always being available even though he was often physically absent. For his example of a life well lived.

Renewal over high tea

Jeni Nix



As Area Convenor, along with my partner-in-crime David, I had the honour of officiating at the Renewal of Vows with David Mason on 26th January. We were delighted to venture out to David M's place for this as I had been a little limited mobility-wise in a moon boot for a fortnight and David N was just coming out of a second round of Covid. I grabbed my little aluminium Tree of Life (for a table cross) on my way out the door and we shared the loveliest time of renewal and conversations on many interesting topics over high tea. Communion at its best on many levels.

Poem

Lord, you are my island
In your bosom I rest.
You are the calm of the sea
In that calm I rest.
You are the waves on the shore's glistening
stones

Their sound is my hymn.
You are the song of the birds
Their tune I sing.
You are the sea breaking on rock
I praise you with the swell.
You are the ocean that laps my being
In you I dwell.

This poem is attributed to Columba and comes from *A Holy Island Prayer Book*. Contributed by Barbara Twells.

A simple tale

'Once upon a time (as all good stories start) a young man travelled by train from Sydney to the Blue Mountains. He was off to see his sweetheart. He carried with him a bunch of bright yellow flowers.

When he arrived in the mountains his sweetheart rejected him. On his way back to Sydney, much cast down, he threw the flowers out of the train window.

Now you would think that this is the end of the story, *but no*, it is the beginning of a transformation! Those rejected blooms began to grow just as they were meant to. As each season passed their seeds spread up and down the train line.

Now these bright yellow flowers grow along the highways and byways of NSW. They grow on waste ground, they belong to no one, they are tended by no one...

But every November, without fail, they bloom bright yellow for God alone. If this humble flower can shine out for God in the waste lands, then surely I can also shine out for God in whatever places I find myself.'

Elizabeth Corah NSW(A)

Canticle Walk in Austria



Michael Hobbs (above) writes: 'In 2014 my wife Sheila and I visited Austria and walked from Niederau to Oberau on the "Canticle of Brother Sun" meditative walk. We came across it quite by chance and it was a deeply moving experience.' This easy walk of 1.7 km includes a series of sculptures by local sculptor Hubert Flörl. For more information, see: <https://tinyurl.com/27mb44z8>