

A STITCH IN TIME

by Anne Bonnefin



"We cannot be fully nourished in the depths of our being if we try to isolate ourselves individually or if we seek to deprive others of their share by increasing our own; for the food that we eat nourishes us in both our souls and our bodies." From Evening Thoughts by Thomas Berry

The Tuesday Craft Group at Community of Christ in Newcastle found themselves asking the questions "What can we do?" "How can we best respond to the needs in our community?" They decided it would be beneficial to approach Sister Di to come and speak to their group.

Sister Di's down to earth faith is grounded in years of working with vulnerable women in society. Her's is a social gospel that she lives out in word and deed. Sister Di's practical, positive spirit was both encouraging and infectious. She was like a breath of fresh air as she shared her experiences working with refugees and asylum seekers. Ever awake to the leading of the Spirit she had courageously started Zará's House, a Refugee Women and Children's Centre, with nothing more than prayer and a desire to help. At Zará's House they care for and support refugees and asylum seekers by being friends to those women "rebuilding their lives after the horror of war and the loss of family, home and country." At their meeting, Sister Di spoke about setting up Zará's House. She spoke about the unique programs for teaching literacy that they have created in response to the needs of the women. Zará's House has thrived as the Newcastle community has offered support.

Even though a stranger at the Tuesday Craft Group meeting Sister Di began her talk by reminding the group of their generosity. "I know of you. I see you. I know how you have helped. I know the many hours that have gone into sewing quilts that we have been able to sell or give away to the refugee women. Your support has been invaluable to Zará's House." So she reminded the group of the many ways that they had contributed over the years to assist vulnerable people in their community with their craft projects.

And indeed for over 28 years the Tuesday Craft Group has been in operation at Community of Christ in Newcastle. It started as an outreach group and is still very much that now. Sixteen to eighteen ladies attend each week. It is a loving and caring group with much support given to those in need. The group has donated many quilts to charities to raise money for their causes. They have knitted and sewn Trauma Teddies, premi baby knits and many other craft items. Toiletries and food items also are collected for distribution through The Samaritans organisation to the Homeless and Womens Refuge and other causes. Marj Manning says "It has been a privilege for me to see the love and friendships grow in the group over the years, and the way they share their time and talents with those in need in our community. We have many denominations represented but it is indeed a little community of Christ."

As I listened to Sister Di I couldn't but wonder what contribution I could make to assist Sister Di and Community of Christ in Newcastle to support the most vulnerable. I have been pondering this question as I

settle into my inner city cottage in Newcastle. My new neighbourhood is a mixed suburb of mostly older European migrants and young families. Shop and business owners flock to the main street and frequent the many good cafes and restaurants just moments from my door. Yet walking down Beaumont Street one can often find a few people who have slept rough. I am beginning to recognise their faces and find myself judging my sometimes dismissive response. Here in this place I am reminded daily of how my comfortable lifestyle comes at the expense of other people having a decent living. "How can I truly feel nourished when another is in need?" Perhaps you can relate - seeing these people makes me feel uncomfortable - they make me aware of my own selfishness, vulnerability and insecurity. I want to ignore that part of me that I see in them - that part that does not know where I am going and is wounded.

Shannon Jung in his book *Hunger and Happiness* argues that we can have "three basic responses to the realisation of our complicity in the appropriation of others' lives and work; sharing, ignoring or avoiding and justifying." Sharing is about the desire to give back and recognises that the many material things we enjoy have come through the contribution of others - often those living on the margin of society. The second response - ignoring or avoiding comes from a place where we just feel overwhelmed and fail to really consider an appropriate response to our complicity. The third response - to justify - is to attempt to declare our actions righteous - eg. we feel we deserve what we have.

I hope that I will find my own way to an appropriate response; to stitch together my talents for the good of those with whom I share my daily walk. I think of the inspiration of the Tuesday Craft Group and Sister Di. It takes many stitches, time and skills to create a quilt or knit a hat or blanket for a premi baby - it takes kindness and perseverance too to create a welcoming place for people to gather. It takes a lot of faith and courage to be like Sister Di - to embrace the possibilities of relationships and to create a safe space that offers renewed wellbeing to the most vulnerable in society.

A Walking Meditation - adapted from *Seven Thousand Ways to Listen* by Mark Nepo

- During your day as you walk around the block, to the store, or on the bus or train - dwell on one thing or person or a song for longer than usual.
- As you breathe deeply try to imagine you are inhaling their point of view.
- Open your heart in their direction without interacting.
- Listen in this way until you feel something stir within you.
- Then return to your day.
- Later, in the evening, make a cup of tea, and with each sip bring the presence of this thing or song or person up from your heart before your eyes. What enabled you to truly feel their presence? What happened when you really listened? What did that feel like?