



**HEAL
OF THE
SPIRIT**



by Adam Wade

As a faith movement continually striving to pursue our call, one expression of this is in seeking ways to provide sanctuaries of peace, reconciliation and healing of the Spirit. Specifically, one of the ways this has been lived out in recent years is through providing a safe place and a listening ear for Latter-day Saints to explore their faith journey. This has been done by congregations around the world offering extreme generosity and hospitality by hosting a “Sunstone” event – giving their spaces, their time, and their ministry.

At the beginning of November, West Pennant Hills congregation and its members (along with some ‘ring-ins’ from around the Mission Centre) graciously hosted the first Sunstone event in Australia.

Sunstone is a non-for-profit organisation whose mission it to sponsor open forums of Mormon thought and experience. It provides both an annual magazine composed of articles and podcasts released throughout the year, and sponsors symposiums that discuss Mormonism through scholarship, theological exploration, art, and poetry. The participants hail from all over the Restoration spectrum and are often varied in terms of where they are at on their faith journey.

In many places Community of Christ congregations and members are not only providing the space to host the event, but also actively participate in the event by being ministers of presence and offering radical hospitality, a listening ear, and their time to answer questions. As a faith community sprouting from the same beginnings, we are uniquely poised to offer this type of ministry to people who are often facing major belief crises in their lives. For the Australian event Karin F. Peter, one of the U.S.A Presidents of Seventy and member of the Sunstone Board of Directors, was here to help facilitate the event and also provide valuable insight and direction for how we as a faith community can respond with grace and generosity to these explorers of faith. While the participants were only few, it created an intimate gathering where conversation occurred freely and easily.

The event itself provided quite a diverse range of topics in its various sessions. We discussed the intertwining of the political religious landscape with Professor Rick Sarre. We ate well at a beautiful grazing table! Four women in the Community of Christ, each from a unique perspective, shared their experience of being called and ordained to the Priesthood as a woman. We journeyed with an artist, Stacie Smith, through many very powerful, moving expressions of her life exploration of faith, family, and questions. In the final session of the day, we explored DNA in the Book of Mormon context with Dr. Simon Sutherton. However for many, the day did not conclude there as the conversation continued around a local Chinese Restaurant dinner table, with participants eager to continue in conversation.

After many Sunstone events it is common for some participants to return to the congregation for worship the next day. In anticipation of this possibility, the West Pennant Hills congregation planned and provided a meaningful and thoughtful communion service in which Cassandra Unger spoke. Some of the Sunstone participants did in fact return on the Sunday, and reflected how valuable and significant the entire experience was for them.

Personally one of the aspects I found so meaningful from the weekend was engaging with people to discuss the elements of our faith, and others outside our faith community deeply valuing the positive aspects of our movement and the recent difficulties we have journeyed through the last few decades. I think some of us at times undervalue and undersell

what a blessing this diverse community is where people can come and openly explore their relationship with the divine.

Thank you to all who came and contributed in their unique way. It was quite unusual for many to be simply hosting an event, and not being the ones organising it! Yet I know from feedback received many of the attendees felt truly blessed and are so thankful to all for the experience. With the ever-changing landscape of religion here in Australia, there is a strong possibility that many other seekers will want to continue to explore their faith with us and I pray that we will always be ready to journey alongside them with compassion, sincerity and welcoming peace.

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