

Sacred Spaces



Early in the beginning of COVID-19, as life started slowing down and I was no longer on autopilot throughout the week with my daughter's activities, I noticed that I began thinking about things I wouldn't normally have had the time to think about. In the beginning, I thought this was a bad thing. Painful memories I'd done so well in the past at ignoring, finally had the chance to come to the surface, thankfully now I was ready to face them. I also began thinking deeper, questioning things I wouldn't normally question. I knew I needed a quiet space, a space not just for those quick short prayers but a place to have long conversations with God without interruption. In the past, being in my garden had always been a sacred space for me, a peaceful place where I could connect to the earth and myself. However now this quiet sacred space became a place of supervising kid's activities and noisy outdoor projects we finally had time to work on. It was by accident that I discovered a native bush track behind our neighbourhood. It isn't as exciting as the more popular walking tracks on the Mornington Peninsula, rather, a secret quiet spot for the locals. This walking track, which is also home for the rare and threatened Mount Martha Bundy Eucalyptus, has become a sacred space for me during our lockdown. In these crazy times this walk has become a daily ritual for me. A ritual I hope to keep once restrictions lift. It isn't a place to listen to music and podcasts but a place for quietness, reflection, prayer and decision making.

As much as this sacred alone time has become very important for me, I learnt the importance of something else.

With all these new thoughts going through my head and not feeling equipped to deal with them on my own. I learnt I also needed to reach out to our church community.

Finding safe sacred spaces within friendships, asking for help with difficult questions, exploring deep thoughts as a group and feeling comfortable asking for advice. It's strange that it took a Global Pandemic and physical distancing for me to learn how to listen to what my emotional and spiritual needs were, I've not only rekindled friendships but I've never felt more engaged and blessed to be a part of our larger church community than when I did before COVID-19.

**EMMA
GHAZARIAN
VICTORIA**

'It's strange that it took a Global Pandemic and physical distancing for me to learn how to listen to what my emotional and spiritual needs were...!'

My sacred space is filled with life, particularly that of the natural environment. In my early teenage years the Spirit revealed to me the sacredness of creation, which was a guiding light to my choice of career, initially in forestry and later in land use planning. My training provided me with an understanding of ecosystems and the dependence of humankind on their processes. I felt the imperative to do something positive and to play my small part to counter the sacrilegious actions of others towards our environment when the circumstances permitted.

From an early age I have developed a love for plants, animals and landscapes, particularly where they exist in the wild in all their diversity.

When I am in the wild, sometimes quite alone, I feel in harmony and at peace with my surroundings. And I have felt a sense of achievement in seeing the creation of protected places such as the Alpine National Park in Victoria and a system of Marine Parks along the Queensland coastline in place as a result of my work as a research or planning officer.

Even at a smaller scale it has been satisfying to manage a few acres on our property in Brookfield to re-establish the Hoop Pine forest (Araucarias) that once occupied the site. When I happened to unearth an Aboriginal stone axe on our yard it connected me somehow to those ancient custodians who had once lived here, perhaps sheltering under trees, feasting on roasted Black Bean seeds or freshwater mussels from the bordering creek.

It has been my delight to seek special places in my travels, from the Araucaria forests in New Caledonia and Chile to the alpine meadows of Australia. Ancient and large trees have a special appeal. I have been privileged to see the tallest of Eucalypts, the Coast Redwoods and Giant Sequoias of California, the Podocarps of Tasmania and New Zealand and more where the human footprint is small.

For me space and time are intertwined. In 1980 My mother, Nina, her sister Gwen and I were exploring the tidal pools on a rock platform near Flinders, Victoria. We sat down beside one pool to watch the marine world in miniature - tiny fish, shellfish and crustaceans living among fringing seaweeds. I felt a profound sense of warmth and well-being as we sat there, silent. Sometime after our return to Crib Point, when I asked Mum and Gwen whether they had felt anything, they confirmed that they had experienced the same peace. It was a place where we had each shared a sacred moment. A few weeks later we learned that their third sister, Hazel, had passed away in Mount Gambier, giving additional meaning in the comfort that we received from the Spirit.

A little over a year later, in 1981, my father died and I was given responsibility for making the funeral


arrangements. I had no time to grieve. Some months later I found myself alone while working as a research officer for the Land Conservation Council checking out stands of Alpine Ash in the Victorian Alps. One stand proposed for logging lay in steep country and I wished to check if it could be reached by bulldozer so the trees could be felled and extracted as logs. When I made my way down the slope, I was gratified to find intervening cliffs made harvesting impractical and then climbed back to my vehicle. I became quite breathless with the effort, which triggered emotions that brought me to tears. I had been at Dad's bedside a few days before he succumbed to the effects of emphysema, and my gasping for breath brought back suppressed memories. That remote place in the bush became a sacred space for me, helping me to heal.

While such experiences can come unbidden into our lives, I also appreciate the opportunity to worship in community in sacred places such as our former campgrounds at Koonjewarre and our chapel in Brisbane. The planning and thought that goes into creating sacred space is something I deeply appreciate and value. In response I have contributed to the management of Koonjewarre and the holding of church and community activities there including Camp Quality and Reunions. The life of the Brisbane church community has been another avenue of service in its worship and outreach activities. In the members and friends of the church I have found many who share the same values and who sustain me in our mutual quest for extending the blessings of sacred space to others.

**PETER
LAWSON
QUEENSLAND**



'I felt a profound sense of warmth and well-being as we sat there, silent.'



' I find myself, in the midst of the busy-ness and rambunctiousness of a Saturday or Sunday play-day experiencing past-present-future glimpses that take me beyond the present moment and connect me with something deep within, yet far beyond. '



My daughter likes to tease me that even if I'm dead on my feet or have a to-do list as long as my arm, I'm always able to fit in our weekend grandkids play-day & sleep over: "But don't you need some time to yourself?", "Haven't you got things you need to do?"

Yes I do. I need to spend time with these little people. No question there...

I got to thinking about that. Having a houseful of little kids – currently 4 through 12 – is hard work. It can be physically and emotionally tiring: making endless snacks (I'm hungry Janma); refereeing disputes (I want the pink plate – you had the pink one last time!); the vigilance ("it's too quiet – where is everyone?"); tidying up a house that has been turned inside out – literally ("how did you find those special things? I had them hidden away!" and "How could you possibly need that many blankets, sheets, tablecloths, doonas, mattresses & rugs for your cubbies?"); a sometimes reluctant participant in whatever trampoline or chasing game is currently in vogue (fortunately a lot of these games require someone sitting in the middle and catching whoever strays near – as long as there's plenty of wrestling or tickling involved, all are satisfied).

Anyone who knows me at all knows I've always loved kids and am happy to spend time with them. And like everyone else out there, my own kids/grandkids are the most amazing, most creative, most interesting, most unique kids in the world – no bias whatsoever. But I also realise that this time spent with my little people – however exhausting on a given day (or night) – is rejuvenating, and on some level brings me peace. The kind of rejuvenation and peace that comes from being in your Sacred Space.

Sacred Space is more often associated with beautiful places and physical spaces and I have had my share of profound experiences of life-giving, spirit-breathing Sacred Spaces.

How and why I understand my time with my grandchildren as my Sacred Space is not easy to put into words because it's not about the obvious things like the fun and the loving, or the peace that comes with quiet & rest...

The best I can describe it is something to do with being witness to the unfolding of being... to blossoming... Being closely present in a relationship with little people over time, is to witness expanding awareness, emerging confidence and empowerment...

to witness Transformation, large and small. Right now, my littlest one is 4½. I make that distinction because Georgie at 4½ is a different little being to Georgie at 4. Let alone Georgie at 3 or 2 or even younger. She is the same little person – but there is more. And it is fascinating and intriguing to me.

I find myself, in the midst of the busy-ness and rambunctiousness of a Saturday or Sunday play-day experiencing past-present-future glimpses that take me beyond the present moment and connect me with something deep within, yet far beyond.

On any given Saturday, time stands still, yet time passes in front of my eyes... and transformation is all around... Little people regularly celebrate their Transformation. "Look Janma – I can reach the biscuits on my own now!"

The idea of transformation brings me eternal hope and underpins my faith. Radical change. Extreme change that comes about without having to be worked through every inch of the way. The kind of change that you look back and think – who would have thought? The Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 is a beautiful example to me. And for me, Transformation is inextricably entwined with the idea of Grace – another underpinning of my faith. I don't claim any theological expertise with respect to my understanding of Grace. For me, Grace is a thing of great beauty. We don't 'earn' or 'deserve' Grace. It flows from God and around and through us. We can open ourselves to it. We can freely share it with others.

I guess there are aspects of my time with my grandchildren that are like a Spiritual Practice for me: the moments of being fully present, seeking to understand them deeply in any given moment through our interactions, their interactions with each other, the choices they make, their responses to guidance and forgiveness, to being loved... and to then glory in the glimpses of their blossoming, the unfolding of their being.

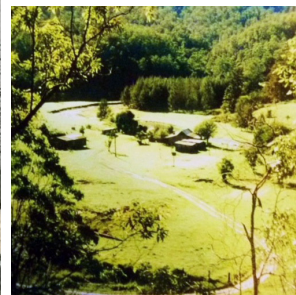
This is my Sacred Space. Time spent in this Space brings me healing, refreshment and peace.

**JAN
THOMPSON
QUEENSLAND**

Sacred Spaces



'We all need sacred spaces, where we can stop, breathe, listen, pray, wonder, connect, restore and renew.'



We all need sacred spaces, where we can stop, breathe, listen, pray, wonder, connect, restore and renew.

One of my sacred spaces is to sit on a rock and fish, it is my thinking place, my praying place, its where I think about life and the mystery of it all, place. Its where I am sometimes able to be alone in my thoughts, and at other times talk to others who come by. Its where I can be in the elements, close to nature which for me always feels close to God. Of course if I catch some fish, then that's a bonus.


When I look back over my life there have been lots of places I would call sacred, and surprisingly enough, though I have been in lots of churches, it is in the outdoors I feel closest to God. On the farm where I grew up, a place called Willow Bend, where willows stood along the bank of the river, our family hosted lots of camps and we had amazing experiences around a campfire, or climbing the mountain called Crooked Top behind the farm. Below the camp house we built a sanctuary in the middle of a grove of oak trees, another Green Cathedral, where we would be led in worship and prayer time, connecting with one another and God.

I recall a trip my wife Wendy and I took to Uluru- all that area, the rock itself, Kata Tjuta, seeing the traditional owners of the land, and hearing them tell their dreamtime stories, watching them paint images of those stories, seeing the painting on the rocks and

fossils of another time, felt very sacred and I felt we were walking on Holy Ground.

Of course now living near, and calling The Green Cathedral my home congregation, means I have often had significant sacred times there, not only in planned moments, but the unexpected, where I could not deny, or want to, the presence of God and the Good Spirit felt through its beauty, the wildlife, the panoramic vista of creation. There have been those other moments too, when I felt the Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me, in worship, in music of flute and didgeridoo and voice, and in communion with others and the space which I called sacred.

**BARRY
BALLARD
NSW**



'These opportunities to connect with the natural world and my family breathe new life and energy into me each week.'



I have a five-year-old and a 3.5-year-old. The 3.5 year-old still comes to our bed every. single. night. She wants a cuddle, about 3 or 4am she sneaks in on my side of the bed and falls instantly asleep again. The past few weeks I've been sleeping terribly (probably because there is a pre schooler in my bed) but as the light is coming earlier and earlier as we lead in to day light savings, I have the opportunity to see this beautiful sleeping girl relaxed and spread out. To have her snuggling in won't last forever, it is a tiny blip on the timeline of her life. The 5-year-old sleeps through the night these days and that reminds me the days (or nights) are numbered with our second wanting and needing the middle of the night cuddles. Sacred space is watching her breath in and out with that sweet little face and body totally relaxed.

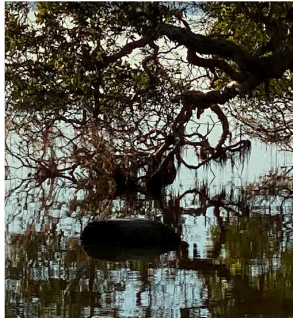
We have slowed down significantly thanks to COVID, and we have spent more time in our own backyard (literally) so sacred space out there looks like the fire pit going, the kids and the dog chasing themselves around the backyard, the chickens scratching around our freshly mowed lawns and the bush turkey settling into our gum tree for the night. This has been most Saturday night's since March. Watching the burning fire embers reminds me of the family camps and reunions I attended what now feels like years ago, and hope may one day be a feature of our lives again in the future.

Sunday afternoons look like family walks in the bush that surrounds us, and local national parks in Sydney. We have never been a family that walks, but now we

have an intergenerational bush exploration with my folks and sister and our kids, often going places I have never been before despite living in Sydney all my life. These opportunities to connect with the natural world and my family breathe new life and energy into me each week. The fresh air, the sounds, the light, the animals and birds we see along the way, are grounding. To spend time in the natural world is a form of spiritual expression. The church building has been closed a long time, and once I would probably have said sacred space was found in those walls, with those people with whom I shared a faith journey with. These days my spiritual expression has turned more towards the natural world to not be deprived from it, to be grounded in wonder and escape the unreal experience day to day life has become. The natural world allows me to just be and to just breathe.

For me, Sacred space is found in the middle of the night cuddling a young child, in the backyard of a home filled with love, and in the natural world exploring creation and breathing deeply, searching for simplicity and grounding.

**CANDICE
CARE-UNGER**
NSW



A View from the Veranda

There are certain places that seep into your soul, exciting the senses with drama, beauty, and awe. Special places have a way of sinking deep down inside and making you ask new questions about yourself, maybe even about the meaning of human existence.

Each day I marvel at the view from the veranda at the rear of our home in Forster on the Mid-North Coast of New South Wales. Looking east I see Cape Hawke, a mountain by the sea, named by an amazing explorer, Captain James Cook RN, honouring Edward Hawke, First Lord of the Admiralty, on 12 May 1770. That was two hundred and fifty years ago this year and the natural landscape of littoral rainforest, low scrub and wild rocks has changed little since European eyes first encountered the ancient land of the Worimi people. Twelve months ago the view was covered with smoke, ash and the smell of widespread bushfires.

As ship passes by on the Pacific Ocean and my wife Marion feeds the native birds in our garden, I extend my gaze south to Seven Mile Beach where familiar Tiona, our beloved church camp ground, lies peacefully between the crashing surf on Booti Booti headland and tranquil Wallis Lake, one of the cleanest coastal lakes in Australia. Night skies reveal twinkling stars, sounds of waves and the piercing glow of a navigational light from Seal Rocks Lighthouse.

Sacred spaces channel the ancestors who have stood where you now stand and the dreams and fears that they brought with them. These places offer magic, reflection, mystery and a sprinkle of the divine.

Connection to places, people and experiences is authentic and sometimes spiritual. Personal memories of Tiona are not just nostalgic or romantic recollections of reunions, camping holidays and building the kingdom. The ideals of zionic living and the challenges of climate change and earth stewardship in sensitive environments are powerful symbols for me, especially as I struggle to manage life, isolation and health in a COVID-19 world in 2020.

I treasure an old photo of my father, Milton, introducing me as a six week old baby to the beach at Tiona, which I grew to love. As a baby-boomer born in December 1950, my parents missed their annual pilgrimage to Tiona Reunion but joined their families for holiday time in January 1951, almost seventy years ago. Through a love for adventure my father exposed me to the wonders of exploring new places, which included rowing across Wallis Lake seeking fish, rock oysters and prawns, gathering pipis on the beach and discovering winding dirt roads during picnics in the bush. He taught me to go beyond the boundaries, a quest for knowledge, to be inclusive and to love your neighbour as yourself. Similarly, my mother, Gloria, shared the skills of awareness of what is going on around you, welcoming the stranger, listening to the needs of others and generous hospitality.

In November this year it will be sixty years since I was baptized by family friend, Jim Wallis, at Leichhardt Church in Sydney and confirmed by Victor Seaberg and Ted Parkes, the same two elders who blessed me as an infant. Leichhardt congregation nurtured me as a child and I grew to understand the gospel message of love and peace and to enjoy the fellowship of community. Sadly, this sacred space closed in 1992, was later demolished and now serves a need as inner-city housing.

Surprisingly, as I grow older I appreciate more the connections to sacramental moments in my faith journey. I always knew that Jim Wallis had grown up in nearby Nabiac on the Wallamba River, which flows into Wallis Lake, and for many years our families camped as neighbours for Tiona Reunion enjoying fishing, laughter and sunsets.

While researching family history over many years I discovered that my great-uncle, Victor Seaberg, was born at Tuncurry in 1888, the year that North Forster (later Tuncurry) Branch was established as the largest district of Community of Christ in the Australian colonies. Also revealing was the discovery that Ted Parkes' mother, Marion Blom, who I knew as Sister Parkes, was baptised in Wallis Lake at Tuncurry in 1888. Members of the Seaberg, Blom and Flood families later sailed in faith from Tuncurry to Sydney and became foundation members of the Balmain Branch, established in 1893. Family connections continued to merge through life events in this sacred space and Balmain evolved to become Drummoine Congregation, another sacred space, where Marion and I were married by Paul Henricks in 1977.

As I reflect on the natural environment and manmade heritage I recall that ministers of the church



have been sharing the message of the restoration in this unique area since American missionary, Gaud Rodger, travelled through the Hunter Valley and Myall Lakes in 1875, establishing contacts with pioneer families at Bungwahl and other early settlements on the Manning and Nambucca Rivers.

Many connections with the local area bring meaning and joy as I continue to serve at Tuncurry Congregation of the Community of Christ in a busy retirement by the sea. In 2002 members of the congregation installed a community Peace Pole in John Wright Park overlooking Cape Hawke Harbour at the entrance to Wallis Lake, which was dedicated by Danny Belrose. My heart soars that this waterside sacred space offers healing and hope through social justice events, peace vigils and quiet meditation for people of varied beliefs.

Through travels abroad I have experienced the impact of sacred spaces from wooden stave churches in Scandinavia to primitive caves in Turkey, majestic gothic cathedrals in European cities, domed citadels in ancient empires, holy ghats on the Ganges River, golden temples in Thailand and beautiful village churches in the counties of England. The United States restoration trail has led me to sites of significance in the story of the church in Nauvoo, Lamoni and Independence, where I received an evangelist blessing from Everett Graffeo in The Temple in 2004.

Domestic life for me has changed in 2020 and may never be the same as before COVID-19. Home is our sanctuary, neighbours are friends and television, internet and zoom gatherings are our connection to others.

I cherish sacred fun time with our growing grandchildren as we swim, play and watch whales at the beach and see dolphins, pelicans and fishing boats on Wallis Lake. So many sacred stories of adventure and surprise still to be told through the view from the veranda.....

**TIM
PRESCOTT
NSW**

sacred
spaces

'I have become aware sacred space for me is a state of mind not a place or location.'



When I was a very young child, I would say my prayers at bedtime like you see in the movies; every night, gathered as a family before going to bed. As a new Mum I spent so much time at the clothes line hanging washing out that this time became my time of prayer. Many years ago I used to ride my pushbike every day and I found my time on the bike was a time of connection to God but over the years I have forgotten this realisation. Now bike riding is just about trying to breath and stay upright. So I must find new ways to be at one with God. Now as I am older, I realise prayer and sacred space take different roles for me.

I have in the past found preparing worships, or reading inspiring stories or scripture in the same physical space, a special chair, has made the process sacred for me but now I find sacred space is in every day activities. As I allow myself to let go and focus on simple present tasks my mind is able to move to gratefulness and peace.

I have become aware sacred space for me is a state of mind not a place or location.

I recognise when I am moved to an awareness of gratitude, appreciation and peace this is my sacred space. It may be as fleeting as a butterfly kiss or dwelling in a prolonged sense of contentment.

During this time of Covid, there are times that I have felt this overwhelming sense of gratitude and

appreciation. Like when I have been walking in the bush by myself and just loving the solitude. Soaking in a hot tub under the stars with all their majesty. Blowing bubbles and being filled with the beauty of the colours that play on the edges. Gardening, trying to make a happy place for the native bees that live in our backyard. Each time I have felt this connection to God I have physically been doing something, yet my mind has taken my thoughts to gratitude and appreciation.

Thus, sacred space for me, at this time in my life, is definitely a state of mind.

**CHARMAINE
UNGER
NSW**