



# CONVERSAR NEWS

October 2015

COMPANIONS – A COMMUNITY OF CONSOLATION



## A word from our Chair, Anne Wakatama ...

Dear Companion,

I just wanted to touch base with you all to update you on two things.

If you were at the annual conference then you will know that we had a long discussion again around the need for members to provide evidence of a working with children check and /or a police check. It became clear during our discussions that different states have different requirements and that in Queensland for example the checks seem to be collapsed into one so called 'blue card.' The meeting resolved unanimously again that members do need to provide evidence when registering of whatever documentation is considered appropriate in their state or, if outside Australia, in the country in which they reside and work. This position is in accord with the advice I have been given by the HR department of the Jesuit Province and also with the requirements for teachers and other professionals who may be working in the same space in which there are children present. If you have not provided this documentation to the Secretary can you please do so as soon as possible.

At our last committee meeting we also discussed the need to tighten up our data base and to remove from it members who are no longer financial. With this in mind, and if you wish to continue as a member of Companions, can you please ensure you renew your membership by mid-December as we will be consolidating our data base at that time. Of course if you have already renewed please ignore this advice!

Blessings and Peace, Anne.

## Companions Pilgrimage and Conference - Wellington New Zealand 13<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> August 2015

### 'COMPOSITION OF PLACE'

The planned pilgrimage to Jerusalem up the Whanganui river was cancelled due to flooding and an alternative pilgrimage arranged around Wellington. Sr Sue Cosgrove, a Daughter of our Lady of Compassion introduced 12 of us to the work of the Sisters of Compassion and the foundress Suzanne Aubert, beginning in the Soup Kitchen.

An emersion into the *Tangata te Whenua* (people of the land) of New Zealand was led by Henare Wormsley who shared his gift of combining Maori Spirituality, Culture and the lost Maori art of sound using ancient wood instruments.

Our Conference began on the 13<sup>th</sup> August with a traditional *Mihi Whakatau* (Maori Welcome) led by Rex Begley. Each of the 30 participants were invited to introduce themselves by naming their River and Mountain. This assisted the 'Composition of Place' theme to get underway and bought something of the indigenous NZ peoples connectedness with the land to our conference.

Iain Radavan SJ, our very able MC led our informal conversations between Anne Wakatama and our guest presenters Sr Kath Rushton and Fr Mark Chamberlain.

Sr Kath from her skill and expertise as a biblical scholar explored with us the theme *Rediscovering the Spiritual in God's Creation*. In her 2 sessions she clearly directed us to the prologue of the Gospel of John as an insight and source of the 'new' cosmology's links with sacred scripture.

Fr Mark led us in exploring 'Composition of Place' in the Spiritual Exercises. He showed that Composition of Place isn't an imaginary play but how we can be present to the mystery of encountering Jesus in me, in my place.

A short presentation by Kevin Gallagher from his research 'The Spiritual Exercises and the Body' was offered. It is hoped that each future conference will offer an opportunity for a graduate to present their research in a topic related to Ignatian Spirituality.

The Conference was a great success and support for the ministry of the Spiritual Exercises in New Zealand The venue of the Home of Compassion was excellent, a place well suited to host our community of consolation. Delegates were introduced to the life and work of Suzanne Aubert, New Zealand's *Saint in the Making*, and something of her links

## YOUR NATIONAL COMMITTEE AND THEIR ROLES

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with Maori spirituality and place.

Since the conference Suzanne Aubert has been officially recognized as *Venerable* by Pope Francis, another step along the way for her. This conference was a significant step along the way for Companions being the first held in NZ.

Kevin Gallagher

*'A pilgrimage is a time of prayer and to witness the miraculous signposts God has left for our return to Him. Ask God to bless you with a heart that will be receptive to the treasure chest of graces He desires to shower upon your pilgrimage. The success of your spiritual journey will depend upon your openness, faith, flexibility, and love' (Source unknown)*

Just as Ignatius had to alter his plans for his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, so we too needed to exercise faith and flexibility in Wellington. The spiritual home for our hosts (the Sisters of Compassion) Hiruharama was no longer reachable due to the worst floods in recorded history. But for those of us lucky enough to be on this pilgrimage, a wonderful journey into the life and ongoing works of Mother Suzanne Aubert unfolded.

We visited several significant sites around Wellington that featured in her life there. The original site of her creche for underprivileged and disabled children has been beautifully restored by the local authorities (hopefully with her beatification as New Zealand's first saint not too far away). Morning tea at the Soup Kitchen revealed this outreach activity to be still addressing the needs of those on the fringes of society. It was surprising that the numbers of volunteers seeking to assist in the program currently exceeds those receiving its services.

Mother Aubert was small in stature but presented a formidable figure to those in government with whom she frequently negotiated programs and resources. Lunch was taken on the steps of parliament in the vanguard of a demonstration for the legalisation of marijuana. (The group pondered whether as a herbalist and chemist working with traditional Maori remedies, Mother Aubert would have been marching.)

At the heart of Mother Aubert's ministry was her deep connection with and service to the Maori people. In the evening we followed the story of her congregation as it unfolded along the banks and communities of the Whanganui River in the movie "Sisters of the River".

This infusion of Maori culture was significantly deepened on day two of the pilgrimage at *Te Papa* the national museum of Maori culture. Here Henare, a Maori man, introduced us to the protocols of welcome ceremonies and we sang our waiata well enough not to offend our hosts. The group were impressed at the depth of integration with which Maori culture is exhibited in everyday life and at how easily a common spirituality emerged from Henare's talks.

Over the journey of our pilgrimage we did indeed encounter God in the ministries established by Mother Aubert and the Spirit that the Maori people regard as permeating all creation. It was a splendid preface for our conference on Composition of Place. Kia Ora Kevin and Sr. Sue who were our guides and educators.

Paul White

Many thanks to Kevin and Paul for writing up the experience of the Conference. It enriches us all and for those of us not able to attend at least gives us a taster. A special thanks to Kevin and his team for all the work in preparing for the Conference. Next year our conference is going to be at Seven Hill with Michael Smith SJ as our key presenter.

Anne has mentioned in her word at the beginning of this newsletter a request to keep our membership up to date by renewing membership and providing the necessary documentation by mid-December. I encourage you to do this.

I would welcome any contributions that you can offer to make this a voice of companions and that assist us in enriching this special ministry we have entrusted to us. Send at any time to lynettetoohy@hotmail.com They will be received with gratitude...long or short! We need your contributions to have the material for a newsletter that content is at the service of our ministry. The next deadline is Monday 14th December. Send it in now before you get caught up in Advent longing and/or Christmas busy-ness.

Lynette