



Australian Health and Welfare Chaplains Association Inc.
(Incorporated in Victoria. Reg. No. A5886)
ABN 393 212 905)

AHWCA 2007 Conference Opening Worship
“Going to the depths.....”
15th April 2007

Homily

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.”

Here we are gathered in this place for the 2007 AHWCA National Conference. We’re not yet sure what lies before us. There’s a sense of anticipation and perhaps excitement – opportunity to renew friendships/connections, begin new ones. Perhaps we come with a sense of tiredness or gratefulness just to be able to come into a different environment and hopefully recharge the batteries. But there is a challenge before us as we enter this time together. The challenge before us at this conference is to “go to the depths.....”

Those working in chaplaincy and pastoral care know about going to the depths with others.

Our willingness to go there with others is often motivated by a belief that in the depths of human experience: illness, isolation; grief; loss; death; brokenness - God is found.

Every person here who works in chaplaincy and pastoral care knows the awe of encountering God in those places – an experience of holy ground!

We know in these experiences the significance, absolute necessity for trust and the importance of vulnerability. These are the most profound experiences and privileges – being entrusted with another’s story.

We are here because we believe in this ministry.....we are blown away, surprised and humbled again and again by those with whom we journey.

But it seems to me that we are not so good at going to those places in ourselves.

- How able are we to trust another with our own stories
- How willing are we to be vulnerable with one another
- How willing are we to know and own the depths of ourselves – our own brokenness; dis-ease; capacity to act/be in ways we never contemplated let alone thought possible
- How able are we to go to the depths of ourselves and be honest about, acknowledge, and honour what we find in ourselves – this is the path to wholeness!

Thomas Merton says “there is in all things a hidden wholeness”. In exploring this the Quaker Parker Palmer reminds us that wholeness is not about perfection but knowing

brokenness as an integral part of life. And after all, this is the message of the Easter season!

This week we are on a journey together – a journey to the depths – the depths of ourselves, others and of God.

We need courage for this journey and our courage comes from knowing that wherever the journey takes us – God is there.

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.”

Prayer

Holy, intimate, vulnerable God,
Open our eyes that we might see
Open our ears that we might hear
The deep places within ourselves
That long to be known and loved.
You call each of us to wholeness.
Give us courage and companions for our journey to the depths.
Amen.

The Reverend Cheryl Holmes
National President