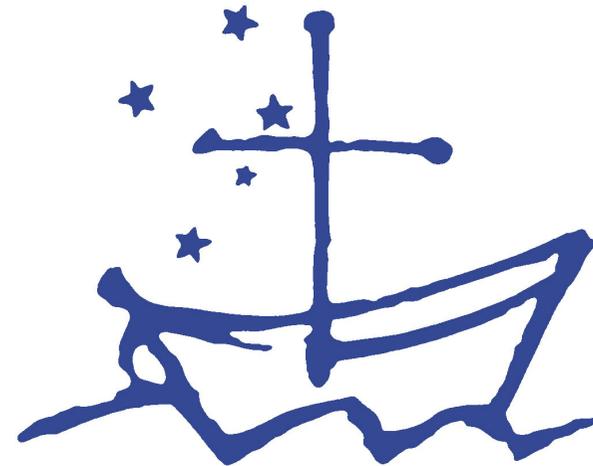


# Living the Easter Mystery

## An Ecumenical Lenten Resource for 2014



Prepared by a Working Party of SA Council of Churches

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## INTRODUCTION & NOTES

This Ecumenical Resource offers suggestions for five group sessions in Lent 2014. Historically, Lent has been a time of preparation for the blessings of the Easter season. It is hoped that Christians from different experiences of church and life will be able to come together to reflect on how Lent can still be meaningful today.

The five sessions lead us through **As Disciples, Into New Life, Into the Suffering of Others, From Woundedness to Healing** and **Into Justice – confronting the powers**.

Scriptural passages, reflections on the Gospel, contemporary insights, art and ideas for practice and action in daily life are offered for exploration, consideration and imagination. Feel free to use them in ways that open up conversation and reflection, making space for sharing new insights about the individual journey and growth in Christ.

**Art works** in this resource are from the Art Gallery of South Australia. They are available for download but please see their **Copyright Statement** at <http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agsa/home/About/docs/copyright.html>

**Are you willing to be a contact person** for your area and to assist groups to be formed that are as ecumenical as possible?

Groups of around 5-8 people probably works best. Try to include people from different churches...contact neighbouring churches and invite the people to form clusters of groups with you and with others.

### Contributors

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Philip Gardner is a member of the Pastoral Relations Team of the Uniting Church Synod of South Australia. Philip enjoys reading, film, walking and collecting socks and ties.

Geraldine Hawkes is Executive Officer of the SA Council of Churches, a Spiritual Companion and Mentor to Ministers and Pastoral Carers across various Churches. She enjoys conversation, music, long walks and visual arts.

Josephine Laffin is Senior Lecturer in Church History for the Department of Theology, Flinders University. She enjoys gardening, travelling and photography.

And so we begin...

## 6. Practices/Action

- Who are the people who inspire you in the way of Christ?
- Who are the people whose lives are centred on justice and who challenge powers that are oppressive?

They may be holy women and men, near to us or far away, or recognised saints or martyrs. Can we name them?

### Millennium Development Goals

Consider the the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which range from halving extreme poverty rates to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015. They form a blueprint agreed to by all the world's countries and all the world's leading development institutions. They have galvanized unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest. From this site, explore the efforts of the [UN and its partners](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/) for building a better world. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

Australian Christian Meditation Community  
<http://www.christianmeditationaustralia.org/>

## 7. Closing Prayer

**Together:** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever. Amen.  
Let us offer each other a sign of peace.

All is to be befriended and transformed...

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Nurturing our attitude, our response and our disposition as a way into justice  
The empty tomb as a symbol of an empty space which makes room for transformation – *kenosis* as self-emptying and the sense of ‘nothingness’ through which something can emerge

There are only two feelings. Love and fear.  
There are only two languages. Love and fear.  
There are only two activities. Love and fear.  
There are only two motives, two procedures, two frameworks, two results.  
Love and fear.  
Love and fear.  
*‘A Common Prayer’ by Michael Leuning (permission being sought to include)*

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How do we respond when we witness the political power plays reflected in this disturbing Gospel? What political power plays does this remind us of in recent times, where we feel the pain of being caught between a rock and a hard place? What happens to our sense of integrity in such situations?

To what extent does this Gospel reflect the pain of our inhumanity and what has been described as the ‘cost of discipleship’?

Where does the truth lie in all this? Is it easy to discern in situations of such complexity who is the enemy and who is the friend here? It is easy to ‘judge’ from the outside and much harder to acknowledge that we are in some ways ‘involved’ and share a sense of responsibility for what takes place when things are so politicised.

Are we part of the problem or part of the solution or both? Are we wounded or wounding or both? Is there any good news in this Gospel?

## 5. Art

*Crucifixion*, Barbara Hanrahan (see guidance on Copyright at p2)  
<http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agsa/home/Collection/detail.jsp?ecatKey=4377>

## SESSION ONE: AS DISCIPLES

### 1. Gathering

#### ◆ As we begin...

Take a few moments to introduce one another. You are also invited to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which you gather.

#### ◆ Opening Prayer

This may take the form of silent prayer or a short prayer by one or more.

**Leader:** May we accept God’s invitation to let our story join with God’s story and in so doing may we grow to gaze more lovingly on God, on one another and on all of creation. Amen.

### 2. Matthew 16:21-26 – someone to read through for the group

### 3. Unwrapping the theme

Focus of the Gospel: Jesus predicts suffering and death, discipleship as cross bearing.

To explore:

- \* Jesus sets face to Jerusalem.
- \* Contrast of Jesus’ call and disciples’ expectations.
- \* Shock of image of cross bearing.

There are many beautiful and rich images of the Christian life. You may like to share some of your favourites in your group. Being born anew, being adopted as a child of God, a sister or brother of Jesus, walking with Jesus, abiding in Christ, living in love. If we include images from the Hebrew Scriptures we add deeply rooted trees planted by rivers, a river of living water that brings life wherever it flows, evergreen trees full of sap, the breath of God giving life. They are just a taste. So much beauty, so life giving, so positive.

Jesus however gives us an image that was shocking, and would be to us if we were not familiar with it. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24) or as famously paraphrased by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

The cross and resurrection of Jesus are not just events in the past but are a way of understanding what it means to follow Jesus. The harsh image of Jesus – that following him includes taking up our cross – reminds us that alongside the beauty, tranquillity and growth that may mark our walk with Christ, they will also be struggle, suffering and sorrow. Some of these may be focussed inward as we wrestle with natural inclinations that are inimical to healthy discipleship, wrestle with deeply ingrained habits that have a grip on us, or face those squarely our idols, addictions, that hold us in their sway. Some of this may be outwardly focussed as we face opposition, misunderstanding and mischief making. Often they will be hard to separate as our inward and outward journeys run parallel.

I feel like there should be some comforting word to finish with but I think not. Jesus gives us a harsh image of discipleship – cross bearing – and at times it is the most apt of descriptions for following him.  
*Philip Gardner*

#### 4. Contemporary Resonances

***Focus: Christian life as a journey of taking up the cross, of letting go and taking up, dying and rising.***

***Some fragments for reflection and discussion from which to choose and muse...***

For ourselves... how do we seek to bear our cross lightly and lovingly?

For others... where do we recognise and appreciate the cross bearers in our midst?

For God... where do we recognise the significance of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross?

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Christian faith can be a movement from witnesses who hear - to disciples who follow - to apostles who lead...discipleship is in the middle of the living of our faith – where do we see ourselves and each other?

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God give us strength. Strength to hold on and strength to let go. Amen.  
*'A Common Prayer' by Michael Leuning (permission being sought to include)*

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gratitude, seeing the doughnut and not just the hole.

Our comfort zone – is it a safe place or a prison of our own making?

Where is the enemy in all this (beyond, within) and where is the friend in all this (beyond, within)?

What power I may stand to lose when the day of justice dawns?

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Listen to the outcast within you – from 'Prayer at Night' by Jim Cotter

*Listen to the outcast within you...*

*The only one whence healing and reconciliation can come...*

*The only one who can bring salvation to the part of you that speaks loudest and thinks itself strongest...*

*In your inscape, as well as in the landscape of the wider world, the voice of the poor and the oppressed has priority over the voice of the dominant...*

*We must not refuse to become aware of all that we find distressing or painful or fearful within; if we do, we shall merely project onto others our own inner darkness...*

*Are you white and afraid of your blackness?*

*Are you male and afraid of the feminine within?*

*Are you heterosexual and afraid of your homosexual feelings?*

*Are you rich and afraid of your poverty?*

*Are you young and afraid of being old?*

*Are you healthy and afraid of your mortality?*

*Are you able and afraid of disability?*

*Are you busily involved and afraid of being useless?*

*Nothing is to be expelled as foreign...*

their power over him. If only they knew who stood before them ...

John puts into a narrative form what Paul speaks of in Colossians, that in the cross, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it." (Colossians 2:15) The death and resurrection of Jesus reveal the true nature of the powers, the limits of their authority is exposed, and we are freed from their tyranny.

This has given Christians courage to faithfully follow Jesus in confronting the powers and working for justice. One thinks of the Christians who confronted the Nazi's like Paul Schneider, the students of Munich, including siblings Sophie and Hans Scholl, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. One remembers too those who struggled for justice in Latin America, like Oscar Romero and the Maryknoll Sisters. Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King in their commitment to civil rights in the US could also be added. All these people stand for the countless folk who because of Jesus were not daunted by the brute force of their enemies but trusted in the transforming power of God's love and justice.

The stories of Jesus facing trial, suffering death on the cross and raised from the dead are invitations to us to join in God's mission in transforming the world. A call to live with courage and hope, to work for justice and peace, until the glory of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea.

*Philip Gardner*

## 4. Contemporary Resonances

**Focus: Crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus commit us to all who are living in poverty or who are marginalised in some way. In suffering and death, powers are exposed.**

**Some fragments for reflection and discussion from which to choose and muse...**

Do we make the cross heavy for others?

How do we carry each other's burdens?

Bearing the cross lightly and lovingly rather than heavily and with hatred for ourselves, others and God.

Disciplines in bearing our cross lightly could include nurturing lightness of being, being still and silent, understanding that we are not our circumstances, nurturing

He did not say, 'You shall not be tempest-tossed, you shall not be work-weary, you shall not be discomforted.' But he said, 'You shall not be overcome.' *Julian of Norwich*

In what ways do we embrace: the cross; the exile; suffering? What is so good about Good Friday? An anticipatory question...

Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains a single grain, but if it dies it yields a rich harvest. What does this say to us about discipleship?

Can we identify a particular cross we bear at this point in our lives, individually or as members of the community of faith? What do we find 'engaging' about this cross that draws us to embrace it as we recognise the suffering associated with it? What has this cross go to do with our sense of discipleship, where we gain a sense that we are following the way of Christ? Do we find this cross to be 'life-taking' or 'life-giving' or both? Who helps you bear your cross – who is your Simon of Cyrene?

## 5. Art

*Crucifixion of St Andrew Mattia Preti (see guidance on Copyright at p2)*

<http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agsa/home/Collection/detail.jsp?ecatKey=7582>

## 6. Action/Practices



### The Sign of the Cross

The sign of the Cross has been used by Christians since the time of the Apostles. It is a pious act, which the Orthodox Christians make in the following manner; the thumb, the index and the middle finger of the right hand are joined together, while the remaining two fingers are bent and touching the palm of the hand. At first, the forehead is touched, then the breast, the right shoulder and the left shoulder.

Besides the impression which the sign of the Cross makes on the senses, it reminds us of its spiritual meanings. The three fingers joined together symbolise the Oneness of God in the three Persons of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The two fingers, pressing the palm of the

hand, signify the union of the two natures in Christ, the Divine and the Human. The touch of the forehead signifies that God is in our head (in our mind), the touch of the breast signifies that God is in our heart (in our feelings), the touch of the shoulders signifies that God is in our limbs, directing them as He wills. In other words, by the sign of the Cross we dedicate to the service of God all the power of our mind, heart, and soul.

We are led to this service of God by means of the sign of the Cross, because it reminds us of Christ's death on the Cross, to which "God gave His only-begotten Son" out of His love to the world (John 3:16). The sign of the Cross on our bodies is also a prayer for God's blessing upon us and others. It has often proved a protection against evil, whether in one's inner thoughts or outward actions, when made in true faith in its power.

Therefore, we rightly make the sign of the cross when we start and close our prayers; when we enter a Church; when we kiss the Icons of the Saints; when the name of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, the name of the Virgin Mary, and of the Saints are pronounced during the Services; when sacred instances occur during the Divine Liturgy; when we start and finish our meals; and on many other occasions. Its frequent repetition, when we are mindful of its significance, can become to us a source and fountain of every blessing.

(taken from <http://www.greekorthodox.org.au/general/spirituality/thesignofthecross> )

**Ecumenical Quiet Day - Theme: The Lord's Prayer** - All welcome!

Saturday 22 March 2014, 9.30am arrival, commence 10am conclude 2.30pm Christ Church Anglican Church, 62 Jeffcott Street, North Adelaide

To be led by Archbishop Jeffrey Driver, Sr Patricia Fox and Rev Rob Williams

**Contact** SA Council of Churches for more information – [sacc@picknowl.com.au](mailto:sacc@picknowl.com.au) / 08 8215 0300

## 7. Concluding Prayer

## SESSION FIVE: INTO JUSTICE – CONFRONTING THE POWERS

### 1. Gathering

#### ◆ As we begin...

Take a few moments to introduce one another. You are also invited to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which you gather.

#### ◆ Opening Prayer

This may take the form of silent prayer or a short prayer by one or more.

**Leader:** May we accept God's invitation to let our story join with God's story and in so doing may we grow to gaze more lovingly on God, on one another and on all of creation. Amen.

### 2. Read John 18:28-38: someone to read through for the group

### 3. Unwrapping the theme

Focus of the Gospel: Jesus before Caiaphas and Pilate.

To Explore

- \* In trial and crucifixion Jesus is confronted by the military, religious and political powers.
- \* Conversations indicate another realm.
- \* Crucifixion and resurrection expose the powers. (Col)

Jesus is brought before the military, political and religious authorities. His supporters scattered, bound and beaten, Jesus appears powerless. A poor man stripped of his dignity is paraded before the pomp of the world's power in Caiaphas and Pilate. Jesus is like all the powerless who are the playthings of the powerful, their lives hang by a thread, and their whole existence at the mercy of the whims of a despot.

The gospel writer John though, is given to irony. Although he doesn't realise it Caiaphas the High Priest of Israel is being confronted by the one through whom all priesthood finds its meaning. Similarly Pilate representing the most powerful empire of the day is confronted by the true ruler of the world. As such they find no answers to their questions, only more questions, as Jesus refuses to acknowledge

## Prayer

My God, I am yours for time and eternity.

Teach me to cast myself entirely into the arms of your loving providence with the most lively, unlimited confidence in your compassionate, tender pity.

Grant me, O most merciful Redeemer,

that whatever you ordain or permit may be acceptable to me.

Take from my heart all painful anxiety; suffer nothing to sadden me but sin, nothing to delight me but the hope of coming to the possession of you,

my God and my all, in your everlasting Kingdom. Amen.

*Venerable Catherine McAuley's Suscipe*

**Make a time to visit a local faith community. For example, the Coptic Gallery at St Mary and St Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church, 18 Goldfinch Avenue, Cowandilla**  
- Bookings via [coptic.gallery@gmail.com](mailto:coptic.gallery@gmail.com)

## 7. Closing Prayer

# SESSION TWO: INTO NEW LIFE

## 1. Gathering

### ◆ As we begin...

Take a few moments to introduce one another. You are also invited to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which you gather.

### ◆ Opening Prayer

This may take the form of silent prayer or a short prayer by one or more.

**Leader:** May we accept God's invitation to let our story join with God's story and in so doing may we grow to gaze more lovingly on God, on one another and on all of creation. Amen.

## 2. Read John 20:11-18 – someone to read through for the group

## 3. Unwrapping the theme

Focus of the Gospel: **Encounter between Jesus and Mary Magdalene**

### To explore

- \* **Failure to recognise but does so when named.**
- \* **Do not cling.**
- \* **Commissioned and sent.**

John's narrative of Mary Magdalene's encounter with the newly risen Jesus in the garden is a profoundly beautiful passage filled with phrases and images that invite pondering and prayer.

*Mary's heart rending searching for the body of Jesus.*

*Her failure to recognise Jesus.*

*That Jesus calls Mary by name.*

*That it is only then that she recognises him.*

*That Jesus commissions Mary to tell the disciples the good news.*

*That Mary is sent, the first apostle of the resurrection.*

Another interesting moment in the passage is Jesus' insistence that Mary

not cling to him. One might think that this is pastorally insensitive of Jesus, rejecting the longing of Mary. On the other hand it suggests that Mary could not enter into the new relationship with Jesus, crucified and risen, if she held too tightly to her old relationship with him. Refusing to let go of her previous understanding of Jesus. Clinging to the old prevents her from embracing the new.

This passage has fascinated me ever since a stray comment by a New Testament lecturer that this “preached well”. It took me a number of years to figure out how to preach on it. (Maybe I am a slow learner.) I was helped by a course I did in pastoral care. The lecturer, speaking on the importance of recognising and grieving the losses in our lives, reflected that many relationships fail or struggle because of people’s inability to let go of the past. He spoke of parents who clung too tightly to their children even after they are married themselves and of husbands who continued to have the same relationship with their mates though they now have new responsibilities. The penny dropped for me, Jesus word to Mary was a word to all of us, we all have face changes, we suffer loss, and we struggle to embrace the new, or even be open to new possibilities whilst we cling fiercely to past.

This passage invites us to consider our lives. To reflect on what we are clinging too tightly to, what is Jesus inviting us to let go of. To discern the new things to which God is calling us.  
*Philip Gardner*

## 4. Contemporary Resonances

***Focus: Continue previous focus but with an emphasis on letting go of the past to embrace the future. Leaving our old life for new life.***

***Some fragments for reflection and discussion from which to choose and muse...***

That which is Christ-like within us shall be crucified. It shall suffer and be broken. And that which is Christ-like within us shall rise up. It shall love and create.  
*‘A Common Prayer’ by Michael Leuning (permission being sought to include)*

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Sometimes it seems that we have been praying a long time and still do not have what we ask. But we should not be sad. I am sure that what our Lord means is that either we should wait for a better time, or more grace, or a better gift.  
*Julian of Norwich*

- ◇ the ending of valued relationships through disagreement, separation or death
- ◇ experiencing being broken and struggling to be whole and healed again
- ◇ embracing woundedness to understand the growth it can offer us
- ◇ becoming wounded healers (after Henri Nouwen) and ensuring that we are wounded healers rather than ‘wounded wounders’
- ◇ identifying positively with others who may be similarly wounded in solidarity

Healing is about desire, longing and yearning for oneness with self, others and God.

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What is he indeed that is maker and lover and keeper? I cannot find words to tell. For until I am one with him I can never have true rest or peace. I can never know it until I am so close to him that there is nothing in between. *Julian of Norwich*

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Sometimes seeking help is more difficult than offering help. We are all both needy and gifted people. There are two ways we can engage in care as we face the real difficulties of life. We can offer our gift when we see another in need or we can receive a gift from another when we are in need. Sometimes we need to be humble and courageous enough to receive as well as to give, as both involve the risk and the grace of loving one another. Sometimes a beautiful mutuality of care can grow through human solidarity.

## 5. Art

*Virgin Lamenting the Dead Christ*, Giuseppe Scolari (see guidance on Copyright at p2)

<http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agsa/home/Collection/detail.jsp?ecatKey=8072>

## 6. Practices/Action

“...**your will be done...**” – what does this mean for me? What does it mean for my local church community?

number of approaches including psychologists and professional counsellors. If you have experienced what for you is significant trauma you should not hesitate to seek help. Secondly by what follows I am not suggesting that the perpetrators of suffering not be held accountable for the wounds they inflict.

I find John's image of the risen Christ still bearing the wounds of the cross an extraordinarily powerful one. On the one hand he is telling us that the resurrected Christ is transformed. He is alive, no longer dead. He is triumphant, defeating the powers of sin and death. God has done something wonderful and extraordinary in raising Jesus from the dead. And yet – he still carries with him the marks of his suffering. The resurrection of Jesus does not erase the wounds of crucifixion but their meaning is transformed. On Saturday when Jesus' body lies buried the wounds are signs of the triumph of evil, of the power over death wielded by the religious, political and military leaders. On Sunday they are the marks of love, revealing a new way in the world, when death is not the final word. The false power of the leaders is revealed and they are stripped of the power to lord it over us.

When we commit our lives into the gracious and loving hands of God, including our wounds, suffering and hurt they too can be transformed. What others may have meant for evil God can turn to good. Through the healing, forgiveness and new beginning offered to us in Jesus we can begin the journey from woundedness to healing. It is a journey that takes courage. It is a journey often made of many small steps. And it is a journey that leads to our healing and the blessing of others. Our lives are transformed and yet we still carry the marks, no longer only signs of hurt but potentially signs of new life and love. So we are invited to put our lives into Jesus' hands, trusting that all of our lives may be a blessing to others.

*Philip Gardner*

## 4. Contemporary Resonances

***Focus: especially/including those wounded by the church***

***Some fragments for reflection and discussion from which to choose and muse...***

Woundedness may involve:

- ◇ the painful necessity of 'breaking things open' in order for them to be healed

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In what ways is our sharing in the life giving self-giving of Jesus life giving for others and for ourselves?

In what ways are we living the irony of the cross – losing and finding ourselves; the first shall be last and the last first?

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We are invited to renewed and different relationships, to realize unrecognised potential, and the gift of freedom.

Like Mary Magdalene, can we hear the challenge and invitation to let go and embrace the new; to experience the pain and prospect of change; where even changes we have long desired can disturb us once they begin to take place and perhaps have implications we had not fully considered until they happened. (It seemed a good idea at the time.)

Can we identify a 'Mary Magdalene Moment' in our lives or in the life of our community of faith where we may tend to 'cling on' rather than 'let go'?

Can we identify a time when we did 'let go' and found it to be a life giving experience?

## 5. Art

*Christ and the Two Marys*, Holman Hunt (see guidance on Copyright at p2)

<http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agsa/home/Collection/detail.jsp?ecatKey=4909>

## 6. Action/Practices

### The Clearness Committee

*A Communal Approach To Discernment* by Parker J. Palmer

Many of us face a dilemma when trying to deal with a personal problem, question, or decision. On the one hand, we know that the issue is ours alone to resolve and that we have the inner resources to resolve it, but access to our own resources is often blocked by layers of inner "stuff"—confusion, habitual thinking, fear, despair. On the other hand, we know that friends might help us uncover our inner resources and find our way, but by exposing our problem to

others, we run the risk of being invaded and overwhelmed by their assumptions, judgments, and advice—a common and alienating experience. As a result, we often privatize these vital questions in our lives: at the very moment when we need all the help we can get, we find ourselves cut off from both our inner resources and the support of a community.

<http://www.couragerenewal.org/parker/writings/clearness-committee>

### The Daily Examen

The Daily Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and discern his direction for us. The Examen is an ancient practice in the Church that can help us see God's hand at work in our whole experience:

1. **Become aware of God's presence.**
2. **Review the day with gratitude.**
3. **Pay attention to your emotions.**
4. **Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.**
5. **Look toward tomorrow.**

For details about each step of the Examen, read [How Can I Pray?](#)

<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>

### 7. Closing Prayer

## SESSION FOUR: FROM WOUNDED-NESS TO HEALING

### 1. Gathering

#### ◆ As we begin...

Take a few moments to introduce one another. You are also invited to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which you gather.

#### ◆ Opening Prayer

This may take the form of silent prayer or a short prayer by one or more.

**Leader:** May we accept God's invitation to let our story join with God's story and in so doing may we grow to gaze more lovingly on God, on one another and on all of creation. Amen.

### 2. Read John 20: 19-23: someone to read through for the group

### 3. Unwrapping the theme

Focus of the Gospel: **Resurrection Eve. Jesus shows his wounds. "Crucified Risen One and Risen Crucified One" Breathes Spirit on them.**

#### To Explore

- \* **Jesus' continues to carry the marks of the cross.**
- \* **Continue to mark him as crucified one but now transfigured into "wounds of love".**

Any of us who have lived life into adulthood have received our share of emotional and spiritual wounds along the way. These do not seem to be handed out fairly with some of us experiencing grief, suffering and loss in ways that are unimaginable to others. Our temperaments differ too, so that what for one person is a glancing blow, to another is devastating catastrophe. Whatever we have suffered in life and however we have responded I think it is fair to say that we all carry wounds from the business of living.

Before we move on I don't want anyone to feel that their particular suffering is belittled in what follows. A reminder that there is some trauma that requires a

“This Jesus, the Risen Christ, was in me and yet I felt nothing of his presence. So often I was looking elsewhere for him. As long as I continued to run away from the wellsprings he had placed in the hollow of my being, I might well go far, very far, but I kept getting lost on roads that led nowhere. There seemed no way to find a joy in God.

Then the time came when I realised that Christ had never left me. I hardly dared speak to him, but he understood, and already he spoke to me. When the veil of worry was lifted, the trusting of faith came to illuminate even my own night.”  
*Br Roger of Taize*

## 5. Art

*Ecce Homo* Albrecht Dürer (see guidance on Copyright at p2)  
<http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agsa/home/Collection/detail.jsp?ecatKey=2651>

## 6. Practices/Action

Take time during the next week to notice what is happening – or not happening – around you, especially in your neighbourhood, your workplace, the wider community, another country.

Where do you notice suffering...how might you/we respond?

### Peace in the Middle East

Let us remember especially Christians across the Middle East, including in the Holy Land. SA Council of Churches invites you and your community to continue to pray for peace among all peoples. We also invite you to buy a **Peace Lamp** from Taybeh, Palestine, for your Church, for your home.

Taybeh is a West Bank village, 35 kilometres north of Jerusalem, where Peace Lamps are made by up to 20 young people. The initiative is “a call to all people of faith around the world to pray for peace in the Holy Land”: their hope is that every Church in the world may have a Peace Lamp.

**Contact** SA Council of Churches for more information – [sacc@picknowl.com.au](mailto:sacc@picknowl.com.au) / 08 8215 0300

## 7. Closing Prayer

# SESSION THREE: INTO THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS

## 1. Gathering

### ◆ As we begin...

Take a few moments to introduce one another. You are also invited to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which you gather.

### ◆ Opening Prayer

This may take the form of silent prayer or a short prayer by one or more.

**Leader:** May we accept God’s invitation to let our story join with God’s story and in so doing may we grow to gaze more lovingly on God, on one another and on all of creation. Amen.

## 2. Read Matthew 26:36-46: someone to read through for the group

## 3. Unwrapping the theme

Focus of the Gospel: Gethsemane

To explore:

- \* Jesus longs to be released from his ministry.
- \* Longs for companionship but disciples fail him.
- \* Although disciples fail Jesus he does not fail us.

Jesus praying at Gethsemane is rich and deep. We gain insight into the humanity of Jesus. The plight of someone who has bravely confronted the religious and political leaders of his day with the injustice of their lives and teaching and who has demonstrated God’s alternative reign of justice, healing and peace now facing his own imminent and painful death. The plight of someone who longs to escape their inevitable fate but cannot do so without losing everything they believe in. At this moment Jesus wrestles in prayer, hoping against hope in the deepest parts of being that they may be another way out. And he longs for companionship, he longs for people to pray with him. Yet he prays alone.

One year in preparing for Holy Week a small group of us were preparing for the week’s services. I was meditating on this passage. We were also praying for a situation in which one of our congregation was facing the death of his son. In

what was clearly an emotionally charged situation I felt with new poignancy the loneliness of Jesus. Why couldn't someone have been his companion? So completely abandoned by his friends.

In the midst of these feelings evoked by reflecting on this passage I was reminded of the phrase of Francis Maloney, "The disciples may fail Jesus but Jesus doesn't fail the failing disciples". The disciples abandon Jesus and we are no better. Yet Jesus suffers abandonment, loneliness and loss for our sake. So that we might know his presence, his intercession when we need it most. Jesus' priesthood, his representative role came home with fresh force. As we prayed for our friend and his predicament, we did so in, through and with Jesus, who knows loss and loneliness.

So we are able to bring our suffering world, our anxiety and grief, the longings of our hearts, the people and places we love to the One who knows us and who has tasted the depths of human loss and suffering. The one who suffered abandonment that we might know his friendship in all the circumstances of our lives.

*Philip Gardner*

#### 4. Contemporary Resonances

**Focus: The passion of Jesus and the suffering of the world. (Including Christians around the world.)**

**Some fragments for reflection and discussion from which to choose and muse...**

Who are the 'cross bearers' today those who bear heavy burdens?

- \* Being a carer
- \* Being a leader
- \* Being poor
- \* Being oppressed
- \* Being detained
- \* Being excluded
- \* Being 'dis - abled'
- \* Being 'out of communion' in some way
- \* Being denied acknowledgment or recognition
- \* Being denied legitimate 'power' or a voice that can be heard

- \* Being overwhelmed by busy-ness and divided attention
- \* Being caught in the crossfire of tension in relationships

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Bearing one another's burdens – from '**Healing: more or less**' by Jim Cotter

*"Some people become voluntary pain-bearers, absorbing the anger and hurt of others, and giving back acceptance and care..."*

*Think of the charge nurse on a hospital ward, hearing the anxiety of the patient, the panic of a mother whose son is in intensive care, the stress of the staff...*

*Think of the therapist, who becomes for a while the client's hated parent, and who receives the vengeful feelings of the betrayed child, and does not give back further pain...*

*Think of those on the end of telephones, those listening to the despairing, the complaint departments of a store or transport system, receiving the anger of the public...*

*Think of the 'buddy' who cares for a person living with HIV/AIDS, maybe one who has been rejected by families and friends...*

*These are the ones who refuse to blame-throw, who refuse to scapegoat individuals or minority groups, who bear the discomfort of a world far from well."*

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There is a hermit in each of us: perhaps there is room in this world only for hermits – or at most hermits in pairs. *Friedrich Nietzsche*

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How do we experience prayer as a sense of God's absence as well as God's presence? Sometimes it is just a sense of empty cold dark space, sometimes the emptiness is filled with warmth and light. Even when you cannot recognise him, will you stay close to him in long silences when nothing seems to be happening? There, with him, life's most significant decisions take shape. *Br Roger of Taize*

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