

'Out of the whirlwind': Clinical Pastoral Education and Climate Change

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Abstract

This article traces the development of an innovative program of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), conducted in 2013, Victoria, Australia. Interns were placed in environmental contexts; the program’s aim was to enhance the eco-ministry identity of interns as they attended to the anxieties and concerns of people affected by ecological change, as well as listening to the cries and groans of Earth. In this sense pastoral care acknowledges the environment and our human presence within it as of religious and spiritual concern.

The theological and supervisory rationales of the program are outlined and include a careful alignment of parallel competencies with the existing objectives and standards required for accreditation. Guidelines for **Sacred Practice in Nature, Place/Case Study** and the **More-than-Human Verbatims** are described, and an illustrative example of such a verbatim is also included.

*Keywords:* eco-ministry, Earth, pastoral care, education, CPE.

*‘Were you there when I planned the earth?’  
Job 38, 4.<sup>1</sup>*

## **Introduction**

Listening, empathic listening lies at the core of Clinical Pastoral Education (and Pastoral Care). But to whom do we listen? This question concerns the nature of ‘the other’.

Traditionally our answer is a human other, and especially the most vulnerable. Our ministry contexts are hospitals, corporations, prisons, military institutions, schools, churches, synagogues, mosques and local communities. Other people are suffering. But in our time Earth too is suffering. Earth herself is pushing into our awareness in unprecedented ways.<sup>2</sup>

Climate scientists have been warning about global warming for many decades. Increasingly frequent and severe weather events, rising sea levels, floods, fires, droughts for example are now beginning to impact our lives and appear, (though so belatedly) in our public discourse. What happens if we attempt to cross the line we have drawn around ‘the other’ as the human other? What might it mean to try to see the more-than-human world as other, to attend to the vulnerable Earth? Attention in the form of empathic listening transforms the listener as well as the one listened to. Dare we open ourselves to discovering this truth in fresh and powerful ways?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Biblical references from Job are from the translation by Mitchell, Stephen. *The Book of Job*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> To speak of climate change as Earth suffering is to step beyond our normal cultural assumptions. This complex issue is discussed in Morgan, J. *Earth’s Cry: Prophetic Ministry in a More-than-Human World*. Melbourne: Uniting Academic Press, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> While this essay arises from within the practice of pastoral care and supervision in CPE, the questions raised are we believe pertinent to counselling and indeed the whole field of religious, spiritual and theological engagement.

‘Treasure in Earthen Vessels’ (Weiss and Temme, 2009)<sup>4</sup> is the title of the book which compiles presentations given at the International Council on Pastoral Care and Counselling (ICPCC) in 2007 in Kryzowa, Poland. In their introduction the editors state that pastoral care and counselling today can neither be reflected upon nor carried out apart from international, intercultural and interfaith networks. The authors briefly trace the origins of the Western practice of CPE, noting the significant influence of Carl Rogers, Seward Hiltner and Howard Clinebell dating from the 1950s and 60s. The strong tie to psychology and psychotherapy is clearly noted, which was not without critique.

Pastoral care and counselling cannot deal with psychological conflicts or individual suffering alone, but it must take up the problems of poverty, of economic globalisation, the decline of traditional cultural values, and the fact that new technologies are entering into each and every corner of the world and thus into our everyday human lives. What models may prove to be successful in future?<sup>5</sup>

Serious reflection is going on in the world of pastoral care and counselling, giving rise to conversations which critically examine responses to individual loss and suffering. There is recognition that individuals are connected inseparably to complex webs of relationships, that structures cannot be ignored and may indeed be perpetuating a range of injustices leading to profound suffering.

In this article we extend the recognition of our connectedness in webs of human relationships to include our connectedness with Earth. Humans, whether we ignore or treasure the fact,

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<sup>4</sup> Weiss, H., & Temme K., eds. (2009). *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: Intercultural Perspectives on Pastoral Care Facing Fragility and Destruction*. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

<sup>5</sup> Weiss, H., & Temme, K., eds. (2009). p 13.

are embedded in the vast and mysterious web of life. We first listen to the biblical tradition in the book of Job for guidance, opening ourselves to a startling gift. The content of God’s two great speeches to Job may seem a long way from our usual discourse in pastoral care. But it is this ‘long way’ that is the very heart of the matter, and it is, we believe, worth suspending our sense of ‘the way things usually are’ in order to listen again. The gift is new eyes. Next we describe our attempt to grapple with this insight in a Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) programme conducted in Melbourne, Australia in 2013.

God’s reply to Job has been described as the first great piece of modern nature writing; the language ‘biologically accurate, earthy, juicy, crusty, wild, untamed’ (McKibben, 1994).<sup>6</sup> Job, we know, is struggling – struggling with the meaning of his immense suffering. He has lost everything, great herds of livestock, his sons and his daughters, and now too, covered with ulcers, his health. Three friends arrive to comfort him but insist on the ‘truth’ that suffering is punishment for evil. For 34 chapters the friends repeat, rehash and backtrack over tired arguments, their theology ‘an exhausted mine’ (McKibben, 1994).<sup>7</sup> Job himself is struggling with a ‘new fact’, one that simply does not fit his (and their) assumptions. He knows he is not an evil man; he is thus locked in a battle with the orthodoxy of his time. Then, at long last, God speaks. God does not address Job’s immediate problems, does not refer to his acute distress or to his anguished questions. In answer God speaks only (and in gorgeous poetry) of a wild and glorious world – a world that is ‘rapacious, tough,

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<sup>6</sup> McKibben, B., (1994). *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation*. Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. pp 53-57.

Bill McKibben is the founder of 350.org. and we are deeply indebted to his small but stunning book *The Comforting Whirlwind* for material in this section. To listen to his unforgettable sermon on Job at Riverside Church New York visit

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=geIni\\_BwjGw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geIni_BwjGw)

<sup>7</sup> quoted in McKibben, B., (1994). p 2.

deadly, amoral’ – intoxicatingly alive, every being in place (McKibben, 1994).<sup>8</sup> The voice is fierce; the tone deeply sarcastic.

‘Were you there when I planned the earth? When I stopped the waters?

When I wrapped the ocean in clouds? When I set the boundaries for the waves? Do you hunt game for the lioness, finding her prey at nightfall when her cubs are aching with hunger? Did you teach the vultures to soar, scanning for prey so his little ones may drink blood?’ In two great speeches God presents Job with a picture of an astonishing world – but a world in which humans simply do not appear.<sup>9</sup>

What is happening here? One message is crystal clear. Job is suffering. God is giving him new eyes, showing him that he is part, and only part, of a vast world. Humans are not the centre. Creation exists without us and before us. In the presence of this glory, and this immensity, Job is silent.

The book of Job is exquisitely apt for our own time. We too urgently need to recognise that we are part of a greater whole. We too are struggling with a worn out orthodoxy – ours being the ‘self-evident’ assumption that growth is good. We too have to deal with a ‘new fact’ that simply will not fit the old paradigm. And the fact is that there is a limit. We cannot keep our commitment to individual materialism and the cult of expansion – and survive. We too have placed ourselves at the centre. We have taken control, unwilling to let go, relentlessly obliterating the world, making it over in our image. Unlike Job, far from being silenced, we are actively engaged in a process of ‘de-creation’, and as a result the God of Job is becoming

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<sup>8</sup> McKibben, B., (1994). p 56.

<sup>9</sup> Job chapters 38-39, 40-41.

more and more difficult to see (McKibben, 1994).<sup>10</sup> If the God who speaks from the whirlwind is the God whom we serve in pastoral care, are we listening? If we are ignoring and even destroying parts of the chorus of voices singing the Creator’s praise, are there not implications for the theology and practice of pastoral care?<sup>11</sup>

### **A CPE programme in eco-ministry<sup>12</sup>**

In our programme we attempted to re-imagine a CPE programme from within this paradigm shift. We intentionally sought to be open to the interplay between the concepts of experience, culture and tradition in the spirit, for example, of Whitehead and Whitehead’s (1995) model and method<sup>13</sup> for ministry, aware that ‘the whirlwind’ required re-conceptualising these concepts.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> McKibben, B., (1994). p 10.

<sup>11</sup> The radical nature of this paradigm shift has been widely examined in the flourishing field of ecological humanities, particularly in ecophilosophy and also in ecotheology, ecopsychology and ecosocial studies. The ecohumanities work across the great divides of Western thought, crossing divides that block our thinking and our acting. One of these is split between nature and culture, a division evident in our categorising of knowledge into science and humanities. Nature (the realm of ecology) is separated from culture in the Enlightenment project of human mastery over the natural world. Nature has simply been the stage for the human drama. Ecological humanities however work from a new centre, that of the organism-in-the environment, where culture is replaced in nature, collapsing the nature/culture divide.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Uniting CPE - The John Paver Centre’ was established primarily to meet the needs of people engaged in other-than-hospital-based pastoral care roles, seeking to benefit from CPE’s method of learning. Dr Jan Morgan’s proposal to offer a distinctive program for interns interested in developing an eco-identity was well received. As well as listening to people’s concerns, they would also pay attention to Earth’s cry, as they spent time immersed in environmentally-focused placements.

This inaugural program was conducted over an eighteen week period in 2013 and was co-supervised by Dr Jan Morgan and Rev Andy Calder.

Thus we needed to re-think the program rationale, objectives, requirements and assessment. Our intention was to align the objective of the program closely with the methodology and learning processes of the CPE model. The approval processes took approximately a year in the making.<sup>15</sup>

### *Programme Rationale*

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) as a programme of education and formation for the ministry of pastoral care has until now been understood as care within the context of the

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<sup>13</sup> Whitehead, J. D., and Whitehead, E.E., (1995). *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*. Revised ed. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward.

<sup>14</sup> We are aware this material opens a huge conversation that cannot be included here. The eco-ministry programme was strongly influenced by Jesus’ life of compassion for people’s sorrows, and for those excluded by the powers and principalities of the world. Also by the Apostle Paul’s words concerning the whole of creation groaning in one great act of giving birth (Romans 8: 18-28, NRSV).

For some references to discussion of the Christological and pneumatological implications see: Edwards, D., (2004). *Breath of Life: A Theology of Creator Spirit*. New York: Orbis Books.

Kearns, L., & Keller, C., eds. (2007). *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*. New York: Fordham University Press. (This also includes a moving Inter-Faith liturgy).

McFague, S., (2008). *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World and Global Warming*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Ruether, R. R., (1992). *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco.

<sup>15</sup> Twelve months prior to the programme commencing, the Rationale and Objectives as outlined here were presented to the Registration and Certification (R&C) Committee of the Association of Supervised Pastoral Education in Australia (ASPEA Inc.), seeking its recognition for accreditation at Level 1, according to the Standards of CPE ([www.aspea.org.au](http://www.aspea.org.au)). In preparing the case, considerable time was spent absorbing the intent of each Standard and, where appropriate, applying additional detail. The R&C Committee, after consideration of the Rationale and Objectives, approved the programme being undertaken.

human community. CPE learns ‘theology from the living human document’.<sup>16</sup> As argued above the ecological crisis is exposing the devastating consequences of our Western world-view in which the human is disconnected from the environment. A complementary paradigm of connection requires rethinking pastoral care and the requirements therefore for education and formation in this ministry.

If ‘pastoral’ is re-imagined, re-situating culture in nature, the organism-in-the-environment, then pastoral care will learn theology from the Earth as well as the human ‘document’.

Humans are within, and thoroughly dependent on the living Earth, the biosphere. The whole of Creation, including humans, is the context for the ministry of pastoral care.

In our programme we used the action/reflection mode of learning, which is consistent with CPE’s methodology. The action component of action/reflection (the ‘provision of pastoral care within a ministry setting’) was enlarged to include the other-than-human world. A ministry setting was a context in which care for the ‘environment’ was a primary goal and pastoral care acknowledges the condition of the environment and our human presence within it as fundamentally of religious, spiritual and ethical concern.

The reflection component of action/reflection explored this ministry experience in the traditional group and individual learning process. The input component was drawn from the

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<sup>16</sup> Dykstra, R.C. (2005). *Images of Pastoral Care*. St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, p 29.

emerging field, known as ‘ecological humanities’<sup>17</sup>, with complementary core seminars related to listening skills, theological reflection and social analysis.

The goal of the programme was that interns develop their ‘ecological identity’. Ecological identity is a hermeneutical concept that holds creative integrative possibilities for our experiences of nature (the wonder and the grief). Development of ecological identity is also an ongoing process or work. Such identity work is consistent with the CPE learning model that seeks to create a context for transformation. Both personal and pastoral identities (the foci of CPE) are impacted by our ecological identity in radical ways. The action/reflection process within a safe learning community provides a context in which interns can grow in understanding of the sacred dimensions of an ecological identity and risk commitment to the personal, professional and political implications of re-imagining a ministry of pastoral care.

### *Objectives (CPE Level 1)*

According to ASPEA Inc. Standard 1.6<sup>18</sup> in particular, an intern needs to demonstrate competency in (i) actual provision of pastoral care, (ii) reflective observations on pastoral practice, and (iii) theological/spiritual reflection. Some of the parallel competencies for the eco-ministry programme were as follows:

*To recognise and nurture an ecological identity and create/develop initiatives in eco-ministry. This means demonstrating:*

*The ability to initiate pastorally caring relationships;*

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<sup>17</sup> Refer to Appendix for an outline of teaching topics: many from visiting presenters.

<sup>18</sup> Refer to Standards at [www.aspea.org.au](http://www.aspea.org.au)

*The ability to identify and engage in an environmental setting as a response to the ecological crisis, and to recognise this as a form of ministry; the ability to engage pastorally with others involved in such a setting – to listen reflectively, to learn from them, to identify the person's agenda and attend appropriately;*

*A capacity for imaginative responses and risking new forms of ministry;*

*The ability to articulate, evaluate and reflect in writing on eco-ministry;*

*Openness to work towards a theological/spiritual framework hospitable to the call of Earth, with a capacity to then reflect upon particular encounters (either with other people or with beings of the more-than-human world).*

Placement of interns raised complex and critical issues. Applicants were encouraged to suggest a placement which demonstrated openness to the programme's rationale and objectives, had an environmental ethos, could provide a suitable on-site 'supervisor' for the intern, and had the potential for some expression of liturgy or ritual.<sup>19</sup> Four people were accepted into the program and a brief description of their placements is as follows:

- (i) A Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) school, Aitken College which incorporates environmental issues into its curriculum. There are on-site gardens for the interns to care for and a strong emphasis on sustainable use of resources;

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<sup>19</sup> This phase proved to be unexpectedly prolonged, as each organisation had its own internal levels of communications that needed to be negotiated before approval was granted.

- (ii) The Centre for Ecology and Spirituality at Glenburn (a rural setting), run by the Christian Brothers. It offers a range of courses and residential experiences for people to reflect on the links between ecology and spirituality;
- (iii) Pepper-Tree Place, an initiative of Kildonan, a UCA agency supporting disadvantaged people. The program includes gardening, animal care, cooking, monthly swap-days of produce and sustainable energy use;
- (iv) Habitat, an initiative of the Augustine Centre and a UCA congregation, is a meeting point for many different organisations involved in education and advocacy activities related to environmental concerns.

Prior to the programme’s commencement, interns received a number of articles to read as background familiarization, as well as suggestions of poetry, films and books.<sup>20</sup> A list

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<sup>20</sup> For example:

Berry, T., (1990). *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*. New York: Bell Tower. pp 12-20.

McKibben, B., (2013). *Some like it hot*. (from the New York Review of Books May 2013).

Morgan, J., (2013). *Earth’s cry: prophetic ministry in a more-than-human world*. Melbourne: Uniting Academic Press. Chapter 1.

Ruether, R. R., (1992). *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*. New York: Harper San Francisco. Introduction.

Suzuki, D., (1997). *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature*. St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin. Chapter 1.

Interns were invited to read poems by Mary Oliver, to view the film, *The Life of Pi* (in the context of ecological crisis), to read the following books: McKibben, B., (2010). *Earth: Making Life on a Tough New Planet*. Melbourne: Black Inc.; Ward, M., (2011). *The Comfort*

of liturgical resources for ecologically sensitive worship was provided, and during the program a number of visiting presenters conducted sessions including biblical understandings of creation, liturgy, and a theology of God’s creatures.

Distinctive features of the programme were:

- (i) A form of **Sacred Practice in Nature**. Interns undertook to stand for half an hour twice weekly outside in a quiet place with one session to be written up in a journal.<sup>21</sup> Commitment to a spiritual practice lies at the heart of all pastoral care that seeks to listen to the movement of the Spirit. To stand prayerfully listening in the presence of other-than-human beings proved unexpectedly powerful.
- (ii) A **Place/Case Study**. This was an invitation to explore in depth the intern’s relationship with one place in a way that held the human and the more-than-human together in one story.<sup>22</sup>
- (iii) **Verbatims of encounters in the other-than-human world**. The verbatim, as a key learning tool, was expanded to include attending to the other-than-human

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*of Water: A River Pilgrimage*. Melbourne: Transit Lounge Publishing; Habel, N., (2009). *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* Hindmarsh: ATF Press.

Resources were available in the Dalton McCaughey Library (part of the Centre for Theology and Ministry, where the group’s peer-learning was conducted). For suggested authors see footnote 14.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>22</sup> The phrases ‘other-than-human’ and ‘more-than-human’ are both widely used in the field of ecological humanities. Though interchangeable each is nuanced slightly differently. In this paper we use both, depending on the context. We acknowledge our debt to Abram, D., (1997). *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York: Vintage Books.

world. Of the 8 required, 4 were to be of an encounter in the human world and 4 of an encounter in the other-than-human world<sup>23</sup>.

Each of these proved to be fertile beyond our expectations and generated astonishing creative energy. We present an example below of one of the verbatims. As supervisors our experience was exciting, challenging and marked by quiet energy, and a certain slowing of pace, as we began to learn from a patient, ancient Earth.

### **Example of Verbatim Encounter in other-than-human world**

The following verbatim was presented in the second half of the program. The author had been placed in a community garden and was breaking fresh ground (!) as she learned to listen empathically not only to other humans but to the other-than-human world. This experience of pastoral care was complemented by her Sacred Practice (see above). She lived by the sea and undertook her Sacred Practice sessions standing on a nearby cliff-top. Her journals of this practice reported many insights as she gradually nurtured her love for, and attention to, the natural world in this intentional way. This verbatim comes from the context of this prayerful meditative practice and is best read slowly and, if possible, aloud with another person.

### **Verbatim 6 – Encounter with other-than-human<sup>24</sup>**

#### ***Conversation with the wind***

**Scene:** I had been thinking about the wind all day. In fact I often think about it. When it is strong and active, people snarl and growl: “*I hate the wind!*” they say and I wonder about that. I wonder how the wind feels in the face of such intense antipathy. So I thought I’d ask. I

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<sup>23</sup> See Appendix

<sup>24</sup> This encounter between Tasmin and the wind is published with the permission of the intern and the text is unaltered. Her name has been changed in accord with accepted practice. W (wind) remains undisguised!

took myself over to my spot on the cliff so I could give myself fully to the conversation. It was late afternoon and the sea would have been calm except for the WNW wind which was blowing it the wrong way. There was no resistance from the sea. There was no attempt that I could discern to flow in its usual direction. It almost seemed to be tittering and giggling at the different experience. The sun was warm on my bare arms and the wind offered its cooling effect when it gusted.

**Conversation:** T: Tasmin (intern) W: Wind (other-than-human being)

**T1:** *tentatively and into a momentary pause between gusts.* I’ve been wanting to talk with you.

**W1:** *with a definite blast to my right side and back.* So what would you have to say to *me*, insignificant one?

**T2:** *again waiting for a pause.* Well, people moan and groan when you’re around in full force. I wonder how that feels – when people groan at your presence, I mean.

**W2:** *swinging round behind me.* Why on earth and in heaven would I worry about what *people* think, for goodness sake! It doesn’t worry me. I’ve got a job to do and I do it. I’m part of the plan. I’m essential. I know what I have to do. What people think?

**Indeed.** As if people are important. Too inflated about themselves if you ask me. A good blow is what they need!

**T3:** *feeling a bit taken aback and struck a bit dumb.* Right, I see.

**W3:** *playing around with my hair and plucking at my tee-shirt.* At least you have the sense today to stand with your back to me. I’ve been watching you coming here and just standing. Even when I blow full into your face with a cheekful of salt you still

just stand there. Glad to see you’re using sense today. Even horses and cows know to back up when I’m on the move.

**T4:** Yes, it is pretty uncomfortable sometimes, but you see, I’m trying to tune in, trying to get a handle on how everything feels. You know, the sea, the trees, the birds, yourself.

I noticed the seagulls today were having a great time. You really tossed them around. But that Pacific Gull – wow – he was certainly a bird on a mission.

**W4:** *whooooooo*. You are noticing. The silver gulls love a bit of a shakeup. We have a lot of fun. The Pacific Gull? Just a baby. Too serious by far. Likes to flex his muscle. I wasn’t too worried today. I’ll have my tern –T E R N.<sup>25</sup> Get it? Tern/turn. *Sends the ti-tree shaking in fits of laughter.*

**T5:** *laughing too*. I reckon the terns go to ground when you get active. I usually see them hunched up and looking grouchy when you’re around.

**W5:** *huffing and blowing self-importantly*. Well as I was saying. I have a job to do. Things would be pretty stagnant if it wasn’t for me. I freshen things up, move things around. The trees love it. So does the grass. Imagine how it’d be if you had to just stand all day, every day. No good at all. I really keep the clouds moving.

**And** I spread the seeds and pollen (and the washing if I get half a chance). Mind you, I’ve been getting a bit concerned at the amount of dirt and topsoil that gets on board these days. That’s not meant to happen. I’m pretty happy that I get up human noses a bit because you guys don’t play by the rules. Far too self- important for my/*our* liking. You know, there’s the rules of the universe and we know them but you humans.... anyhow I’m glad *you’re* tuning in. Hope you’ve got some friends. I’m off -

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<sup>25</sup> An Australian marine bird.

-- got work to do. Remember to turn your back to me in future. Makes good sense. It's what everything with a bit of sense does. Byeeee.

**T6:** *into the gently playful puffs.* Bye and thanks so much for the talk. It's good to feel I know you --- a little. Bye.

### **Tasmin's Theological Reflection**

I really enjoyed writing this. I love the wind and always have and I was trying to empathise with him/her (*although somehow the wind always seems masculine to me!*) about the negative responses that I always hear. I don't often hear anyone say they enjoy the wind. I wonder why that is. Is it that we are precious about how we look and the wind doesn't give a toss? Is it because we feel slightly or a lot out of control in the face of a natural force? Is it the discomfort of it or that we have to work hard in the wind? Whatever it is, we generally don't like it. But as the wind pointed out, it has an important part to play (**W2 & 5**). It was odd that when I started the conversation I really felt insignificant (**T1 & W1**), but then as the conversation flowed there was a softening on the part of the wind and some humour (**W3, T4 & W5**). I felt very special and privileged to have a conversation with such an important and powerful force. It's funny how the human ego is such that it believes itself to be all important and the most powerful thing on the planet, but I really felt put into my place (as a human) at the beginning of the conversation. (**W1 & W2**) I really felt shame on the part of my species. I am loving the reminder that I have had with this course about the Hebrew word *ruach* and its meaning of *breath, wind, spirit*. I have shared that with a few people in conversation and it's amazing where that has taken hold and been a springboard.

As I was conversing with the wind it really felt that I was in touch with an agent of God and one that was automatically in complete tune with God and in that, far superior to me with my

choices and my ego. I felt there was so much that the wind, as such an agent, could teach me. Indeed there is so much that all of nature (agents of Creator/Creation) stands ready to teach me if I but ask. I have moved closer to *‘praise and adoration’* through this conversation and give thanks to the Creator God for this connection.

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Group interactions after the presentation of these verbatims were invariably lively, and this was no exception. There is much that can be said here from the perspective of education in pastoral care. We offer a few comments. In attempting to respond to a paradigm shift the action/reflection mode of learning requires the intern to act, not only by attending a patient in a hospital bed, listening to the concerns of a prisoner and possibly advocating for better conditions, but by attending to the other-than-human world, by placing herself in a position where engagement became a possibility – on a cliff top. In CPE (as in counselling) empathic listening, as a way of being, involves an attitude of receptivity to the other. Here the other is wind. The reflection occurs in the usual way, written, presented and explored in the group and in subsequent supervision.

Questions clearly arise concerning the nature of the voice of the wind. Philosophical, psychological or theological exploration of the self as T and as W is beyond the scope of this article.<sup>26</sup> It is clear however from Tasmin’s responses that this cannot be discounted as an ego trip. Her experience of being insignificant in relation to an infinitely vaster world, and her experience of shame at the very least suggest more is going on here. Tasmin’s sense of

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<sup>26</sup> For a wonderful example of conversation with the elements see Saint Augustine *Confessions*, X, 6. p 212. An illuminating philosophical/theological approach in which we as humans are part of a chorus of voices of creation, can be found in

identity is not only being confirmed, it is being challenged. As in all empathic pastoral dialogue, the ‘carer’ and the ‘cared for’ exchange roles. Clearly the wind here is the carer, calling Tasmin to account, opening her eyes.

Wondering ‘how the wind feels, so I thought I’d ask’, and ‘taking myself over to my spot on the cliff so I could give myself fully to the conversation’ are expressions that indicate a shift in worldview. A ‘conversation’ with the wind? Leaving aside the poets among us, this is not the usual way-things-are. Here a human self is learning to attune, allowing herself to be taught; she has stepped beyond wind as an external, irritating backdrop and intentionally opened herself. ‘The sun warm on my bare arms and wind offered its cooling effect when it gusted’. Saint Francis of Assisi experienced these ‘elements’ as living beings, members of a created family of which he is part. His Canticum made reference to all creatures, especially of Brother Wind, Sister Moon, Mother Earth.<sup>27</sup> Do not we, as pastoral carers, and as educators, also need to open ourselves to these others, to recognise them as kin?

Anthropocentrism, the privileging of the human above all other life-forms, is now revealed as a fundamental and devastating problem in our time. Misguided human-centred-ness is an inescapable implication of God’s speeches to Job, and appears here in the most candid of terms.

In reference to the section within (W2) ‘.....What people think? *Indeed*. As if people are important. Too inflated about themselves if you ask me. A good blow is what they need!’ Too

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Chrétien, J., (2004). *The Call and the Response*. Translated by Anne A. Davenport. New York: Fordham University Press.

<sup>27</sup> Retrieved from [www.franciscanfriarstor.com/archive/stfrancis](http://www.franciscanfriarstor.com/archive/stfrancis)

inflated.....’ what could be more incisive? We fear runaway economic inflation, yet we cannot see that economics is a subset of Earth’s economy. We humans are relentlessly walking the path of increasing consumption. Also, in (W5) ‘.....There are rules of the universe and we know them, but you humans .....’ We are, astonishingly, consuming our Earth home, *oikos*, our household – as if there were no limits. If pastoral care is called to attend to structural change, is there not an imperative to widen our concept of structures? The interns who applied for and were accepted into the program of course were already sensitive to the natural world. As Tasmin says: ‘I love the wind and always have’. She reacted protectively towards the wind, and against those of us who grumble. Yet she experienced a shift in the conversation which in her reflection she identified as ‘odd’. At the beginning she felt insignificant, but as the attitude of the wind softened and the conversation unfolded, she became aware of double pronged and powerful feelings – on the one hand shame, and on the other being ‘very special and privileged’. Such experiences are sorely needed in our culture – experiences where our deep responses to our home, Earth, are felt, honoured and nurtured. Pastoral care in living dialogue with tradition, culture and experience has an immense gift to offer here.<sup>28</sup>

The stories of faith, a long and living history of encounters with God, (and agents of God) act as containers for experience. Tasmin’s theological reflection flows freely. Breath, wind, spirit are the words she needs to give voice to her experience; ‘. . . it really felt I was in touch with an agent of God’. She understood there was much to learn; ‘so much that the wind, as such an agent, could teach me . . . if I but ask. I have moved closer to *praise and adoration* through

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<sup>28</sup> For a more detailed exploration of the pastoral ministry that emerges as we begin to attend to Earth’s cry, to recognise our silencing power, to know our need to grieve and to act, see footnotes 14 & 15.

this conversation . . .’ She is being replaced in the world, taking her place, listening rather than dominating the conversation. Through the agency of the wind she knows the closeness of God. Wonder becomes praise.

Tasmin’s words bring to mind the penetrating insight of mystic scholar and sacred activist Andrew Harvey (1995):

There is a worldwide famine of adoration, and we are all visibly dying in it.

The desolation and nihilism, the meaninglessness, and tragic and brutal carelessness, and perversity we see all around us and in us, is a direct result of living in a spiritual prison in which we are starved and have starved ourselves of the food that our hearts, minds, and souls need most: the food of worship, the food of love, the food of gratitude, the food of praise, the bread and wine of adoration.<sup>29</sup>

Our experience of the natural world, the praise and adoration (and the grief and pain) needs to be included in our understanding of the self, an ecological self – a self that needs to be listened to (Thomashow, 1996).<sup>30</sup> As supervisors we believe Tasmin’s inner integration of her ecological, personal and pastoral identities was evidence the objectives of the course were being met. Deep inner change will manifest in the outer world, and this was evident in

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<sup>29</sup> Harvey, A., (1995). *The Return of the Mother*. New York: Penguin Putman Inc. pp 169-170.

See also Harvey, A., (2009). *The Hope: A Guide to Sacred Activism*. New York: Hay House, Inc.

<sup>30</sup> For a very helpful (and practical) exploration of ecological identity from an educationalist, see Thomashow, M., (1996). *Ecological Identity: Becoming a Reflective Environmentalist*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Tasmin’s final CPE Evaluation. In response to a question about desires and dreams she wrote:

“I have become a public transport user and bike rider extraordinaire!!! This course has challenged me to examine the way I live in a new way. Whilst I have always had a ‘green’ tendency, that tendency is now an essential and an *expressing* part of me. There is now a conviction and a knowing which cannot be ignored. Through this course I have woken up and now I must live with this awakening “... *for I never know the hour ...*” (adapt. Matt 24:42). I plan to become involved in the redevelopment and revegetation of a local cliff walk being undertaken by my local Council. I have dreams for the land surrounding my church and would like to be part of a group developing a garden for the local community, whether it be an edible garden or a garden of remembering the indigenous plants (my preference). I would like to become part of a local wetland community for my own growth in knowledge and understanding and to be part of a group preserving something precious”.

### **Evaluation and Further Developments**

In reporting back to the Association we evaluated the program in general and specific terms. Overall, this pilot programme was assessed to have been very successful. The CPE structure was an excellent container for this new dimension, and indeed provided a careful and rich framework for learning and accountability. The interns were able to pursue their learning, in the context of the whole of Creation, and did develop their ecological, pastoral identity.

In specific terms, in relation to the requirements of the three Objectives (CPE Level 1)<sup>31</sup> for successful accreditation, feedback to R&C included the following:

*(i) Actual ministry as a pastoral carer (Standard 1.6.1)*

Though interns were working at different levels each took up the challenge to begin to reimagine forms for an eco-pastoral ministry, as well as developing their pastoral skills;

The ‘sacred practice’ component (a meditative prayer practice in the natural world) proved unexpectedly powerful, indeed transformative.

*(ii) Reflective Observations on ecoministry (Standard 1.6.2)*

Verbatims of encounters in the other-than-human world (4 out of 8) were a new requirement for interns and proved extremely valuable as a fertile source of reflection.

Similarly journals of their sacred practice contributed significantly to changing self/Earth awareness.

*(iii) Theological/Spiritual Reflection (Standard 1.6.3)*

The teaching programme provided challenging material that opened fresh horizons for thought and practice. The fields of ecotheology, ecospirituality, ecoliturgy and green church initiatives are expanding all the time. We could only offer fragments. This was balanced by the rest of the programme which supported the intern’s own exploration and integration.

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<sup>31</sup> Refer to Standards at [www.aspea.org.au](http://www.aspea.org.au)

Invitations to reflect on the presence of Earth in interns’ personal stories, accounts of their spiritual pilgrimage, verbatims and their own faith tradition did lead to changes in self-understanding. Theological reflection opened ethical and vocational challenges and renewed commitment.

### *Interns’ feedback*

Interns assessed this pilot program in very positive terms. In the words of one intern: “I can’t imagine another way to structure this course. All the content has been such a valuable resource for self-information and analysis”. The residential weekend in a rural landscape was important, with one intern commenting in relation to re-imagining the ‘pastoral’ in the context of the whole of God’s creation: “The weekend away, the input about the warming of the oceans, the ‘immersing’ in sacred practice and the setting was a turning point for me”. Another comment about the weekend was: “The two days away were precious and remain in my memory as a ‘depthing’ moment – a vision of roots going into earth as a ‘stronghold knowing’”.

In terms of the placements, interns reflected favourably, particularly when having a ‘hands-on’ experience: gardening, exchange days of produce, markets, care of animals. One placement was in an advocacy setting which was office-based. The intern commented: “There is too little land for an on-site focus. The partners busy themselves with activities that may impact the other-than-human almost anywhere else on the planet, but not its own site”.

### *Further Developments*

Since completion of this program, a report was provided for the Executive of ASPEA, which in turn encouraged further such programs to be undertaken. To that end, a CPE programme in

July – October 2015, whilst not exclusively focused on environmental contexts, nonetheless incorporated the core elements of the 2013 program: namely, sacred practice, Place/Case Study, ecoministry presentations and other-than-human verbatims. Of the four interns in the program, the one who was placed in an environmental setting completed the full complement of other-than-human verbatims, whilst the others completed a lesser number.

The supervisors, along with one of the interns, Tasmin, were invited to make a presentation about the program at the 2014 Conference of ANZACPE<sup>32</sup>, held in Melbourne. As part of that presentation, the ‘Conversation with the Wind’ was re-enacted and stimulated much subsequent conversation and interest.

One of the challenges with an initiative such as this is to maintain momentum, and enthuse fellow supervisors and CPE Centres about incorporating the dimension of eco-ministry within their programs. The supervisors of this pilot program have therefore offered to conduct three evening seminar sessions, each of two hours duration, to introduce the rationale of the program, and its application, to interested supervisors. ASPEA has agreed to these being conducted; encouragingly, the Executive has also agreed to these seminar sessions being recognised for professional development<sup>33</sup>. The seminars will be conducted in 2016, and will also be promoted amongst ANZACPE supervisors.

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<sup>32</sup> The Australia and New Zealand Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ANZACPE) was formed in June 1990. It is an Association of seven Member Associations comprising Supervisors from Australia and New Zealand.

<sup>33</sup> ASPEA requires supervisors seeking re-accreditation (each five years) to have completed at least 100 points of professional development. Points are allocated for different activities such as (e.g. reading, audio-visual, internet learning, supervision, Committee membership, Publication, Workshop/Lecture Presentation).

### **Conclusion**

A whirlwind. God shows Job a wild and glorious world, intoxicatingly alive. The knowledge is tumultuous, disrupting Job’s deepest assumptions and concerns. In his silence he learns his place in the vastness of the universe. This antipodean initiative is a beginning – hardly a whirlwind but perhaps a zephyr - in the pastoral care movement of CPE. It is a response not only to human suffering, but to a suffering Earth. This programme keeps faith with the learning objectives of CPE, and provides a new paradigm for supervisors and interns alike to deepen their pastoral identity and hone their skills. In response to the question posed by the editors of ‘Treasure in Earthen Vessels’ (Weiss and Temme, 2009)<sup>34</sup> this pilot programme recognises the connectedness of individuals within complex webs of relationships – human and more-than-human.

The programme attests to the claim that empathic pastoral listening and theological reflection are enhanced and deepened through growing our ecological identity. To enlarge the boundaries of ‘the other’ is to step over a threshold. It is also profoundly confronting and de-centring (were you there when I planned the earth?), revealing that we have been pitifully poor, indeed derelict, in our responsibilities as carers of Earth. Climate change is the result. We now live an era called the Anthropocene.<sup>35</sup> At stake is life as we know it – and as such, is of paramount and urgent concern for education in pastoral care.

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<sup>34</sup> Weiss, H. & Temme K., eds. (2009). *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: Intercultural Perspectives on Pastoral Care Facing Fragility and Destruction*. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

<sup>35</sup> This term is widely used to denote the present time interval in which many geologically significant conditions and processes are profoundly altered by human activities. These include the chemical composition of the atmosphere, oceans and soils, and perturbances in cycling of elements generating ocean acidification and climate change.

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## APPENDIX

### Guidelines

- (i) The guidelines for **Sacred Practice in Nature** asked interns to find one place they would visit during the programme, twice-weekly for thirty minutes at a time, and to journal the experience. A place in the natural world that felt safe and without interruption – by the sea, in the bush or garden for example. The guidelines outlined a process for relaxing and centring using all the senses in being attentive to the surrounding landscape. Early in the programme a two-day residential session was held at a coastal location, and interns were introduced to this Sacred Practice.
- (ii) The **Place/Case Study** was an in-depth analysis of an intern’s chosen site of Sacred Practice. The first task was to research the story of that place; geology, geography, weather, pre-human habitation, bio-diversity, Indigenous peoples, impact of settler peoples. The next task was to describe the relationship with that place in terms of observations, feelings, learnings and to reflect on those theologically and ethically through an eco-ministry lens.
- (iii) The revised **More-than-Human Verbatim** guidelines required interns to describe and reflect on the encounter. Some of the prompts included:  
*Having re-entered in your imagination the experience you have chosen, the task is to tell the story, attending to all your senses and to what you felt. In reflecting upon and evaluating the encounter some questions to consider were: “What would it mean to have a pastoral (loving) heart towards the world?” “Did I*

*listen, respect and honour the other?” ”Is there a social, political or environmental response you might consider?”*

## **Teaching Topics**

### **Why ecoministry?**

Ministry is response to cry. In our time we are called to respond to the cry of Earth. Many obstacles block our capacity to hear this cry including Western culture itself. We are shaped by a discontinuity between nature and culture, and this forms our identities. We are familiar with personal, professional, religious (spiritual, pastoral) or political identity but not as readily with ecological identity. Ecological identity crosses the nature/culture divide and makes space for our experience of nature, our grief and our joy. Commitment arises from such identity integration: ecological identity becomes embodied in ecoministry.

### **Hand-to-Hand Combat with God: Hand-to Hand Combat with the World**

Drawing on the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel – as interpreted in a magnificent painting by Delacroix, and in a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke – this session explored the challenge of meeting our fears about what lies ahead as we encounter climate change. An engagement with God, and an engagement with God present in God’s sacred world of Creation requires that we recognise we are wrestling with an angel who confronts, embraces and wounds us.

### **Earthing God in the Liturgy**

The liturgical form for worship – gathering, listening, responding and departing – now needs to incorporate developing our relationship with Earth. This demands a re-forming of our

identity, as we lament and also align ourselves with a story of hope and the vision of a renewed Creation. Interns were offered principles for creation of new rituals, a set of worship resources with an ecological focus and a moving experience of ecologically sensitive liturgy. This enriched the possibilities for taking up their responsibilities in leading morning worship.

### **Theology and Ecology**

This session situated the question of God and the environment in the theological conversation – in particular in the work of Moltmann, in the Incarnation and the Trinity (in the work of Rahner and Barth). Creation and redemption cannot, and must not be separated. The radical commitment of God to the cosmos provides the foundation for renewed vocation to ministry. Experience in ministry in rural parishes underlay this discussion and powerful implications for pastoral care emerged.

### **Green Church**

A practical grounded account of a long-standing initiative in the Synod of the Uniting Church. The complexity, difficulty and persistent hope in this attempt at structural change is an example of one strand of Patton’s model of pastoral care. The session included reports on the implementation of a Synod resolution pledging energy reduction of 20% by 2020, on surveys of church leaders’ views on the importance of the environment, and on the ministry of encouraging local churches in sustainable living choices.

### **Animals on the Agenda**

Reverence for all of life requires a reappraisal of our approach to animals. Drawing on experience as a chaplain in an animal hospital, the presenter focussed on the place of animals in our religious heritage and implications for a ministry of pastoral care. Challenges to our enlightenment inheritance, to the judgement that animals are without soul, come from the

Celtic tradition, from the lives of the saints and the biblical tradition. In recovering our relationship with animals, the importance of the human-animal bond and the need to attend to grief when this bond is broken, need to be encompassed in the scope of pastoral care. Controversial ethical issues also arise once there is agreement on respect for animals.

### **Ecogrief**

Building on the normal sessions on grief, we also focussed on ecogrief, a pervasive but largely ignored reality in our culture. Climate change, extinctions, dismay at our part in damaging God’s Creation, in the loss of habitat, the swiftly deteriorating oceans, and destruction of forests – all are sources of grief. Ecoministry includes fostering awareness of these multiple griefs, learning to live (and not suppress) our own grief, and thus developing our capacity for empathic pastoral listening with others.