

From President's Address – Annual General Meeting – November 14, 2016

It is great for me to be standing here, and truly a privilege as I experience it, to deliver this President's Address for the 27th Annual General Meeting of our Association, the *Association for Supervised and Clinical Pastoral Education in Victoria Incorporated*. It is great because I did not take for granted that this would be the case as I began and negotiated my ascent into the Presidency. I felt from the outset that this was a special project given me and a full-time job and I wanted to give it that special time, alongside support of my parents experiencing an ageing transition. As they have found themselves in recent times in hospital or respite care/rehabilitation, I have been taken into clinical areas and meetings and this has been significant for my vocation also and revealing of the work that we do and seek to promote in Pastoral Care.

It was in fact working as Chaplain in a residential aged care community of 150 residents (2008 – 2013) and reflecting intentionally in writing on that experience towards a book of which I have completed three chapters which prepared me, I realise on reflection, to take on this role. What it meant to be Chaplain to those residents, literally to find myself, who I am, in such a community in that very particular space or arena has had a profound and life-changing effect upon me. I felt that I caught the edge of the wisdom of a generation including centenarians, super-centenarians up to 105 years of age, and many residents with varying stages of dementia who asked of me nothing and everything in asking me to be authentically who I am. They modelled for me clear and open communication, courage and the need to be fully and immediately present in the moment. They gave me words, better than I had, that expressed this immediacy, and when I didn't have the words. The greatness of this procession of people could only be known in relationship, and with the attitude of humility and reverence that I learned to live into that comes with openness to the relationship.

There was resident Lorna whose father and a well-known twentieth century writer of books for both children and adults were close friends, both becoming recognised writers. Lorna was a very clear communicator and a stern but compassionate teacher whenever I visited her. She would not stand any careless communication and called me to task. Another example of the immediacy and power of these residents in their apparent frailty and impairment of thinking included Peter with whom I shared a close relationship. Peter, who had significantly advancing dementia, said to me as we sat together and he took my hand, "You're a person." Peter was saying to me that he experienced our shared humanity and personhood and my recognition of his humanity in its fullness despite his dementia. It was Peter, the person with dementia, who invited me into this realisation and who broke down that distinction. There was no separation – a person with dementia and a person without dementia. The late Rev'd. Dr. Geoff Blackburn, a devotional volunteer who continued to provide monthly devotions to residents until he was 97 years of age, was another such outstanding person in his humility and humanity and an example of this procession of people, the greatness in my midst that I came to live into. I did not realise that he was well recognised at Whitley College but came to know him as a fellow traveller and friend who remains very memorable to me. Geoff Blackburn died in 2014 just short of his 100th birthday. His death notice read, "His scholarship and his pastoral heart walked hand in hand."

So it has been for me in coming into the Presidency to realise the history of the Association behind me and to know the power of this history, as I learnt in aged care, with my own personal experience and gratitude of coming into Clinical Pastoral Education (hereafter CPE) in 1996; to experience the wisdom of my elders and being able now to have the opportunity to honour this history.

Being invited onto an 'Advanced Accreditation Committee' for CPE this year brought me in touch with an article written by Stephen Ames, published in 2015, *What happens to the person with dementia?* The premise of Stephen's article, as it came to me, is that our ability to be with the person with dementia is determined by the quality of all our relationships with the recognition that dementia care is offered from our shared humanity that itself is "damaged, derailed and deficient." Being with and learning from this community of residents, this procession of people over these years, became for me knowing the highest form or higher order of relationship and the determinant of this and reference point for all my relationships in striving to communicate clearly and effectively to meet the other in their need. The awareness of the quality of our relationships has been my aspiration, interest and concern towards my contribution as President of ASACPEV Inc.. It is *the living, human document* that is my point of orientation and frame of reference.

From the moment I came onto the Executive as Vice President in 2014 what struck me powerfully was the privilege of service, the power invested in us as Executive in service of the Association and to make decisions on behalf of the Association, that the Executive has the last word. The well-worn phrase "Exec. to ratify" I don't take lightly. It was important for me to begin our first Executive meetings as President with time for reflection and the telling of my story, including of my time with the Association, and to ensure that we all become familiar with the broader history of the Association in reading *A Finger Pointing to the Moon* by Joan Kenny. The privilege of service in being appointed to the Executive is a point I desired to make strongly and convey from the way this sense of privilege touched me personally. Since these positions are in effect voluntary, the privilege of service is not so apparent. Our vision for our Association can only begin by starting where we are, as I learnt in residential aged care, with openness and acceptance of the appointed leader in our midst and what that person can uniquely offer during his or her term of office. It is from the Executive level I think that we become a professional body. Each time we met, the Executive group coming together reminded me of the Open Group in CPE, the small group process. We are a group coming together. How important is this group experience for us? Do we recognise this connection in how we bring ourselves and our hopes for how our students bring themselves? Is it an experience, coming together as Executive, of which we say, "Lord, it is good for us to be here."? For me, bringing myself to work with the Executive has not been a business so much as tending a garden, upholding the place of both the task and the relationship has been important for me. I would like to thank and recognise each member of the Executive as we have grown together in our understanding and appreciation of service and working with one another, with a number of new members on the team this year. As with the Open Agenda Group, it is a process as Executive to realise what it means to be a part of this group, how we bring ourselves and how we come to appreciate the contribution we each can make. I also acknowledge the support and encouragement of a number of members as I have come into this role, including past Presidents Bernadette

Wurlod, and Gill Henderson, who know the demands of this path and have met me in the immediacy of these needs with empathy, care, compassion and practical support.

A particularly interesting insight has come to me in the support and mentoring I have experienced from the Clinical Pastoral Educators. I especially recognise and thank Graeme Gibbons and Allison Whitby whose tending has been invaluable. In my role as President the distinctive contribution of this level came into sharp focus. You may be familiar with Henri Nouwen's story *The Flyer and the Catcher*. Henri loved attending the circus and watching the trapeze artists fly through the air, braving the emptiness of space and the danger of this, until they found themselves caught in the strong hands of a partner. This is the image for me that carries the level of the Clinical Pastoral Educator. I have been thrown opportunities and as I have been willing to catch these, and to brave the emptiness of space, the Clinical Pastoral Educator has been there to catch me. In the process of flying it is trust on the part of the Clinical Pastoral Educator that I am capable of seeing the flight through. But I must first be willing to let go into the opportunity. The Educators do the tasking, trusting and tending very well and have it down to a fine art. They have maximised my opportunities and enlarged my experience of taking up this role of President while a Pastoral Supervisor and made it exciting and new in opening to me possibilities that may help to shape my future and I would not have anticipated. Such is the specialty of this level.

Two weeks ago I attended the 'Teaching for Learning Day' with the University of Divinity, an opportunity which Allison Whitby as CPE Liaison Officer threw to me. This proved a great day, to experience the place of CPE in the University. The day was held at Catherine Booth College, the Salvation Army College with the University of Divinity. Rev'd Dr. John Capper, Director of Learning and Teaching, was very encouraging of my attendance. Tom Rose and I represented the CPE Community and were made to feel very welcome with special mention.

The day proved most valuable for me from the education level to being with members of the faculty of the University of Divinity, including those who were great and memorable teachers from Yarra Theological Union where I had studied. The focus of the day was on the disciplinary commonalities in teaching and assessment practice as related to each area and principles of new assessment policy. Practical questions included: "Are we well equipped to teach students how to learn?" and "How do we become learner teachers?" I was encouraged and excited by these very grounded, student-centred questions that for me connect with CPE and starting with ourselves. It was exciting for us to further appreciate and grasp the work that we do in CPE and to clarify the contribution of CPE through our group discussion with teachers of the University, to recognise CPE as embracing all the fields of study and bridging the divide, recognising that it is about appreciating culture and diversity which we can take for granted in CPE in starting with *the living, human document*. One of the University's goals for 2025 is "to be formed of partnerships, structures and scholars that can communicate, challenge and transform 21st century society". Hearing this I could feel the significant place of CPE and the active work we do that informs this goal. The University is also looking to develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theology with the initial goal to be learning from Indigenous Australians what is most needed. Again that excited me in hearing the contribution of CPE in starting with the *living, human document*.

My role has brought me in touch in both expected and unexpected ways with opportunities to work with supervisors of all levels in the Association, serving on Committees and in email correspondence and phone conversation and these have truly been a privilege. The survey sent from President of ANZACPE John McAlpine in December 2015, *ANZACPE and Your CPE Association*, noted in two reports for the AGM, asked the question under 'Professional Development' – *How do we achieve an equal level of competence as supervisors through alternative pathways (other than academic)?* I see that the opportunities that have been opened to me as a Pastoral Supervisor in the role of President informs the answer to this question. As we find ourselves in dialogue with supervisors of different levels for professional development, as I have had opportunities this year, we can be surprised by what we can learn no matter what our 'level', and I think this is the key to our moving forward as an Association in breaking down prejudices of which we may not be fully aware. Attending the ANZACPE Conference with the opportunity to dialogue was invaluable to this end and being able to attend at a time when ANZACPE is actively and intentionally considering its future. I greatly appreciated being able to be with colleagues from member associations and to hear their stories personally and as a body.

I have valued working with Executive on our change of Association name and leading the third Special General Meeting of the Association for this purpose. The transition is continuing and well underway, as members have been informed through the year, and now much more visible. As I have said, I have come to realise how important to me is upholding and honouring the history of the Association for the 'elders' who have nurtured my own growth and the growth of others and left their particular legacy. Reviewing the John Paver Memorial Scholarship became one of these examples, how we truly honour John's legacy.

In conclusion, I thank each of you firstly for taking the time to be here and also for listening. Thank you each for the opportunities I have had with each of you in various ways this year, whether through being together in committees, meetings, email or phone contact and including opportunities that have been both life-giving and challenging that have brought us together in ways both expected and unexpected. These are the "alternative pathways" to which John McAlpine refers in terms of our professional development. This is just what we are about in seeking to grow as supervisors. I have valued the opportunities and experiences that have washed onto the shores of my Presidency this year as the primacy of process and the prosperity of our profession.

Finally, the words I have held onto, as I have ridden the waves of the Presidency in this my first year, have been the words of yourselves as members of ASACPEV Inc. in your commissioning of us as Executive – "Do not be afraid to lead us". These words have given me the courage and encouragement to take up my tasks and to climb the mountain of the Presidency each day in service of the growth of our Association. I do not take these words lightly from the membership but as heartfelt commissioning. Thank you each for your acceptance and trust extended to me and to all members of the Executive, and in anticipation of your commissioning of us in our respective roles in 2017.

Carina Lobo
President, ASACPEV Inc.