

## Launch of *Graced Beyond Telling*

15 February 2024

I am gradually coming down to earth after last night's launch of *Graced Beyond Telling*, also launching our 80th MSS anniversary celebration year. And celebration it was! We were joined at the Blackburn parish/school hall by at least 100 people, some of whom we have known for many decades.

Our planning and organising team arrived early to set up the hall, assisted by spouses, partners, friends and family, putting out chairs and tables for books and supper, preparing plates of food, and the many other details that ensure a welcoming space for everyone. They were Liz McAloon and Andrew Mountford, Fiona Basile and James ..., Amanda Freeman and her friend Edwina, both Bernadettes, Glen D'Souza, my nephews Sam and Rhoy van den Bosch, and Michael on behalf of Coventry. Some other early arrivals also helped. The place was a hive of activity and looked great when everything was ready.



From the moment people began to arrive, the atmosphere of celebration, joy and love began to build. No one was in a hurry to find a seat. People wanted to meet and greet. To me it spoke volumes of what Fr John used to often say to us: 'you are people people'. We build relationships and a sense of community with people wherever we are. What tends to follow is that they do the same with one another, and that seemed to be happening last night too.

Liz McAloon was MC for the night, and as we so well know, she was wonderful in that role. Welcoming everyone, she introduced each of the MSS present: Stancea, Betty, Kath, Pat K, Pat B., Marce, Bernadette W and Bernadette M.; and introduced Stancea to give the Acknowledgement of Country, give a formal welcome to the assembly.

Stancea told our MSS story, beginning with Bruny Island and that pivotal conversation of Kit Hawkins with

young John Wallis: 'Why can't we have sisters...?' She went on to tell of our first four women coming together on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1943, the beginning of the Home Missionary Sisters of Our Lady. In a few sentences, she sketched the development of our mission into the highways and byways of rural and outback Australia, and as the years went by, to our more urban work with people. And today, our mission continuing through the John Wallis Foundation, now Highways & Byways.

Many of those present would have known parts of that story, but today's chapter of working towards our fulfilment may have been new to many. Highways and Byways is part of that, of course, but now it is also EFCL taking care of much of the administration.

Stancea concluded her address by introducing Gabrielle McMullen.

Gabrielle's address launching *Graced Beyond Telling* is a wonderful overview of what the book is all about – or rather, what it tells about my life journey. She concluded with: **I have great pleasure in launching Corrie van den Bosch's *A Soul's Dark Journey: Graced Beyond Telling***

See separate attachment for a copy of Gabrielle's address.



Then it was my turn to speak. I shared with people something of what writing this book had done for me, of how I came to take up journal writing which has been such a powerful means of coming to understand my inner life. I also spoke of the presence of God, working unrecognised through the messiness and brokenness of my life. Only in retrospect did I begin to recognise it. And now, reading those journals years later, I kept being astonished at how clearly God was present and working.

When I concluded, Liz invited a few questions. These gave me the chance to share reflections on the changes happening in our times, and how these affect the way we think of God and our role in the Church and world.

I concluded formalities with a blessing:



I have great pleasure in launching... *Graced Beyond Telling*

We've had a lot of words tonight.  
Let us take a moment of silence,  
aware that we are amazingly blessed:  
blessed in the gift of life;  
blessed in our families, friends, communities,  
the natural world and the experiences of life,  
all of which contributing to our becoming  
who and what we are at this moment,  
who and what we are for one another and for our world.

May we be blessed by the One  
who is the source of all that is,  
the source of all blessing,  
And in the fullness of that blessing  
may each of us know ourselves  
*graced beyond telling,*  
and awaken one another to that same grace.

Amen.



Edwina and Amanda preparing supper.



Happy reunion: Andrea Butler and Betty