**“Bring in the poor and the crippled”-   
Spiritual accompaniment among the fringes**

**Monday 13th May 2019**

**Mission 2019: One Heart, Many Voices**

**Elizabeth Lee**

Elizabeth (Liz) Lee is a Spiritual Director who is drawn to offering spiritual accompaniment with those in the fringes. Following eight years of life-giving and privileged ministry in MRRC, a remand jail for 1000 men, and Matthew Talbot Hostel, a large men's homeless hostel, Liz recently undertook a three and a half month sabbatical during which time she visited examples of spiritual accompaniment in the fringes in the USA and the UK.

Originally a Food Technologist, Liz has been a Research Scientist, Museum Curator, Community Development Worker and Teacher of Science and Religious Education as well as Chaplain and Pastoral Care Officer. She holds a Master of Arts in Theology, a Masters of Education and a Bachelor of Science (Honours). Liz is a member of the Australian Network for Spiritual Direction and is its Sydney Regional Representative, as well as an active member of The Grail, an international women’s spirituality movement.  She is married to John and has three adult children and a granddaughter.

Who comes to the banquet of spiritual nourishment and who is not invited to this banquet? Do we go into the streets and alleys and bring in those who are poor or crippled, blind or lame? Can we? How can we?

Drawing on my experiences over the past eight years, I share some of my reflections on spiritually companioning people on the margins. Men and women who have been incarcerated, those experiencing homelessness, living with mental illness and struggling with addictions, have challenged and encouraged me. Together we will explore ways of offering a deep listening presence in non-traditional settings.

#2 Acknowledgement of Country.

I honour the Gadigal people of the Eroa Nation, traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we gather, land that was taken from them without their consent, treaty or compensation.  I honour the Dreaming of the First Peoples of Australia and commit to walking respectfully on their land and journeying with them in the quest for justice and reconciliation.

#3 **Blessing on us present**

*If you feel comfortable, let us close our eyes and breath.  Breath in and out. Grounding ourselves in this place, in this moment*

May we give with a loving heart this day, and receive the satisfaction that comes with doing so.

May we receive from others with openness, and allow them the gift of giving to us.

May we acknowledge our vulnerability, and have the wisdom to recognize our need.

May we reach out with continual kindness and do so with a loving and peaceful heart.

Based on a Blessing by Joyce Rupp

#4 **Welcome and Introductions:**One sentence to share, say it on a breath: your name, where you are from, why have you come today?

What I hope to do this afternoon is share with you some of my recent experiences of accompanying vulnerable people on their spiritual journey, explore together some possibilities and to see if there is anyone who would be interested in collaborating with me in this space.

#5 The challenge of language.  I have for some years been speaking of Spiritual Direction/ Spiritual Accompaniment in the margins but of recent times I have been pondering the concept of “fringes” rather than “margins”.  "Spiritual Accompaniment in the Fringes."

A fringe is a decorative boarder that adds beauty to a fabric.  The integrity of the fabric is closely related to how the fringes are cared for.  If the fringes are tattered and frayed the rest of the fabric is vulnerable, and likely to unravel.  If the fringes are cared for, and protected the rest of the fabric maintains its integrity. Fringes can refer to those who may hold alternative or unorthodox views, outside the mainstream, but somehow still relevant, at times challenge and even prophetic.  Fringes are also the interference patterns that are formed by the diffraction of light. We also celebrate Fringe Festivals not Margin(al) Festivals!

Margins are the empty or blank parts of a page.  Margins define what is included and what is excluded.  When something is described as marginal it usually means that it is small, insignificant and of little if any value.

#6 More significantly, for me, is the Gospel story of the “Woman with the Haemorrhage” Luke 8:43-48.   This woman, who had been suffering blood loss for 12 years having tried everything, has the opportunity to reach out to Jesus.  Most translations say that she reached out and touched the hem or edge of the garment that Jesus was wearing. But, I understand that a more accurate translation is, that she touched the fringe of Jesus’ garment, and this fringe was most likely the tassels that are on the tallit, a Jewish prayer shawl.  Numerically the tassels represent the 613 commandments contained in the Torah. These fringes or tzitzit are widely considered a reminder to think of God at all times. So, this woman, desperate for a cure reaches out to Jesus in faith, knowing she just needs to touch the fringe to be well. Maybe I am being invited to reach out and touch the fringes.  Maybe we are all being invited to touch the fringes and in that way be healed, made whole as a society.

#7 So, for me, it is Spiritual Accompaniment among the Fringes.

**Scripture reading**

#8 Jesus tells a story of a landowner giving a large dinner and sent out many invitations but each one invited offered excuses.  The landowner became angry and told the aide, “Go into town, into the streets and alleys, and bring in those who are poor or crippled and those who are blind or lame…, I want my house to be full!” Luke 14: 16-24

#9 Let us for a moment consider the banquet on offer as a spiritual banquet.  How are you spiritually nourished daily, weekly, monthly and annually?

Now imagine that you are homeless, or escaping domestic violence, just come out of jail, in a drug rehab for 9 months, living with mental health issues, lonely, bereft or dying.  Under any one of these circumstances, how would you envisage that you are being nourished spiritually?

What might you be desiring?

#10 Who comes to spiritual banquets and who is not invited?  Do we go into the streets and alleys and bring in those who are poor or crippled, blind or lame?  Can we? How can we? While some may accompany those who have been incarcerated, experiencing homelessness, living with mental illness and struggling with addictions or have experienced significant trauma, we could all could consider who comes to us and are we offering an opportunity for spiritual as well as physical nourishment.  Who is among the fringes and outside our ministries of spiritual accompaniment? Are some hungry for spiritual nourishment and want to come but can’t?

Let me pause here and share with you what I mean by spirituality.

#11 *Spirituality is about what gives us purpose in our lives.  It is about our sources of meaning and hope, which in turn is intimately related to our connectedness to ourselves, to others and to the world. (****From: National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care)***

#12 *Spiritual Direction can be seen as a relationship of ‘attentive companionship’ where one person (the Spiritual Director) respectfully and reverently listens to another (the Directee) and helps them notice, name and respond to what is unfolding in their life and explore what gives their life meaning and purpose.  A Spiritual Director accompanies a person as they share the stories of their life, their fears and anxieties, their joys and delights, what is life giving and what is life denying. It is ultimately about the life and well-being and the growth of directee’s relationship with self, others and creation, affirming the basic quest for meaning.  Regardless of the directee’s relationship with God, as a spiritual director I, through Divine grace cultivate a space that is holy and fosters spiritual intimacy.*

3 stories:

#113 While I was at Matthew Talbot Hostel, the counsellor introduces Simon, a well-educated, middle aged man and who identifies as a Catholic.  Simon’s psychiatrist vehemently dismisses that he could possibly be hearing the voice of God, and Simon is heavily medicated for what he refers to as psychosis, medication that Simon says is not helping.   When asked what he is desiring, Simon says, conversations with someone who will take seriously his search for meaning in his life and his relationship with God.

Paula Ferris in “Spiritual Direction and Twelve-Step Sponsorship” says that spiritual directors need to *“recognise that practicing addicts, still in their addiction, are not good candidates for spiritual direction, as is the case with any person suffering with untreated mental health issues.”* I definitely view things differently.

#14 Colin and I often stop for a chat.  Colin has been homeless for many years, and for the last three years describes himself as “off grid.”  He is s committed Christian and very happy to talk about God whenever anyone will lend him an ear. One day Colin stopped me in my tracks when he said “Lots of people are doing lots of good things for us homeless guys.  But always it is about you helping us. None of you would ever think of inviting one of us to a meal, sitting down alongside us and having an equal conversation.”

#15 Peter would come up for the cuppa of tea and cake we serve after Mass at the Talbot each Sunday.  In talking with him he was obviously on a spiritual quest. I told him he would be most welcome to join us at Mass on Sunday mornings.  He said, with tears in his eyes, that he was not worthy to enter a church.

#16 Let me tell you something of my story.

* I have been in spiritual direction from my mid 20’s, over 30 yeas now
* For a long time I had been wondering if I was being called to be a spiritual director
* 2010 experienced a call to prison ministry
* Took leave from teaching, commenced CPE (clinical pastoral education) training
* 2011-2015 Chaplin at MRRC
* In October 2015 I commenced at Matthew Talbot Hostel as Pastoral Care Officer
* From 2013- 2016 I trained as a Spiritual Direction
* I noticed my desire to offer Spiritual Direction among those “in the margins”
* Too busy to allow this to unfold in any significant way
* It was not going to happen while I had so many competing demands at MTH
* Decided after 7 years I needed a sabbatical
* September to December 2018 14 week sabbatical ~ 6 weeks in USA, 8 in UK for rest, renewal and reorientation

#18 Being in the Northern Hemisphere over autumn and winter, I got to experience Autumn and winter in radically different ways.  The trees captures me and became something of a metaphor for my time away.

#19 The rest and renewal was nourishing my roots and the bare branches, full of sap are the various possibilities that I am now exploring.

#20 As part of this sabbatical, I visited St Boniface’s Church in the Tenderloins, San Francisco and there are lots of homeless people in the Tenderloins.  The front 1/3rd of this church is made available for people who want to come and pray. The back 2/3rd provided a welcome and safe place for the homeless to sleep between 6am and 2pm each weekday.  Apart from blankets they provide little else. Just a safe place to sleep watched over by one paid worker and one or two volunteers. If they require other services they will be referred on. It is a remarkably reverent space.

#21 While in San Francisco I met with Tracie Rubbie the co-founder of Sidewalk Talk.  Sidewalk aims at fostering human connection.  A group of people, who have undertaken some basic on-line training and under the guidance of a Sidewalk Talk City Leader, each take two chairs and sit on the sidewalk or pavement to listen to people.  What started as a one-off event in response to the yet another mass shooting in the USA has blossomed into a worldwide network across 12 countries in 40 cities with some 3,500 volunteers. #22 I have subsequently trained as a city leader and participated in listening sessions both in New York and in Sydney and I am working with my local council to see if we can establish Sidewalk Talk or something similar in my local area.

#23 I had 4 days in Anchorage visiting various listening posts established by Marcia Wakeland and hosted by trained volunteers.  Listening posts are similar to Sidewalk Talk in that they offer a listening presence to those who drop by.  But in the case of Listening Posts they are held in locations visited by people who are vulnerable: a homeless shelter, public libraries, supported accommodation, living skills centres etc.

#24 When I was at the Matthew Talbot Hostel, I, together with some volunteers, offer a listening space, for a transient group of three to eight men and women.  The real gift of this time is the opportunity to be present to and honour the sacred story of each individual. One woman remarked that she feels safe to speak about anything in this group.  One of the men said that this group feels like a welcoming family. #25 These Listening Circles that I facilitated at the Learning Centre attached to Hostel, were informed in part by the work of Anne Scott.  Anne Scott in her book Finding Home: Restoring the Sacredness to Life- stories of women in homelessness and transition, says

#26 *"not only is there a growing homelessness problem here - and across the world - which is touching more and more people, but there is also a certain homelessness of the soul - of the inner.  And so, when we offer a place for women to meet and connect at this level, while their outer problems remain, they are able to find peace - home, even if just for an hour. Slowly something comes alive in the women through this process.  Not for all, of course, because some wounds are so deep, and their issues can be complex. But there is usually a healing that takes place, even if it is just a felt experience of being welcomed, as they are having their sacredness reflected."*

I had the great privilege on meeting with Anne during my sabbatical, infact it was the opportunity to meet with her that drew me to California in the first place.

I note that these words of Anne’s are similar to those I read yesterday morning when reading Richard Rohr’s daily meditation for Saturday.  **Next slide**

*In everyone’s life, there is great need for am* anam ċara, *a soul friend. In this love, you are understood as you are without mask or pretension. The superficial and functional lies and half-truths of social acquaintance fall away, you can be as you really are. Love allows understanding to dawn. . . . Where you are understood, you are home. . . . When you really feel understood, you feel free to release yourself into the trust and shelter of the other person’s soul. . . . This art of love discloses the special and sacred identity of the other person. . . .*

In August 2015, 4 days before I was to go for an interview for the position of Pastoral Care Officer at Matthew Talbot Hostel, I heard from Lucy Abbot Tucker of the #27 Ignatian Spirituality Project, based in Chicago, that offers retreats in 30 centres across the USA for men and women who are homeless and in recovery.  Up until then, while I was aware I was being called to the ministry of Spiritual Direction, I was also sensing that my directees may not be predominantly churched, white, middle aged men and women with who I would sit in a comfortable chair at monthly intervals over a period of years who can afford to pay for Direction.  As I heard Lucy speak, I began to see new possibilities for Spiritual Direction.

Fast forward 3 years and I am a participant along with 12 other women at a ISP retreat at the Loyola Retreat House out of Cleveland Ohio an hours plane trip from Chicago.  Simultaneously there is a retreat for 20 homeless men running in another wind of the retreat House. I felt quite at home when some of the men turned up, just like any of the men I have been accompanying over the past 8 years.  Many of them bring their overnight “luggage” in a black garbage bag. The women as they arrive seemed to have found some form of suitcase or overnight bag but are equally vulnerable. I took one woman to her room she burst into tears sobbing that she did not deserve this.  This being a simple room, typical of retreat houses that may have a few decades before been a novitiate for religious containing a single bed, desk, small wardrobe and some religious artwork on the wall. This woman normally sleeps on a mattress on the floor of a shelter, that gets stacked to the side of the room each morning.

#28 ISP retreats marry Ignatian Spirituality with 12 Step Spirituality and language.  On my retreat the team 4 women, one a trained spiritual director, one who currently work in a hospice of people who would otherwise homeless, and two women who have themselves previously been homeless, in recovery and ISP participants.  What profoundly moved me was seeing how for many of the participants it was their first experience of encountering a God of love. The graces that were abundantly present

#29 When I was in London last year I visited St Mungo’s.  #30 St Mungo’s provided an extensive range of services to those who are homeless, coming out of jail, living with mental illness or addictions.  #31 The part of their work that I was particularly interested in was their support of those living with homelessness who were on their end of life journey.  I spent 4 days shadowing their palliative care coordinator.

#32 While I was in New York, I had the privileged of meeting with Don Bisson, a Marist Brother, Jungian Analyst, Spiritual Director and Formator.  I had heard Don speak on some CDs.  As we sat and talked about my dream of offering spiritual direction among those in the fringes, he not only encouraged me to pursue this but also to consider offering a formation program to help form other to do likewise.  He has a such program where 5 weekends a year for two years various people, already in ministry in the margins are trained as spiritual directors.

#33 Over the course of my sabbatical time I recognised that there were a vast number of opportunities for fostering human connection and offering spiritual accompaniment with those among the fringes.

1. 1:1 accompaniment
2. Listening Circles
3. Offering Reflection Days and Retreats
4. Facilitation/ PD
5. Networking: linking the spiritual direction community with those in ministry at the fringes
6. End of Life Care
7. Formation of people to accompany others spiritually and Supervision

#34 Pope Francis reminds us:

“The Church exists to bring about an encounter with the visceral love of God’s mercy.  To do this the Church must go outside to look where people live, where they suffer, where they hope.  The Christian message is transmitted by embracing those in difficulty, by embracing the outcast, the marginalized.” *Pope Francis*

#35 I believe many are devoting their time, energy, their lives to feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned.

#36 I am wondering if in part we have been influences by Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs.  #37 Maslow proposed that as human beings needed to have their basic needs met before being able to address their psychological needs and only then can an individual focus upon their higher needs such as self-fulfilment .  #38 But I suggest that if we can we have meaning and purpose in our lives then we can tolerate various levels of unfulfillment in our physical and psychological realms.  #39 Vital to this is human connection.

#40 John Kabat Zinn says,

“*In our loneliness and isolation, there is a deep longing, a yearning, usually unconscious or ignored, to belong, to be connected to a larger whole, to not be anonymous, to be seen and known.  For relationality, exchange, give and take, especially on an emotional plane, is how we are reminded that we have a place in this world, how we know in our hearts that we do belong.*

#41 Gary Smith, a Jesuit priest who lived and worked among the poor of Portland Oregon, says:

*“…many individuals, I think, are driven to talking to themselves and to the mannequins of their lives, because no one around them listens to them or cares about them.  They are not mentally ill; they are just lonely. Some folk connect more with cockroaches, mice, cats dogs, birds and plants in their SRO (single room occupancy hotels) rooms than they do with other human beings.  This is not so much by choice, as it is as a result of the poison of human disregard*.”

#42 So Banquets are not just about food.

Think, pair share.

#43 Over the next 20 minutes I invite you to reflect individually, in pairs and as a table group.

4 minutes in silence, 6 minutes as a pair at your table.

Then 10 minutes as a table group

#44 Then we will return to the whole group

1. What spiritual accompaniment do you/could you, and those with whom you work, offer those among the fringes?
2. Who else, particularly those among the fringes, could be included in what you already offer and how?

#45 **An Invitation:** Robert Lentz says of his icon of Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago:

*“Cardinal Bernardin gazes out at us as he did so often in his life, in the pose of one who listens- and one who listens well.  It is not always easy to hear what the marginalized have to tell us. Their truth may be blurred by anger, slurred by pain, or whispered from insecurity or fear.  When a person at the centre, like Joseph Bernardin, makes the effort to listen to those at the margins, however, miracles happen and God’s kingdom reappears.”*

#46 2:45 Three R’s:  Where has there been resonance, resistance, and realignment.

There is also a blue piece of paper.  On it I invite you to joy down your name, contact details and any ideas you may have (if you have any) if you would you be interested in exploring some options into the future with me.

#47/ #48 Closing Gratitude