



WORKSHOP ABSTRACTS AND PRESENTER PROFILES

Playback Workshop

Watercloset Productions: Tony Williams and Dennis Clare

Playback theatre is a genre used to tease out or highlight main points or issues after listening to a presenter, giving the audience a dramatised experience of the presentation through drama, mime, music, visual theatre and song. Playback theatre helps the audience to experience the presentation in 3D and brings to life that which has been spoken.

In the workshop setting participants are asked to recount stories, experiences or emotions that are then 'played back' as a means of bringing life to the story and it also allows the person telling the story to see it from a differing viewpoint.

Presenters Profile:

Tony Williams is an accomplished musician and composer, who has several internationally released albums to his credit, with no1 hits in South Africa and Norway. He has regularly performed on Australian Television and Music circuits both as a solo act and with his own bands.

Dennis Clare began his career in mime in his home State of Tasmania, He has traveled the length and breadth of Australia performing in theatres and at Festivals, finally moving into the Comedy and Pub circuits. Dennis has performed internationally throughout the UK, Europe and North America. He is a regular performer at the Art Gallery of NSW.

Reclaiming humanity, re-establishing community

Rev Dr Christopher Newell, AM

If we are not careful, then we feel the spiritual issues that we face are merely those located within faith communities. We focus on inclusion rather than the root causes of why it is necessary to include in the first place. Why it is that dominant norms, values and structures are largely unproblematised by the very act of inclusion, leaving the *status quo* as it is? In a recent book Goggin & Newell (2004) make an extraordinary claim: that Australians with disabilities, via an all-pervasive experience of *otherness*, are routinely subject to a form of social apartheid. We need to understand and to help faith communities to understand that the exclusion practised by faith communities is very much a reflection of age old and contemporary questions with regard to what it means to be human, who qualifies as a person, whether we can have second or third class people, let alone un-people, and especially who should decide with regard to these questions? We need to move beyond the mere telling of individual stories, to recognising the power of individual and collective narratives to effect “narrative repair” as the noted theorist Hilde Lindemann Nelson observes. In this way we seek to move the disabled mind and body from being central, but the objective “talked about”, to viewing disability as being central to humanity, community and indeed nationhood. Arising out of these questions, and the narratives of those we know to be *other*, we learn to rethink who it is to be *us* – our moral community. Our task is obscene, counter-cultural, but vital, not only for the very communities in which we exist, but also for the reclaiming of transforming faith communities, and embracing nations.

Presenter Profile: Christopher Newell is Associate Professor in the School of Medicine, University of Tasmania. He is an Anglican Priest currently on staff at St David's Cathedral, Hobart. His recent publications include *From Out back to Out Front: Voices in Spirituality and Disability from the Land Down Under*, (co-edited with Andy Calder, Haworth Press, 2004) and, with Gerard Goggin, *Disability in Australia: Exposing a Social Apartheid*. (UNSW Press, 2004). In 1999 Dr Newell was Highly Commended in the Australian Human Rights Awards. In 2001 he was also appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM).

A JOURNEY IN INSTITUTIONAL UNDERSTANDING: Personal, pastoral and philosophical issues confronting chaplains and other carers who engage in pastoral relationship with people with disability in the institutional setting.

Trevor Whitney

I will use my personal story of being appointed as a chaplain to institutions for people with intellectual and / or physical impairment as the backdrop for personal, pastoral and philosophical insights concerning the relationship between people with disability and carers such as chaplains, other clerics and lay volunteers.

The institutional context, in which I as a chaplain engage in pastoral care with the residents who live in such a setting, will be sketched and, subsequently, some of the issues facing carers who seek to nurture relationships of integrity within this environment will be explored.

Issues to be addressed will include:

- The medicalised context of disability – how does the chaplain / carer fit in?
- The chaplains / carers personal prejudices and limitations.
- Other barriers to meaningful pastoral and personal relationship e.g. fear, denial, mortality, 'non-being'.

Also, learning edges discovered through intentional, ad hoc, and ongoing pastoral relationships, as well as those areas of learning discerned through the conduct of religious worship, and through personal reflection with mentors, will be described. These learning edges will include:

- The mutuality of relationship.
- Remembering the simple things of human friendship
- The invitation to move beyond 'doing' to 'being'.
- Humour.
- The significance of religious ritual symbolism.

Presenter Profile: Trevor Whitney is currently working within the UCA, UnitingCare Commission, as Disabilities Ministry Chaplain. And has been in this role since September 2000. This ministry includes 3 day / week chaplaincy at Minda, a large residential and service facility for people with intellectual impairment; UCA chaplaincy at Julia Farr Services, a home for people with intellectual / physical impairment; community and church-based advocacy; and membership of the South Australian Task Group on Disability Issues.

Tales of woe or lessons in love? Collective witness and personal testimonies of trauma.

Lorna Hallahan

Elie Weisel, writer, philosopher and Holocaust survivor said that: 'If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation has invented a new literature, that of testimony.' Testimony is the telling of the story of violence, trauma or exclusion. It is not a story whispered into our darkness or related in a private diary, it is a story that seeks an attentive audience and hope-filled action. Often, as many people involved in disability advocacy know, the story is rejected as untruthful, too confronting, too demanding, or too backward looking. Sometimes the story is taken from the teller and used to promote other people's righteous actions. The teller is left feeling helpless, dependent and dejected. Ideally, however, an attentive listener witnesses the story with respect and reason, and is brought into a deeper, more

embracing relationship with the testimony giver. Here the story is co-created by the testimony giver and the witness bearer. They become the creators of 'knowledge de novo' which as shared meaning can become the spur to action to transform the world. This paper examines the place of testimonies of trauma in a conference such as *Bridges to Understanding* and asks how we might begin to understand and act on our role as collective bearers of witness?

Presenter Profile: Lorna Hallahan is a social worker and Christian theologian who recently completed a PhD in disability theory and Christian theology. She is the coordinator of the Disability and Spirituality Project of the Flinders University and Adelaide College of Divinity Centre for Theology, Science and Culture. Lorna has been involved in disability advocacy for many years and regularly speaks and writes on issues related to the disability movement and spirituality.

Developing Inclusive Interfaith & Ecumenical Communities **Susan Stork-Finlay & Rev Robert Stringer**

For many people with disabilities, faith and spiritual resourcefulness are one of the many reasons and motivations to seek the company of other people. This session will report on the "Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Faith Communities" project, funded by a Victorian State Disability Plan Innovation Grant in 2003. The project is to enhance the capacity of faith communities (Churches and other Faith Communities) to promote the inclusion of people with a disability. Topics covered will include:

- Spirituality as a measure of capacity building,
- spiritual practice and well being,
- spirituality and advocacy and
- the need for inclusion is much more than just access to the worship space.

This will be a presentation of the insights and learnings so far.

Presenters Profile:

Robert Stringer is a minister of the Uniting Church with 35 years experience in cross cultural and social justice ministries.

Susan Stork-Finlay is the Disabilities Resource Officer of the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, is a clergy spouse and lives with a neurological disability.

Debut CD from Raging Lives

Colin Wease, Toni Fonoti, Kevin Malcolm, and Dave MacMillan

'Civilisation is spread more by singing than by anything else, because whole bunches can sing a particular song, where not everyone can join in the same conversation. A song ain't nothing but a conversation fixed up to where you can talk over and over...without getting tired of it' -Woody Guthrie

The Raging Lives show is a 35 minute showcase of the immense talent of two of the programs most prolific writers Colin Wease and Kevin Malcolm who also give voice to the many songs written which may not be able to be personally verbalised by the other writers in the program. Songs from (self-titled) the Raging Lives album and from the next album which is currently in pre-production "Speak from the Heart". This is followed with a workshop, which gives insight into the process and the stories, which give birth to the human anthems, which are created at Cascade Place.

The band formed in mid 2004 and the songs they sing and play have come out of a music project at Cascade Place, a centre for the arts and environment in Redcliffe just north of Brisbane. Cascade Place is a service of the Cerebral Palsy League of Queensland.

The song writers' aim is to give people with disabilities a voice to express how they feel, how they view the world around them and how they identify the issues which effect them.

The composition process that has been developed enables people, regardless of disability, to release their inner creativity and express their life experience, inner thoughts and problems in a song. It helps them view a positive side to what may be negative experiences and help them detach them selves from those memories. It inturn creates a path to inner healing which helps the clients focus on their dreams and hopes and on their own personal skill development.

This process has created an option never before viewed within Australia. It takes the focus away from traditional "music therapy" and looks within the person for music instead of bringing the music to them. It was realised quite quickly that the message of the songs is a powerful and positive force. It lets other people with disabilities know that they are not alone in their feelings, fears, hopes and dreams and creates a universal connection and a circle of influence and inspiration. The songs raise cultural awareness of the similarities and differences in all our lives. Thus contributing to a more enlightened society and allowing others to join in.

Disability and Poverty: Exploring the Connections

Julia McCreadie & Terri Fealy

In this paper we will argue that when a person has impairment there is a consequent disabling by our society that forces both the person and those who care for them into a state of poverty: financial social, emotional and spiritual. In the paper we will outline how impairment directly contributes to these various expressions of poverty and the consequences of this for people with impairment and their families. We will examine how our society through its legal, political, bureaucratic and social systems contributes to this situation. We will then consider what a theological perspective offers to challenging the disabling impact

of our society, and some of the possible ways that our faith communities can alleviate this situation

Presenters Profile:

Julia McCreadie is Manager of the Case Management and Respite services of UnitingCare Supported Living and has 27 years experience working in the disability sector in the UK and Australia. She is graduate nurse specializing in intellectual disability and has worked extensively with children and families. Julia lives with her husband and 2 boys, and is looking forward to having the 'great Aussie mortgage' when they move into a new home later this year.

Terri Fealy is Manager of UnitingCare Supported Living and has 25 year experience working in the disability field with both children and adults. She has also been a member of the L'Arche Sydney Community for the past 15 years. L'Arche is a network of Faith communities throughout the world where people with and without impairments build life together. She is passionately committed to human rights and social justice. She currently lives with her 2 dogs Aneru and Shanti.

My Story: Creative Expressions, Discovery and Acceptance

Robert Oakman

My name is Robert Oakman. I am an award winning visual artist and songwriter who was born with Cerebral Palsy.

Over the last decade since I first became involved in visual arts my work has been featured in many exhibitions the most successful being the "Censored" exhibition which was held at the Australian Scientific Study into Intellectual Disabilities conference at the Brisbane Convention centre last year which received media coverage (Courier Mail, Radio National, Ten News) when the exhibition was censored due to its "confronting" nature. I also was involved in the forming of the Dis-Arts group which is a community of artists with disabilities who's focus is creating works which reflect the reality's of living with disabilities.

I first became involved in visual arts at the age of 26 as a therapeutic release but as I progressed I became more aware and more interested in using art as a means of conscious expression, the intention of the works I have created are to provoke deeper thought, I feel that by inspiring people to look beyond the visible, they will see the true meaning of my art. In the same way, if people can look past my chair and take time to get to know me, they will see that I share the same hopes and dreams as everyone else, being accepted and feeling loved is just as important to me as being respected as intelligent.

Feelings such as depression, isolation, difficulties in communication, and dependency all play an integral role in the works, which I have created. I feel this

process of positively expressing these emotions, which at times has been very confronting for myself, has had a cathartic effect on me emotionally and has helped to make me feel more positive about my current situation.

I am also a religious person and consider myself a person with great faith and belief that I have been put on this planet for a purpose and that purpose is to help educate people about the frustrations that people with disabilities experience on a daily basis. My songs reflect this. I always used to wonder why I was born with Cerebral Palsy and it wasn't until I understood god's purpose for me that I am now able to get on with my life. Though I have to live with my disability everyday, knowing that god is walking with me makes it much easier.

The seminar presentation which I have put together features some of my art works and explores the themes and intentions of the specific pieces and the issues which have shaped my life and my works

Presenter Profile: Robert Oakman has been painting for over 10 years. He has exhibited work with other artists from Cascade Place. In 2001, Robert won first prize (\$1000) in the Arata Exhibition, an exhibition targeting artists Australia wide who use assistive technology. Robert uses a head pointer with brush attached.

A Merging of Two Worlds: My Personal Testimony

Athena Pavlis-Goard

Drama: *The Phone Call*

This drama, although fictional, typifies many of the experiences Athena has encountered within the Christian Community: lack of understanding and sensitivity to her needs from ministers or members, lack of access to church buildings and therefore ministries and a sense of belonging and able to contribute and participate.

Testimony:

This personal testimony looks at Athena's growing up as one of two daughters with physical disabilities in a family within the Greek culture. It also looks at her experiences of growing up within the institutional setting of a special school and its effects on her life.

After living the institutional life for 16 years Athena had built a distorted theory of two worlds: the world of disabled people in one world and non-disabled in the other. She shares her intimate experience of how she was able to look past her disability and encounter a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the witness of author Joni Erickson Tada. At this point her two worlds merged into one. She now lived in one world and Jesus loved her despite her disability. If God could use Joni than Athena was sure He could use her as well! God had a purpose and plan for her.

A subsequent conversation with a wise minister encouraged Athena to perceive her disability in positive ways and to explore her own unique ways of participating and contributing to her church and the wider community.

Presenter Profile: Athena Pavlis-Goard (*Dip. Christian Counselling, B.Ed Habilitation, M.Ed Human Relations & Community Education*) Board Director; *PWD Australia* Athena has educated and promoted the inclusion of people with disabilities within Christian and local communities, has directed Christian disability camps and prepared leadership training and education for church communities. She lectures at the Australian Catholic University on 'Disability Culture'. Her primary interests continue in spirituality, inclusion and disability issues.

Sensing Disability in Buddhism

Dr Fiona Kumari-Campbell

This presentation claims that it maybe possible to generate an alternative reading of the law of *karma* based on a dynamic reading of the story of the Buddha's path towards enlightenment. The question of disability and ways disability is known within Buddhist traditions is under researched. Traditionally, Western practitioners have written off Buddhism as a transformatory spiritual path for disabled people. Many accounts of Buddhism are written from an outsider perspective and assume (incorrectly) that Buddhism is a fatalistic belief system. In response to such claims this paper stakes out 'new' ground in developing a Buddhology of Disablement.

When the young prince Siddhartha observed humanity's (natural) tendency towards sickness, ageing and eventually death – these states of being, he correctly observed were not an aberration. Such states of *dukkha* (suffering) exhibited the truth of impermanence. All we can be certain about is that nothing stays the same (c.f. *Four Noble Truths*). A dynamic reading of Buddhist doctrines enables the retrieval of impairment from a state of abnormalcy (the delusion) and conceives of it as a mere (naturalized) corporeal impermanent phenomenon. Indeed many writers argue that it is the quest for youth, health and life - for perfection (ableist illusions) that causes suffering, better described as a state of unsatisfactoriness. In the spirit of interfaith dialogue this paper will explore common and disparate readings of the doctrine of karma and reincarnation as a commitment to developing a Buddhology that assists disabled people to make sense of their lived experience in affirming ways.

Presenter profile: Dr. Fiona Kumari Campbell is an academic with a disability who teaches in Disability Studies in the School of Human Services, Griffith University. Her research focuses on interfaith issues, ableism, technology and law and disability. She is currently finalising a theology degree. Fiona's favourite cricketer is Aravinda De Silva.

MY IDEAL SUNDAY SCHOOL – IDEAS AND RESOURCES FOR INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY

Kaye Shanks

I will be presenting some of my thoughts about including children with additional needs in a Sunday School program. When it became obvious that my youngest daughter had a developmental disability, I went to speak to the Children's Ministry Co-ordinator at church to discuss some of the issues my daughter had. I asked whether the Uniting Church of Australia of which I am a member, had any resources to help. The Co-ordinator didn't know. My enquiries led me to the Children and Family Ministry Unit who told me they didn't have any resources and asked if I would like to help write some. I took up the challenge. I decided to think about what I would really like to see. I will look at practical ways to deal with the following areas:

- Communication and Listening skills
- Behaviour
- Toileting/ Eating/ Drinking
- Fine Motor Skills
- Attention / Concentration
- Using an Aide
- Making friends
- Fears / Anxieties/ Obsessions

This list covers many areas and is a good starting point for parents and leaders to use when discussing how best to involve a child with special needs in a Sunday School programme. I have considered it mainly from my daughter's point of view and have added a few extra areas. However, I need to stress that each child and each disability will have her own individual considerations and no checklist will ever be complete!

Presenter Profile: Kaye is married to Finlay. They have 3 beautiful daughters, 2 with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Before children, she was an Occupational Therapist in the Disability field. The journey from service provider to receiving services has been interesting and challenging!

Kaye is a member of Cross Purposes, an ecumenical support group for parents of children with a disability.

Secular spirituality and its relevance to disability

Murray Lloyd

The language and concepts of contemporary spirituality have provided a key that enables the psychological and physical stresses of disability to be understood and supported in a new way.

This has created a new strand for training programmes for medical and para-medical students ; one that does not break the well-established taboo on discussing religious aspects of a person's life.

This paper will review the inner strengths and resilience that can be developed when a person feels respected, understood and listened to in a way that helps them to search for meaning in their suffering. This approach is known to provide a bridge to a consideration of religious factors that have been abandoned or not experienced before.

Examples will be given of an advanced type of listening skill that has been labelled " spiritually enhanced active listening"

Although developed to support older people attempting to adjust to the multiple disabilities of older age, it has relevance to the management of all situations in which physical or mental impairment are being experienced, temporarily or permanently.

This presentation is best suited to an experiential framework in which, after an introduction of the concepts, the audience is asked to develop and share possible responses to clinical situations. Time is also required to absorb and react to what may well be new territory for the majority

Presenter Profile: Murray Lloyd is a retired Consultant Geriatrician from the Far South Coast of NSW who has worked as a Consultant Physician in rehabilitation, palliative care and aged care for 25 years.

He has made a particular study of the difficulties that older people have in facing the many disabilities that can be experienced in older age. A recognition that the many different meanings of the word ' spiritual' were having a very negative impact on providing holistic care led to a hypothetical clinical definition of how the human spirit functions.

`Going Walkabout Together Through The Suburbs' Life Journaling With Volunteer Buddies Among Young Adults Living With Intellectual Disability And/Or Mental Illness

Robbie Lloyd

Robbie will present information about his PhD research project. This Action Research project involves young adults (about 18-35 yrs) living with mental illness, or with intellectual disability, keeping a journal of their feelings and experiences every fortnight, with the help of a volunteer buddy. The research is about recording feelings and experiences for 12 months (during 2004-2005). This is to show how people living with mental illness, or with intellectual disability, are quite capable of exercising self awareness and having a say in how their lives are organised. The journaling is based on a set of prompts

designed to help balance self awareness, which Bobbie Lloyd has developed through research into universal human needs and desires for balanced consciousness, expressed in literature and art.

The ultimate goal is raise community awareness of the value in different consciousness, and to work with the health system and others, to create more ways for these two groups to have a say, in managing the services creating quality of life. We will work with agencies towards empowering these two groups.

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A Christian perspective on what makes people valuable

Jason Forbes

The presentation will begin by looking at contemporary methods of how people are valued, and how such methods “dehumanise” people with disabilities. A Biblical alternative will then be given for valuing all people. This will be done by examining what it means to be made in God’s image, how does having a disability relate to the fall of humanity, and how humanity ultimately finds its value in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – the Gospel. This will then form the basis for inclusion in a Christian community, and particle ways of doing this will be discussed.

Presenters profile: I was born with Cerebral Palsy, however, this has not stopped me leading an active lifestyle. I came to understand the significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection for me personally when I was 18. I am now studying as a student minister at the Presbyterian Theological Centre.

My Story

Lex Nason

I divide my story into three parts: my spiritual journey, academic and professional career, and social life.

At the moment, I’m working on a Master’s thesis – theological reflections on disability. It is basically a literature review but I am hoping to gain some fresh insights from this conference

My social life can be very hectic at times. I like to go to tropical resorts for R&R as I love swimming and sun baking, visiting wineries, going to the Opera, and dining out when I can. I have a great housing commission unit. I have yet to meet the love of my life!

I Have a Story..... People with Disability and their Families Participating fully in Parish Life

**Trish and Glen Mowbray, Veronica Hoey SGS,
Trish Murdoch, Jeanie Heininger SGS**

This presentation draws on a cross-section of people with disability from all around Australia, giving voice to their experiences of, and hopes for, participation in Parish Life.

It will treat the following principles:

- The more each person uses their gifts, the stronger the community and the richer the relationships in that community,
- As faith communities, we are one body and through Baptism we are in solidarity as we journey together with our diverse personalities, struggles and gifts.
- Catholic social teaching encourages us to explore further the practical dimensions of our spirituality and affirm the dignity of the human person.
- The Body of Christ presumes a place for everyone. The Gospel of Jesus Christ demands a place for everyone.

This process of reflection which will be presented could support parish leadership, e.g. pastoral councils or planning groups, to consider inclusive practice in the parish life of all the participants of this multi faith conference.

Presenters profile: Jeanie Heininger is a Sister of the Good Samaritan with a Master of Arts Degree in Adult Christian Community Development.

Leadership roles: -

- Executive Director and Principal of Mater Dei
- Disability Services for Centacare, Sydney and Canberra
- Parish Disability Connections Group

Being a fellow Citizen with God's people in God's Household Stephen Mather & Martin Butcher

As a person with a significant disability, Stephen will express what it is like for him to be a member of the church. This presentation will demonstrate how Stephen has become a welcome member and a full citizen of the Church family. He does not just attend church but also ministers to others in many different ways.

Despite Steven's cerebral palsy, he has been able to make a considerable contribution to the life of the Church Family in many different ways including; welcoming people to church; giving a kid's talk during the service and encouraging everyone with his big smile which shines as he worships his God.

Steve lets others know that he is praying for a sick member of the congregation long after others have forgotten that someone has asked for prayer.

During the presentation Steve will explore what it means to be; “no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household.” Ephesians 2:19

Steven will communicate his about his life and spiritual journey from growing up with a disability living at McLeod House at the Spastic Centre, his current joys and frustration, and the future promise that in heaven there will be no wheelchairs and will be seen as one of God’s children, equal among men.

Presenters profile: Steve is a person with severe cerebral palsy. From aged 5 he lived at McLeod House at Allambie Heights, on Sydney’s Northern Beaches. For the past 10 years or so he has lived in community houses in the Ryde/Epping area. A great achievement for Steve in recent times is that he has started working.

Uniting Spirituality & Sexuality

Susan Stork-Finlay & Rev Robert Stringer

Spirituality and Sexuality in themselves are often deemed taboo topics, but together...!!

This discussion will explore:

- The impact sexuality can have on spirituality and the complexities for people with disabilities and their carers, family, friends and faith community.
- Discussion on maintaining integrity of individual physical, personal, sexual, social, spiritual alongside illness/ disability affecting self, carers, family, peers, colleagues, community.
- The understanding of intimacy in relationships and parallels between intimacy and the experience of God.

Presenters Profile:

Robert Stringer is a minister of the Uniting Church with 35 years experience in cross cultural and social justice ministries.

Susan Stork-Finlay is the Disabilities Resource Officer of the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, is a clergy spouse and lives with a neurological disability.

'In the silence between all the words': moving beyond fear and frustration towards inner peace. Spirituality, disability and the experience of meditation: Christian and Buddhist perspectives.

Lesley Lewis

For many people with disabilities, along with those who love, live with, care for and professionally support them, the search for inner peace becomes a crucial aspect of the spiritual journey. In fact, the search for inner peace is of paramount importance for each one of us, whether we live with or without a disability, as part of the spiritual journey each one of us is experiencing.

Drawing on an interfaith perspective, and exploring core truth and wisdom, along with the sense of a spiritual path, inherent within aspects of both Christian and Buddhist teachings, this presentation will explore a way of moving beyond the fear and frustration which is part of all our lives, yet which is often felt more keenly, more intensely, by those with a disability. Some of us, for instance, deal with a life-threatening illness, intellectual disability or acquired brain injury; others, who may not have a 'disability' per se, might yet be 'disabled' by unresolved inner conflict and self-hate, lack of self-esteem, lack or loss of faith, or chronic anger states. In one sense, inner conflict and self-hate, lack or loss of faith and ongoing anger states can be as much a disability as any of the more widely recognised types of disability!

We shall see that if we come to allow ourselves to be still, to reflect, to 'listen', we might hear and experience what I call 'the silence between all the words', so that we can move beyond fear, frustration and a sense of being 'disabled' and therefore incomplete, towards an experience of inner peace, spiritual calm and completion, through meditative practice.

In this experiential workshop we will explore and share together an array of meditation techniques, to discover a sense of, or better still to experience for ourselves, 'the silence between all the words'. It is proposed that an awareness of these meditative approaches can be adapted, translated and shaped according to the needs and requirements of each faith community, family or individual.

We will conclude the session with time for discussion, feedback and questions.

Presenters Profile: Lesley Lewis has managed an independent private practice as a rehabilitation counselling consultant and meditation teacher, for over 20 years. Her work has as its focus the care, support and rehabilitation of brain-injured clients, people of all ages with developmental disabilities, those dealing with mental illness and/or dual diagnosis, and those encountering life-threatening illness. Lesley lectures, conducts workshops and teaches at individual, family, group and community levels, using an array of supportive modalities including guided imagery, visualisation, stress management techniques and, especially, meditation

Her foundations are within the Methodist/Uniting Church, and Lesley has studied and embraced the Buddhist path for over 30 years. In 1996 she attended the Kalachakra Training with the Dalai Lama.

Since 2001 Lesley has also worked with UnitingCare Supported Living as a support co-ordinator with the Independent Living Team, assisting people with intellectual disability/dual diagnosis to live fulfilling, fruitful lives within their community.

Bridges to understanding through Seasons for Growth

Lyn Dowling, B.A.Dip. Ed. B.S.W. {Hons}

Seasons for Growth is an educational program directed at understanding change and loss. It takes place in a small group setting that allows individuals to explore the physical, the emotional, the social and the spiritual dimensions of grief. In doing so it values the personal. Yet it also encourages critical analysis of the social.

Underpinning the program is the belief that grief is a normal response to change, and that all humans experience episodes of grief. Using the metaphor of the Seasons, the program identifies the many *shared* aspects of grief and loss. At the same time it honours what is *unique* in each person's story.

With its respectful approach that validates participants' stories, the Seasons for Growth program offers a safe space to explore the pain, grief and loss that can be experienced by individuals and families living with disability when they encounter *systemic* and *structural* barriers. It can therefore be a valuable tool for building bridges to understanding disability.

Seasons for Growth also creates a community space for better listening. When we take time to examine and acknowledge our own grief experiences in a supportive environment, we become empowered to listen better to other people's stories.

Once we really listen, we are called to respond to the personal as well as to the social, structural and political causes of pain. This paper describes the Seasons for Growth program and how its supportive, yet critical lens has supported some groups living with disability in the Hunter.

Presenters Profile: Lyn has been a disability advocate for a number of years. This paper moves forward from her chapter in 'Voices in Disability and Spirituality from the Land Down Under: Outback to Outfront', and explores how a community program that includes the social and the spiritual can build bridges of understanding about disability issues.

Developing an Inclusive Faith Community

Athena Pavlis-Gourd

Drama: *A Sunday Morning in Church*

This drama accentuates the barriers often experienced by people with disabilities who want to be part of a faith community. It highlights barriers to their inclusion that may not be generally recognised.

Workshop:

This is a one-hour training package provided for places of worship committed to the inclusion and active participation of people with disabilities. It has already been run twice within Christian communities. Participants will actively engage and personally examine their own places of worship and their suitability in terms of the specific needs of people with different disabilities. Handouts will be provided for note-taking along with references and resources for further assistance.

As a group brainstorming activity, participants will examine common attitudes and stereotypical images that contribute to barriers to inclusive practice. Many of them we have been taught as a society but are not necessarily true.

Worship meets universal needs. We all subconsciously expect to meet our physical, personal, emotional and spiritual needs when we go to worship. In a small group activity called *'Making It Personal'*, we will examine how some people with disabilities may not get these needs met and will generate some possible solutions. A copy of the Disability Discrimination Act and a version of the Disability Services Standards will be adapted specifically for use by faith communities and will be provided as a reference.

This workshop will finally examine practical ways of meeting the needs of people with disabilities through developing tailored made Disability Action Plans.

Presenters Profile: Athena has educated and promoted the inclusion of people with disabilities within Christian and local communities, has directed Christian disability camps and prepared leadership training and education for church communities. She lectures at the Australian Catholic University on 'Disability Culture'. Her primary interests continue in spirituality, inclusion and disability issues.

Too Busy To Relax: Nurturing Your Spirit With Relaxation

Susan Stork-Finlay & Rev Robert Stringer

Time to nurture the inner self?

Time to relax and take some space for yourself?

This workshop will provide opportunity for nurturing through relaxation techniques.

It is often assumed that people who are active participants in their faith traditions know how to nurture their spiritual and physical body. The reality is that many people prioritise involvement in activity or are too busy to take time to nurture themselves in this way.

It is also often assumed that people with disability either have plenty of time to relax or are unable to undertake many forms of relaxation due to their disability. This workshop will discuss the importance of nurturing ourselves. A range of forms of relaxation that can be used by people of different abilities, faiths or spiritual expression will be outlined. It will also include brief relaxation strategies in the midst of other tasks, such as driving or traveling.

The workshop will be tailored to the participants needs and priorities. Participants will then choose some relaxation techniques to experience in the workshop.

Presenters Profile:

Robert Stringer is a minister of the Uniting Church with 35 years experience in cross cultural and social justice ministries.

Susan Stork-Finlay is the Disabilities Resource Officer of the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, is a clergy spouse and lives with a neurological disability.

Building Relationship: The Heart of Spiritual Communities

Terri Fealy

In a society that is highly individualistic, community is a catch phrase with little real meaning. Yet community only develops when we open ourselves to relationships with those who are different. In this paper I will consider the ways in which relationship is a spiritual experience that enhances our quality of life. As our communities are weakened without the inclusion of all, regardless of difference, I will argue that they are also weakened spiritually when we do not enter into relationship with all. I will make reference to my friendship with a woman with intellectual impairment who has had a profound impact on my life. Using this as an example I will explore what it is we learn from people with impairment about ourselves and the possibilities for our world. I will argue that if we wish to have rich spiritual and faith communities, people with impairment and others who are 'different' must be at the heart of these communities.

Presenter Profile: Terri Fealy is Manager of UnitingCare Supported Living and has 25 year experience working in the disability field with both children and adults. She has also been a member of the L'Arche Sydney Community for the past 15 years. L'Arche is a network of Faith communities throughout the world where people with and without impairments build life together. She is passionately committed to human rights and social justice. She currently lives with her 2 dogs Aneru and Shanti.