



# CEO'S ADDRESS

---

*Dr Kate Harrison Brennan*

Anglican Deaconess Ministries AGM  
Thursday, 19 October 2017

## WELCOME

Thank you, Jenni, and welcome, ADM Members, to our Annual General Meeting.

In our 126th year, our mission is the same as it has always been: to raise up women with theological formation for practical and public engagement. What we want to see is women, from generation to generation, flourishing in Kingdom work.

In 1 Peter 4 we read that:

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever.  
Amen.”

This is an important part of the biblical basis of ADM’s mission. For women to flourish in image-bearing, they need to steward faithfully God’s grace in its various forms.

This was not happening as it should when Peter wrote to the "exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia". Nor is it happening as it *could* in Australia and our region. Ultimately, our gospel witness is poorer for it.

The instruction to steward God’s grace comes in the context of Peter’s injunction to "be alert" (1 Peter 4:7). Like the bridesmaids of Jesus’ parable, we must be ready for his return. This readiness is seen in using our gifts for his purposes. In order for women to steward faithfully the gifts they have been given by God to use in service, they need opportunities to be formed theologically, to make culture as Christians, and to do mercy and justice.

ADM, as a Christian women’s foundation, serves the body of Christ when we help women to steward their gifts.

As one woman wrote after our Annual Funding Event in September, "I think that idea of gifting was one of the things that hit me the most at the Annual Funding Event – just how different everyone’s passion and calling were, yet how exciting to hear everyone going in the same direction: to advance Christ’s Kingdom."

We help women steward their gifts when we: provide them with space in a nurturing environment; when we help them to do more than survive, but dare to grow; when we don't give up meeting together; and when we work from generation to generation.

## GARDEN IN THE CITY

On the importance of space in a nurturing environment, Meredith Lake, one of our 2017 Fellows, said recently, "Everybody wants to know what they are working on is important, and worth it ... Just to have a Christian organisation say this is worth doing, you're worth investing in, we want you to develop your gifts, and grow and be who you're meant to be ... that's been incredibly affirming and strengthening."

And, by the way, Meredith's project is a significant book on the Bible in Australia, which will be published by UNSW Press.

On the day after Meredith submitted her manuscript to UNSW Press for the first time (back in August), Meredith said this over lunch: "You know, Virginia Woolf was right – women do need a room of their own. The space at ADM has been so significant for me."

Why has it been so significant for Meredith? With small children at home, this year, Meredith hasn't had to wait for the library to open at 9, or even 10am, for her to be able to write.

We opened the renovated space here at ADM in late January, the day after I went on maternity leave. Since then, what we envisaged as a place to encourage women to flourish in Kingdom work – a 'garden in the city' – has hosted 471 MAC students, 800 people for MAC's Life with the Luthers event, 100 people for our Annual Funding Event, 22 other events across our ministries, women who use the reading room for co-working and sabbatical research, women who make use of the Board room for ministries that they lead, as well as our five Fellows and team.

In giving this space to women to steward their gifts well, this garden in the city is an important gospel mission. We can reflect on the significance of the idea in 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18, that the Lord brings us, and others, into a 'spacious place'.

Our garden in the city is a physical, spacious place for Christian women to be made more like Jesus and to serve him. Our physical space enables their gospel mission.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is also metaphorical space into which we invite our neighbours. In Zechariah, for example, we read how one day we will invite our neighbours to sit under the Lord's vine and fig tree. Our ministry of space at ADM points to the time when will Jesus return, and as we read in Hosea 14, "People will dwell again in his shade, they will flourish like corn, and blossom like the vine."

## MORE THAN JUST SURVIVING

On helping women and men do more than just survive, our Mental Health & Pastoral Care Institute received grant funding from Fuller Theological Seminary to create an innovative program that local churches can run to serve new parents.

As our Co-Director of the Institute, Sarah Condie, reflected recently: "Becoming a parent for the first time is not generally thought to be a time when Mums and Dads do little more than survive.

We expect that they will face sleep deprivation and much uncertainty about feeding, crying and settling, and figuring out how to do life with this brand-new bundle of joy, and hopefully avoid post-natal depression. It is a significant time for a couple, and very little attention is given to helping them do more than just survive."

The Mental Health & Pastoral Care Institute has had the privilege of focusing attention on this moment in a couple's lives, and help develop a resource that might completely change this experience for them in a very positive way. 'Raising Resilient Parents' is a pilot program being developed by Sarah Condie and Lyn Worsley at Church by the Bridge in Kirribilli. They have over 20 parents participating, four of whom have a baby aged under eight weeks.

These parents are being given a unique opportunity to think about more than just surviving. Investing in the lives of parents at this pivotal time of transition has the potential to alleviate and reduce the incidence of post-natal depression, and help new mums, in particular, adjust to this enormous time of transition in more positive ways.

One new mum commented last week that she valued the opportunity to think about herself in the process of becoming a mother. Even in the six months since her daughter was born, she said she had lost a sense of herself and what she did well.

This is just one program being developed by the Institute. A marriage enrichment course is in the final stages of production and will be released in early 2018. In the past year, another key activity for the Institute Directors was to present at the triennial Faithfulness in Service conferences, attended by all licensed for ministry in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney. The topic was 'Core Strength', focusing upon building resilience to manage the stress of ministry.

The programs of our newly-established Mental Health & Pastoral Care Institute are helping churches to demonstrate, as we read in Psalm 18, how the Lord can be the rock, fortress and deliverer in the lives of people suffering from mental illness, and for others in need of pastoral care.

## BUT DARING TO GROW

To be faithful stewards of God's grace, we need to dare to grow. For 10 years Mel Hanger had a dream. As a woman with a passion for ministry with young people, she has worked as a youth minister, assistant school chaplain and a professional coach of young people. She knew there was something missing in the resources available for young people. There were great Bible-based resources that had little or no insights from psychology. And wonderful medical resources that did not integrate biblical wisdom. Almost no resources for young people were actually developed with young people as co-creators. This was her vision.

After 12 months in the weekly Hub program at ADM, there was some progress, but there were no workshops, no resources and no glittering results.

In spite of this, something extremely significant had happened. At the graduation, Mel revealed that gradually, over the past 10 years or so, she had become a bonsai, made to feel small and restricted in her growth by negative experiences and a self-limiting belief system.

As a result of her involvement in The Hub and ADM, she now describes herself as a rainbow eucalypt. It is an enormous tree, and beautiful, with spectacular colours. She has broken free of the bindings and controls that shaped her for so long and held her back.



Mel has made changes to her employment, restructured her finances, and reordered her life so that she can devote herself to Hope Junction.

She is flourishing, and ready to help others flourish. The Hub is as much about formation as it is about ministries and organisations. To grow flourishing ministries, you have to help people flourish. Thirty-four women have been funded, trained and supported through The Hub, Traineeships and the Annual Funding Event.

Mel now views herself differently. Why is this significant? Her life and work is about bringing glory to Jesus. Psalm 92:12 compares the righteous of God to Cedars of Lebanon. Mel, made righteous in Jesus, is his eucalypt. Her goal is to bring glory to him through sharing his message with young Australians.

## CONTINUING TO MEET TOGETHER

To be faithful stewards of God's grace, we need to continue meeting together in fellowship, as we are re-formed in Christ.

Nicole Gertenaar started studying at MAC in 2014, after coming to know Jesus through Kairos Prison Ministries. She was working towards a Diploma in Christian Studies, and was to be awarded the diploma at the recent graduation ceremony on 24 March. However, Nicky died in December last year, before she could graduate.

When friends are asked about Nicky, the first thing that they speak about was her authentic love and care for others – the mark of a life transformed and shaped by Christ. Jackie remembers conversations when Nicky shared why she was late to class or late to submit course work – because Nicky had been too busy helping out other people.

Nicky loved and valued her time at MAC. This was partly because of the joy she took in growing in her knowledge of the Bible, and learning how to apply this to her life. But Nicky enjoyed MAC for more reasons than just the study. She found MAC to be a warm, Christ-focussed community that welcomed her in.

Margaret Padroth, a friend of Nicky's and fellow MAC student said, "Being at MAC gave Nicky new-found confidence and direction in life." It renewed Nicky's focus, and she approached her studies with great enthusiasm. One friend recalls Nicky phoning her and saying, excitedly, "Would you believe it? I got a high distinction!"

Nicky had a heart for evangelism and even while seriously ill in hospital, just days before she died, she was sharing with the hospital staff about Jesus.

Nicky's experience at MAC encourages and reminds the MAC community to continue to be a place where people are equipped to serve Christ, not only in outward-focused ministry, but also in fellowship with each other.

Over the past 10 years, enrolments at MAC have grown 260%. In March this year, 15 Diploma students and five Certificate students graduated.

As a community, the student body at MAC loves and cares for one another, regardless of each student's different story. In this way, it is a community that reflects the love of Christ.





## FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

To be faithful stewards of God's grace, we need to see women, from generation to generation, flourishing in Kingdom work. The deaconesses who have gone before us are our cloud of faithful witnesses.

Two deaconesses have died since we gathered together last year. Both of them set an example for us to imitate.

This week, we received the news that Deaconess Valerie Moore has died and gone to be with the Lord. In 2012, Valerie reflected on her life in a letter for the diaconate. She said, "I feel that all the way, the Lord has blessed me." Valerie lived with clinical depression, but continued to teach the Bible and see God at work in her life.

Since our last meeting together, Deaconess Heather Badgery has also gone to be with her Lord. Soon after studying at Deaconess House in 1959, Heather went on to run Lisgar – the deaconesses' hostel for working girls. These teenage girls had either been before the court, or were considered to be at risk. Heather found and mended clothing for the girls, went to court with the girls, helped them to keep to the programs agreed with the court and found them jobs.

She took them to St David's Church in Arncliffe, and formed partnerships with other churches that sent groceries and cakes every weekend. It was a responsibility that never really let up.

When Heather did leave Lisgar, she continued to serve Jesus in her work as a nurse and nurse educator. She served in the prison medical service at Parramatta jail, before retiring.

In Hebrews chapter 6, we read that we are not to "become lazy but we are to imitate those, who through faith and patience, inherit what has been promised". We are very thankful for the faithful example that the deaconesses and retired female deacons offer to us today. We thank God for them – for their work and faith – and for Jacinth [Rev. Jacinth Myles, Chaplain for Deaconesses & Retired Female Deacons] who ministers to them and cares for them on our behalf.

## CONCLUSION

In the Garden of Eden, the responsibilities of bearing God's image – to be fruitful and steward God's creation – would have been easy. But in a fallen world, it is harder than we realise. Yet, in Christ, we are re-formed, in order that we might be fruitful stewards as we wait for his return.

At ADM, we want to see women flourish in Kingdom work, faithfully stewarding God's grace in its various forms.

Our Board – including our former Chair, Gillian Davidson, and our Chair, Rev. Jenni Stoddart – have made this possible through their governance.

Our team, especially Ken Breakspear, who was Acting CEO during my maternity leave this year, have been focused, hardworking, and faithful.

A woman wrote to me recently: "I feel like I'm taken seriously by ADM ... and I'm sure other Christian women do too. We have so much to contribute; we just need others to believe in us."

Unlike the way of the world, which pits women against one another, when we as Christians see other women helped to steward God's grace to them, we are all the better for it as God's gospel is advanced and he is glorified.



ADM must steward the resources we have been given by God, and so we obviously cannot work alongside God in everything he is doing.

But as we consider the ministry of ADM in the past year, I want to say that if you and your giftings – your ministry and mission – has not been valued by Christian community, and you have been made to feel that you are something less because another man or woman is flourishing, then I am very sorry. That is not how we do things here.

ADM will be faithful in stewarding God's grace to us, when we put aside personal interests and hurts and seek to serve the broader church – the body of Christ – so that God has the glory.

