

## **PRAYER AND REFLECTIONS – INTRODUCTION**

For too long we were taught that it was God who needed our prayers when in fact **we** need prayer. It is not God who needs to listen to our pleas, but we who need to listen to God. To do this we need time to step into a place of quiet, to listen to the Spirit whispering in the depths of our being. God is always there, it is we who are not present.

In our increasingly busy world times of quiet are more important. Unless we cultivate some deliberate routines for this it will not happen – there will always be something urgent demanding our attention. In moments of quiet we can listen to our longings, ponder the responses we are making to life, to events, within relationships.

There are many ways of praying. There is the prayer of quiet, meditation, praying a mantra in keeping with the rhythm of breathing, pondering scripture, writing poetry, responding to the Spirit in art, participating in the liturgical life of our faith tradition. Different styles will assist us at different times along the journey of life. Our responsibility is to discern what is right at a particular time, and then be faithful to the choices that have been made.

The strength and wellbeing of a school staff is influenced by the inner life of each person. Staff prayer can call people to deeper awareness of God, God both within and among us. It must be well prepared keeping in mind the needs of the staff and the wider school community. It is not a matter of hurriedly downloading something from the web a few minutes before a staff meeting and then inviting those gathered to read it. Perhaps a more effective way is to choose a theme for a term, and then during those weeks gently draw the staff into a deepening awareness and response. Within any staff there is great wisdom but often we need permission to speak from the heart. So creating a safe, inviting space is essential.

Parker Palmer strongly believes we teach who we are. Over many years he has crafted, in collaboration with others, a retreat process to ‘nurture the inner landscape of our lives’. Originally it was called ***The Courage to Teach***. So successful was this in assisting teachers to see their work as vocation rather than job, that the retreats were expanded to include leaders, doctors, health care workers, those in public office. His retreat work is now referred to as *Circles of Trust*. He believes that we can only share from the heart if a safe, inviting interpersonal space is created.

To keep the space safe Palmer uses what he calls: ***Touchstones***. These practices are relevant to staff prayer, reflection and dialogue and follow this introduction. He emphasises the invitational nature of retreat work. This echoes the invitational nature of the gospel. Jesus always invites never demands.

In the prayers and reflections that follow I have tried to include a variety of resources. I would suggest that the person leading prayer or a staff reflection day choose those pieces which might evoke a response in the individuals and the group. I have deliberately included scripture, music, art and poetry as they are all the language of the soul. For one, art might find a deep resonance for another, poetry.

I have tried to choose music that is readily available on the web. I will detail this at the end of the reflections section of this publication. I have intentionally included Australian poets and musicians as they are in touch with our Australian heart and culture.

As a former school principal I am aware from experience that ongoing opportunities for staff to nurture their inner being can transform a culture. It needs to be a priority and leaders must search for a variety of experiences to offer in an effort to meet individuals where their journey is. It can never be a one size fits all. Most contemporary literature on leadership reiterates the importance of nurturing high trust cultures. Taking prayer, reflection, conversation and dialogue seriously enables a community to flourish. The gospel is all about love – what it looks like and what it demands of us. It is my hope that what follows will draw us more deeply into the mystery of God; and God is love. So may we encourage each other to live with greater awareness and intention.