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Equip.

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Equipped to be Different

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Equip is the official journal of EA Australia. Its purpose is to promote Alliance concerns, inform and encourage readers about evangelical initiatives at home and abroad and inspire thinking and action concerning communication of the Gospel in Australia today.

EA does not necessarily endorse all views printed in *Equip*. Instead articles are included to encourage discernment and debate on key issues for Australian Christians.

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EA's Vision

- **Local churches and ministries** understanding and exercising their God-given mission: global, national and local
- **Christians** thinking and living as disciples of Jesus in every part of their lives
- **Australian society** characterised by greater truth, justice, love, respect and a better life for the poor and marginalised, especially the indigenous people of Australia
- **Evangelicals** working together locally, nationally, and globally

Why join EA?

- to **engage your faith and life** more
- to **access excellent resources and ministries** pertinent to your Christian life
- to **be part of a trusted Christian response** to issues of concern, such as standing alongside our indigenous communities
- to **be connected with quality people** from other denominations in the spheres of church, mission and business
- to **add your voice with 200 million other** like-minded evangelical Christians in Australia and worldwide

An evangelical is someone who passionately believes the central claims of the Bible and traditional Christian faith: such as that Jesus is both God and man; that he announced the arrival of God's kingdom, that he died for our sins; that he was raised from the dead. Evangelicals emphasise personal commitment to Jesus Christ and a desire to live out that faith together and in the community in words and works of justice and love, anticipating God's promised future.

Editorial



The change of title of EA's flagship magazine from *Faith and Life* to *Equip* may come as a surprise, especially as it was changed only two years ago from *Working Together*. The reason for the

change of nomenclature is due to the merger of the Zadok Centre for Christianity and Society with EA's Public Theology department, begun about a year ago, to produce Ethos: EA Centre for Christianity and Society, which now produces all EA publications. This meant that *Faith & Life* impinged upon Ethos' Christianity and Society territory with publications like *Perspectives and Papers*. Now Zadok (soon to be Ethos) *Perspectives & Papers* can more clearly continue to major on Christians' relationships scattered in the world, in work, community and politics, with challenging in-depth articles on the intersection of public, professional and personal life.

Equip will major more on how Christians gathered, or the Church, can engage the world more effectively in its local mission, but with global background in mind. The articles will be shorter and snappier than *Perspectives*, and not pitched at quite as high a level, though still aimed at an intelligent, engaged audience, just more engaged from their church base and in its context.

This issue, *Equipped to be Different*, reflects this change. Indigenous issues, the arts, holiness, chaplaincy, environment, all call for for equipping to be different, distinctive. There are competing views about the church's relationship to indigenous people based on a robust ongoing exchange between Andrew Kulikovskiy and Mark Brett and Chris Marshall. The interstate protagonists in this debate will be meeting face to face on what is normally the Australia Day weekend to further understand these issues so critical to national identity and to get to know each other in a spirit of reconciliation. It is this kind of robust debate, but playing the ball not the man or woman, that EA, Ethos and *Equip* seeks to model.

Karly Whalley, shares her journey in relation to the arts, her own spirituality and illness. It is a warm and revealing story of the healing power of art in the service of God and creation's beauty and mystery. Mike Bird gives us a birds-eye view of holiness, holding the tension between legalism and anything goes libertarianism. Chris Thornhill gives a challenging picture of life as a chaplain, and how to resist the temptations to compromise by simply baptising the organisational culture. In his case, it's as a police chaplain, on the front lines where Gospel meets the harsh realities of life today.

Finally, our review by Mick Pope gives a preview of Ethos' 4-5 March dinner and conference speaker one of the great Christian environmentalists and outstanding communicators, Professor Michael Northcott and his new book of sermons, *Cuttle Fish, Clones & Cluster Bombs*. We hope you can join us to hear him (see back cover), and also enjoy reading *Equip*.

Gordon Preece
Ethos Director

(Re) Discovering Art within Faith

By Karly Whalley

How illness created the space to find a spiritual connection with creativity

Over the past five years my life has gone through quite an upheaval. The year after completing a demanding (physically, mentally, emotionally) theatre degree my husband and I returned to Melbourne with the intention of finding work in our respective fields (my husband – music, myself – theatre). We knew it would be tough; by leaving Sydney we were leaving established professional connections and relationships and almost guaranteed work to be back in the same state as our families. However we firmly believed it was the right decision and we trusted that it would work out, even if it meant a slow re-acquaintance with Melbourne.

Six months later I started to realise something was wrong and nearly six months after that I finally had a diagnosis (albeit an uncommon and unhelpful one, but one nevertheless) of fibromyalgia; a very badly understood and very un-strategically treated condition by medical professionals and the general public alike. I experienced pain that, over a couple of years, spread from my elbows to my neck, upper back, lower back, hips and

knees, thankfully stopping before my ankles were reached. In the theatre degree I had done everything from stage managing, lights and props to directing. I was very hands on, very practical and quite used to travelling one handed up and down the scaffold in the theatre with a light in the other hand. Such activity could no longer have been even considered. Instead it was replaced by hours of stillness, with some movement only to ensure stiffness and more

During this new time, in quite a significant way, 'the arts' saved me.

pain didn't set in any more than was inevitable. It was a lifestyle dictated by how much pain I was feeling. Even though I was the one at home and my husband working, if I hung out the washing it was the only thing I did all day because my arms were up in the air for so long and I no longer cooked with pumpkin or other hard vegetables unless I knew Pete would be home in time to cut it up. I got a new car (the criteria; automatic, power steering, comfortable seats which wouldn't aggravate my hips – all for the cheapest amount possible as I wasn't working) which I drove only when a lift could not be arranged. However even though I did drive, I never drove anywhere further than 15 minutes away as that was the limit of

my concentration, let alone the limit of the pain in my arms and knee from the action of driving.

I don't tell you all this for sympathy, I tell you this to set the scene for why and how I re-discovered the arts during this time. Having said I did a theatre degree you may think that I was well aware of the arts and to a degree I was. But my relationship with the arts was almost strictly practical; what's the story and how do we best tell it?

During this new period of my life the arts came to mean something new altogether and my experience of them expanded. I've always loved to make things but I'm not a natural 'painter' so I never felt I had any legitimate connection to the visual or fine arts. And as much as I had wanted the arts to have an impact on my faith, my previous experience of arts and the church had not been especially encouraging and was very limited and limiting. During this new time though, in quite a significant way, 'the arts' saved me. They kept me sane, they gave me life. Because of the pain I often felt like my body was being constantly overstimulated, which required me to change the normal activities of my day and the things we take for granted. One small example is that I stopped listening to music. For a period of nearly three years I don't think I chose to listen to any music. I needed peace, quiet, stillness. I needed regular but easy changes





'The Artist's Wife in the Garden at Skagen' by Peter Severin Kroyer >



of pace from sitting, standing, lying, activity, inactivity – all which needed to be carefully monitored and controlled.

What I found in this limiting time of life was a personal exploration of spiritual disciplines, taught, developed and encouraged by a regular supply of books (and personal encouragement and information) from my parents. It was something I could do, when I wanted to, needed to, was able to.

During this time art or creativity became for me a spiritual discipline. Now I can barely untangle creativity from spiritual discipline or practices. I engaged with art as I never had before. It spoke to me in ways it never had before. I had the time and the space to be with art the way I never had before. One example is the painting 'The Artist's Wife in the Garden at Skagen' by Peter Severin Kroyer. I think I got the image from an old cheap calendar somewhere. It is a painting of the artist's wife, in what I assume is their garden. She reclines on a lounge chair reading with another chair, empty beside her. I sat with this image for hours. She was doing what I was doing. Being, waiting, sometimes reading. I don't know who the other chair was for in reality, probably for the artist himself, but this chair represented all sorts of things at different times for me. Often placing myself within the image as the woman, the empty chair was waiting for my husband or a friend. The empty chair was waiting for God. Sometimes the empty chair was full of God. Sometimes the woman was God waiting for me to fill the empty chair. This image gave me peace, comfort, hope. I felt that within this image I was able to spend time with God.

It was during this time that I was forced to learn to 'be'. The

understanding that we are 'be-ings' not 'do-ings' is one we often struggle to live out in practice but all I could do during this time was 'be'. I had to let go of what I had been and what I thought I would do. I had to find the ability to just be now, to just be in relationship with God. And I found my relationship with God strengthened through creativity and art. Not just through an observation of images but the creative engagement of mandalas, labyrinths, collage, painting, playing, re-discovering the importance of storytelling (weird for someone from theatre I know), even finding the physical connection between myself and art and that it 'hurt' me at times. When I was undisciplined and did too much for too long I suffered pain from the creativity, thus I could never rely on 'inspiration' as my sole creative instigator. The idea of almost divine inspiration where you work and work till finished was unhealthy, even impossible for me – a lesson which still to this day means I try hard to live a balanced life in all things.

I discovered the soul healing nature of beauty and found that my soul and body almost ached for beauty and then sighed with relief within it. I also found the therapeutic nature of playing with colour, shape and form. My husband says that the love I developed of making jewellery was a form of therapy during this period.

Art and faith became connected in a way no one had ever told me they could be before. This wasn't about the sometimes cringe worthy idea of using art to bring people into the church building, or of preaching through the arts. Instead this was about engaging with the arts personally, spiritually. This wasn't about producing art that was for others to see. This was about creating a space for God and myself

to communicate, about giving my mind, heart and body space to listen to God in a way I may not be able to at other times. It was about *being with* God, not necessarily *talking to* God. It became a place to pray, to think, to meditate, to consider, to reflect, to find my true thoughts, to find God's thoughts, to be renewed.

With 'the arts' within many churches developing today I want to encourage people to find a connection to the arts that is personal, explorative, playful and engaging. To engage in the arts doesn't always mean putting on a performance or exhibition. It can be a personally engaging act that brings us to a place of *space to be*. This is quite a different mindset – this is not art that is produced for other people. There are no 'tangible' results. No one else may ever see it, but this does not matter. No one else may understand it, but this does not matter. If someone else does see and does benefit from it, this is a bonus for *them*. This art is not about talent or ability; we all have the ability for this type of art. In fact I could go so far as to say we may all have the talent for this – it's just that 'talent' in this respect has nothing to do with the items produced. Instead the talent is our ability to allow this space to be where we open ourselves up to the thoughts of God. This is a different type of art. This is not visual or performance art, this is *creative space* to be with God.

Karly Whalley is a lecturer in art at Tabor Victoria and enjoys exploring the many different ways the arts can facilitate worship and spirituality both personally and corporately.

