

Presbytery of North East Victoria

Chairperson's Letter of encouragement, August 2025

In their book, *The God Bearing Life* Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster tell the story of Moses and the burning bush in a way that has shifted my thinking forever. What they say is that bushes are burning everywhere, alive with the presence of God. The problem is that few notice. Bushes are burning and holiness is all around, for those who will see.

Foster and Dean are not the only ones to draw this to our attention. The poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, earlier wrote: *Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God, but only those who see, take off (their) shoes.* Palawa theologian, Garry Worete Deverell says much the same thing in speaking about indigenous Australian spiritual life. Everything is God breathed and for those with eyes to see and ears to hear, everything is alight, everything sings the song of the presence of God.

Most of us have been formed by an evangelical movement, or a liberal theology, that is now several-hundred years from its beginning. It seems clear that the thrust of these movements, their thought and expression, no longer speak in meaningful or life-giving ways to the people around us. If I am honest, and I hope that I am, I do not consider myself a terrible, irredeemable sinner. I know my place in relation to the *other* that we call God, but I also know that my life-long relationship with Jesus has given me a dignity that allows me to stand before God, knowing my place, but also knowing my worth. That is quite something, is it not? Whatever your self-understanding, we share a puzzle about our calling as a people of God living in a very interesting time. What do we understand? How are we to speak?

For me, a starting point is to try to understand the culture in which we all live. If we are to speak into that culture, we need to understand it. This is too complex a question to address fully by the end of this page – but I am going to hazard that one part among many has something to do with the switch, in our lifetime, from the bottom line being the *common good* to the bottom line being the profit margin - an economy in which some rise at the cost of others. It is a switch that renders us competitors rather than neighbours, consumers of rather than carers for creation. I am going to hazard that in the world of consumption there is little time for, or perceived need of, a spiritual life. If we look carefully, with eyes that see, there is a sickness, a suffering, that goes with the loss of an understanding of ourselves as spiritual beings. The question for us, as it has always been, is how to open our own eyes, and the eyes of those around us to see bushes on fire with the presence of God. My instinct is that one way in which this will happen is through self-understanding gained through respectful conversation with the first people of this land who know about loss of connection and who, despite the hostility directed toward them, are finding a way back. So shall we.

For people like me it will come through an ever-deepening immersion in the landscape, in the different *quiet* of the bush, in the vast openness of places where I can see from horizon to horizon, in a life that is stripped back. What will it be for you?

How shall we speak? Maybe in actions more than words and in practice more than principle. All that I know at this moment is that God, the indefinable, ineffable holy, is always and everywhere – like breath, like fire. Bushes are burning, the whole world is ablaze. The invitation is to open your eyes.

Gereldine