



## **THE GERARD TUCKER ORATION DELIVERED BY: THE REVEREND JEFFREY O'HARE**

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2013 at Christ Church South Yarra**

'Now we see in a mirror dimly.....then we shall see face to face.

The greatest commandment; to love.'

In 1954, the Autobiography of Fr. Gerard Kennedy Tucker was published.....,

The Right Rev. W.H.Johnson, Bishop of Ballarat wrote the forward.

He began by reflecting; "There can be but a few people in Victoria who have not heard of Fr. Tucker, the Founder of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence..... this Anglican Priest who is prepared to preach in churches of all denominations, and is so relentless in his attack on the social evils of our day....."

'Thanks Be', whilst not an exceptional book, is remarkable because it gives us an insight into the priest, the man, the ideals of a religious order, and the formation of possibly our most complex and innovative social welfare organisation. And above all, a sensitive, vulnerable, impatient and righteous man, entirely guided by his deep and singular relationship with God and an unshakable faith which put love first, at all costs, to a prevailing, disinterested and un-empathetic society of a young, emerging nation; who's minds he changed by the determined heart and awkward rhetoric and stutter of a man who believed in all people no matter how rich or poor.

Tucker was comfortable with the notion that not all people would agree with his ideals or practise, and many didn't! But he was admired and loved in the end by most Australians, and many practitioners overseas who witnessed and at times scrutinised his work, as he went about developing with a growing staff and support base both within an emerging welfare sector and through the generosity of the private sector. On the whole, people liked the self sacrificing and enthusiastic way in which Fr. Tucker strove to serve our Lord and the people who came under his attention and care.

His integrity, reflected best in the Letter of James:

"Pure religion and undefiled before God is this; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the World."

His language was passionate, direct and challenging.....expressions in his characterising definitions of poverty; "the Scandal of the Slums."

His Motto in life..... 'This one thing I do' ....." reminds us, that in his singular focus, to prevent and end poverty, we can begin to understand him if we are prepared to have our conscience hurt and our minds provoked to think, and ultimately our wills to be stirred into action!"

So much was he known and loved, and gratitude towards him proclaimed; a child on a Sunday evening radio program during the Second World War responded when asked by the radio presenter; "who then shall we pray for this evening?" The little girl, with conviction responded; "why, Winston Churchill and Fr. Tucker of course!"

For the modern Brotherhood, we acknowledge a world that continues to seek after justice and we are convinced that the language we speak, must be authenticated in action and evidence. That peoples lives are being touched and transformed by positive relationships and intelligent thinking and action around key needs and social issues; with innovation and inclusion; taking with us and influencing....

Government, corporates, educational institutions, thinkers and practitioners, volunteers and most importantly the people we care for and engage with, in our day to day work. Tucker believed in what we would term as a relational model work and purpose.

Compassion must be marked by friendship, and loving action must come from true listening.... that at the basis of the work of the organisation, we reach solutions by listening to the ones who need our support, through Christian love, exploring problems from the ground up, so that the solution may be understood as the sum total of an authentic process of investigation and an investment in assuring that we understand the possibility that we might put in place action to prevention, rather than perpetuating a culture of dependency that ultimately leaves people where they are at.

Shifting people into participation requires the building of individual capacity, and we continue to learn that one size doesn't fit all and therefore the task of one on one engagement, focused listening, searching for the gifts and strengths of the individual offers the best possible outcomes through programs which are designed to focus on systemic problems and solve them.

The bottom line needs to be that we assist people to participate, through the sort of grounded social investment which offers a hand up to employment, housing, social engagement and connection, healthy relationships and education, a sense of belonging and achievement, well being and the courage to take appropriate risks and realise the modest aspirations which every Australian has and deserves!

For the Brotherhood, this requires an openness to learn. Our clients, to become assessors of our services - not customer satisfaction meters - through reflective engagement made possible by the authentic relationships we have built in the first place, and that we become open to a culture of learning in which is reflected the sort of ongoing development that sees our programs as being relevant and innovative and appropriately timely for the people we serve; not just our clients, but the whole of community, as ultimately we place people back into the mainstream!

The Brotherhood's influencing agenda partly focuses on this; influencing by sharing our evidence and practise, demonstratable models of engagement and transformation, programs, properly tracked so that anecdotal and intellectual evidence is understood and embedded in continued development of models and programs that will ultimately transform peoples lives and solve systemic causes of disadvantage.

Four areas which currently demonstrate this way of practise:

Hippy. Our Home Interaction Program for Parents and Young people prepares children for school by teaching basic learning skills through mentoring; building a learning relationship with parents which develops a learning environment in the home, and gives confidence to the child and parents to connect with the wider community through better communication skills and confidence building in preparing the whole family to enter learning environments. In the next 12 months or so, this innovative and proven program will have reached its 100th site including remote indigenous communities across Australia.

Our 'Urban Camps' and schools engagement program, invites young people from our secondary schools around Victoria to come and experience our work and 'disadvantage' over a three to four day 'live in' experience at our head office environment. This program sits with both our education agenda in re-establishing our ties with Anglican Schools and now many others, government and other independent schools, and builds on our influencing agenda in introducing this younger generation to the issues of disadvantage and the hope for future engagement and support of this young group of people. Stirring their

passion for social justice, and introducing them to the bigger picture and experience and reality of life in this great city. We now hold 13 -14 camps a year, influencing the lives of over 200 young people annually.

The development of our African Australian Community Centre in conjunction with the Anglican Parish of Footscray and our Ecumenical Migrant Centre, offers a place of gathering and settlement, picking up on the fine work of the parish in their ministry to Sudanese refugees over the last 15 years and shifting the focus, once again to capacity building and professional development for employment opportunities for the newly arrived African communities in Victoria who are keen to get on with being participants in our work force and accepted as members of the broader communities in which they live. Mentoring for those who are still traumatised by the years of being displaced, fleeing their homelands, living in refugee camps and fear for safety and life itself. Building once again, the sort of place in which they can feel safe, heard and honoured as people as they find freedom in this their new and promised land. The relationship and the partnership with the parish is vital in acknowledging and understanding the vital faith dimension in their life and journey here, and continues to support the parish in the continued building and presence of this parish in the wider community of Footscray.

The exciting new and innovative 'Youth Foyer' project, in partnership with Hannover Welfare Service, which has seen the first of three places of accommodation and social and life education centres in Victoria, with a 'deal' agreed with Tafe Colleges in Glen Waverley, Broadmeadows and Shepparton, offers a place for young people who have experienced homelessness and long term disconnection with family relationship and formal education, the opportunity to find a place to live, and enter into educational opportunities and trades/apprentice training with a focus on developing a positive education in which the holistic care and development of the person becomes the focus. Holmesglen in Glen Waverley opened in July and Broadmeadows will be operational by the beginning of next year and Shepparton in 2015. It is our vision that a 'Youth Foyer' become part of the infrastructure of every Tafe College and give an important opportunity for young people to re-engage with formal learning and preparation for work, and that the Foyers will go along way to solving the growing issue of homelessness and disconnection.

We seek to build renewed relationship with the diocese of Melbourne through some key projects and supports such as Footscray and rekindling our important historical relationship with this parish (Christ Church South Yarra) and in engagement with your primary school.

A focus on education, based on the foundation of this school by Tucker's father; Rev. Horace Tucker, the supportive, learning and preparation for ministry of a young Gerard Tucker received here, and his own focus that the first precept of his philosophy and vision for an Australia free of poverty, that all children receive a decent education as the basic foundation of life's participation in society is the foundational stuff of the Brotherhood's work.

Zephaniah, refreshes us in the story of eternal longing in the Old Testament for justice and mercy: that as we wait for the Lord, our enemies may be turned away and that we fear no more disaster.. victory might be won, our oppressors dealt with, the lame will be saved and the outcast gathered in... I will bring you home at the time when I gather you, says the Lord, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes....

In the light of this and the action of Tucker, to the work of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence today, we are faced with the challenges of the future, as uncertain, possibly as ever, waiting on our response to the call to social action.

Welfare will begin to look very different in the years ahead; funding harder to achieve, more responsibility placed back on to agencies like ours to manage the social contracts which will assure the continuance of all we have worked for, for over 80 years. The rise of volunteerism as a means by which we deliver and re-image people's responsibility in re-forming community. Our response to our growing ageing community fits in with this as a means of identifying the capabilities of our retirees and their potential in assisting us in realizing our mission and their support in this. And of course the enormous challenge we will face with our growth corridors as they spring up with little appropriate infrastructure to support people of all ages as they find themselves isolated from the services they will require for basic living needs.

At 'changes' heart the basic sign posts to success will be our ability to give people permission to engage and learn by;

1. Being listened too
2. By our listening
3. By being able to take the risks to succeed or fail and reflect productively on our learning's from those experiences
4. To speak and contribute out of our experience and wisdom
5. To think beyond time management to excellence in our chosen paths
6. To be creative and even abstract in our thinking, and innovation

7. And by taking people with us in relationship which will affirm the human spirit and our longing for justice and freedom.....

and will show us something of the image of love that

Paul reflects on.....

Fr. Tucker lived.....

And is possible now....

At a recent 'Urban Camp', a year 9 girl challenged me on my thinking around refugees and asylum seekers.... we can only speak the truth of the human spirit....

Can you tell me here and now that as we come face to face with a refugee or asylum seeker that we think for one moment that they are a lesser human being than us, or that indeed given the circumstances we would not have acted as they did and that reaching our shores and finding safety at last, that in all this they have done anything illegal?

What remains the bigger question in our current reality, behaviour and response, and that it is said at least once a week by our leaders....."I/We make no apology for what we do!"

At best, a breach of Human rights and not acceptable!

Tucker hurt our consciences, provoked our minds to think and stirred us into action.

He has shifted the choice of seeing in a mirror dimly and challenged us to see face to face - and to do so in love.

Amen.

Readings references.     Zephaniah 3:14-20

1 Corinthians 13.