

## **Open Sanctuary@tilba    A Christ Centered Community Caring for Creation**

Open Sanctuary @tilba is a ‘new expression of church’ with a particular emphasis on care for creation. As a Christ-centered community, the sanctuary also aims to offer a contemplative and inclusive way of prayer and gathering from our base at Holy Trinity Church, Tilba Tilba on the far south coast. As an expression of commitment to global action from a grassroots level the Sanctuary held a gathering in connection with the Montreal Climate Change conference in early December. With a growing number of church representatives involved with the U.N framework on Climate Change, offering a spiritual and moral perspective on human activities and our effect on climate, the Sanctuary community felt it important to honour the inter-spiritual gathering as part of the conference in Montreal. We were blessed to have poets, musicians and writers amongst us to offer their particular gifts giving expression to a love for and desire to care for God’s earth. We also shared an Agape Meal remembering the Christ who died for us and through whom all things came into being. In the morning, before the gathering some of us walked up Gulaga (Mt Dromedary) to share in a ceremony with one of the Yuin (indigenous traditional owners) woman of the area. On the way up however we encountered several fallen trees across the track and whilst we were able to keep walking others were delayed making the ceremony too late for us to participate.

On Christmas Eve the Sanctuary offered a service under the trees with carol singing, poetry reading, shared reflections and silence to appreciate the potent beauty of the natural setting at the foot of Gulaga. The evening light lasted long enough for us to plant a flowering Gum, the first of many trees to be planted, and symbolic of the birth of the Christmas season. This was followed by a shared supper and the chance to meet with the variety of people who came along to the gathering.

In the meantime the Sanctuary has been successful in obtaining a grant through Eurobodalla Shire Council and Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority to fence the one and half acres of land owned by the Church and plant up to 200 seedlings of endemic species. The land borders a small stand of endangered Redgums and our project will include the planting of some of these magnificent trees.

Open Sanctuary @tilba aims to offer a spiritually and practically integrated expression of the desire and need for a deep connection with God’s creation and sustainable life principles within a contemplative way of life. The physical setting of the Sanctuary is one of almost haunting beauty with a landscape of powerful energy and spiritual significance for its indigenous owners. In fact Gulaga is central to the creation story of the Yuin people of the area.

Spending time at the sanctuary one finds that simply to sit and gaze upon the landscape becomes prayer. Eagles and hawks soar against the background of the mountain which at times may be clothed with cloud and at others stand clearly against the sky. The place draws one into stillness in which an encounter with the Mystery of God may arise.

OS@t is now a “Ministry Chaplaincy Unit” within the Diocese. We have a primary link with the Commission for the Environment and are developing relationships with other groups. Whilst we remain in infancy stage with just the church building, in need of work, and the small plot of land the vision is to purchase some more land for regeneration and Sanctuary or Sabbath space. The level of interest from the local community is really heartening and we hope and pray that this will grow.

The Sanctuary will hold regular gatherings, events and working bees. If you would like to know more please e-mail Rev. Linda Chapman. We will shortly be sending a leaflet throughout the Diocese explaining the vision and asking for support.