1. What are the strongest cultural influences present in your country today?

Our initial consideration was to situate ourselves in our context: that of a secular, postmodern and post Christendom (rather than post Christian) society. What that means practically for us is that we live in a society where the Christian denominations no longer hold the authority that they once did, and where many people embrace other faiths and spiritualities. It also means that as a society we tend to value the personal and the emotional over the rational.

In this context, we were able to identify a great many strong cultural influences in our society today. These include the following:

- Loss of respect for authority, because of position alone: hence all groups have to market themselves these days
- We are a multicultural and multifaith society: this has raised fears of difference for some; for others, an acceptance and appreciation;
- The rise and rise of consumerism: high cost of “accepted lifestyle”, long working hours, loss of the Sabbath – impact on individuals and relationships; importance of appearance, use of “spin”; range of leisure activities; erosion of soul; religion and spiritualities have also become consumer products.
- The importance of “progress”: we keep wanting more and more
- The movement of peoples globally
- Increasing loneliness; the loss of caring communities
- A risk averse society
- Media control of so many issues
- Loss of habitat in the natural world and loss of species; climate change and global warming.
- Instantaneous communication and publication of information; technological overload
- Individualism

For the purposes of this response, I would like to consider those important cultural changes that are creating spiritual challenges for our Grail region at this time.

We are very grateful to Gary Bouma’s book, ‘Australian Soul’, parts of which we studied in preparation for our discussions. He gave us a sound basis in research for many of our thoughts, observations and feelings. Our loss of trust in authority has been well documented. The World Values Surveys reveal that from 1983 to 1995 the big losers in the trust of Australians were the Federal Government, the legal system and the churches. We Grail women in NSW, most of us born and raised Catholic, have experienced this
loss of trust in the Catholic Church in our own lives, and sadly, the continuing saga of sexual abuse and cover-up in the worldwide Church is more justification of our varying levels of disappointment with the institutional Church.

Our multicultural society is also a multifaith society, and ecumenism has moved on to multifaith dialogue. There are many sections of society interested in this. It is also true that recent years have seen a burgeoning of many different spiritualities and spiritual paths. For the spiritual seeker, there is no end of variety to choose from. At the same time, never have people been so reluctant to commit themselves to any one path or religion.

2. In what ways is the spirituality of your Grail grouping being affected/challenged by these cultural influences?

In spite of these cultural changes, nearly all of us have remained Christian with strong links to the Catholic Church. For many of us, this in itself has been a personal spiritual challenge as we have grown in faith and knowledge. What has emerged most clearly from our discussion is that it has often been our involvement with the Grail which has enabled us to remain within the Church, because it provided us with a nurturing community and an active involvement in a religious and spiritual life (things which our local Church did not always give us), and it educated us to the beauty and riches of our Catholic faith, spirituality and religion. It also encouraged our active participation in social justice, it gave us a voice as well as teaching us to listen, and it introduced us to women of faith in many different parts of the world.

So while we remain rightly critical of many of the faults and failings of the institutional Church, the Grail has enabled most of us to persevere in the practice of our faith, and that is where we are today.

However, we are challenged by the rising prominence in our society of so many different faiths and spiritualities. Our Grail group has become very open to this and we regularly create opportunities for our members and friends to engage with people of other faiths and beliefs. We are also open to more varied spiritual paths, to other ideas and philosophies. In keeping with the spirit of postmodernism, we are not afraid to embrace meaningful or enriching practices from other traditions.

The reluctance of many people today to commit themselves to any institution is a challenge to our continued existence in the future, as our current members gracefully grow older. We are challenged to compete in a very vibrant marketplace to attract new members. In so doing, we are often challenged too by women who are responsive to our values and spirituality but who are not themselves believers. We are challenged to be open, and I think we do try very hard to do that. We know that the reign of God is so much more than any one church or religion.
3. In what ways has the spirituality of your Grail group shifted over recent times and what do you see as the major challenges for the future.

We spent a great deal of time reflecting on our personal spiritual journeys, and change has been an integral part of each one. However, as stated above, most of us have remained within the Catholic Church although critical of the institution’s failings, and we are all open to listening to and being changed by the faith stories of others. What we have all held onto is our unwavering commitment to the gospel’s radical call to bringing about the reign of God on earth, and this, which has been especially nurtured by the Grail, has sustained us in hard times.

The last decade has seen us devote much attention to our group spirituality: this includes our attention to prayer at group meetings, our regular liturgies, a number of retreats, and the introduction of weekly *lectio divina* for anyone interested. We have explored indigenous spirituality and creation-centred spirituality, and listened to people of many different faiths. The result is an extraordinary group cohesiveness, a community that cares deeply for one another, but also an outward looking group that welcomes others into our midst and is open to change and growth.

We understand how people can be strongly attached to the traditional structures of their religion. We understand, too, that people can move on from that and seek something far more open. We see the major challenge of the future to be one of remaining open and inclusive while maintaining a common vision within the growing diversity in the Grail.

(Group North Queensland -see below)
## CULTURAL CHANGES AND SPIRITUAL CHALLENGES

What are the strongest cultural influences present in your country today?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Christian values (background based traditions; basic needs of food, shelter, education, celebration, family unity and loyalties.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multi-cultures</td>
<td>The diversity of backgrounds and the conflict of cultures (there are large communities of Pacific Islanders, short-term workers, students, refugees, regular immigrants.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>This changes almost day-to-day. It includes television which makes willing prisoners of people in their own homes. Not only are they seeking entertainment in the comfort of their own homes, but they are also being bombarded with advertising. Most of this is false advertising. Communication is faster and smarter than ever before and it is instant. Travel is easier and people do not feel any longer that they are permanents in one spot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders in many countries are making refugees of their own people. Australia takes in few refugees but there are enough to challenge the hearts and minds of people in communities. Ordinary Australians STILL lack education in the reasons people are turned into refugees. They also lack education in political processes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materialism</td>
<td>Ownership (individual possessiveness rather than openness to sharing.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapidly changing (family) roles: Grandparents are “very busy now.” More women are in the workforce AND still managing homes. Children are in paid care more than ever.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitiveness</td>
<td>This has reached epidemic proportions in Australia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Group 3, Brisbane group – see below)
Question 1:
What are the main cultural influences impacting on our society today?
(Arrows into the centre show a strong influence and shorter arrows indicate a lesser influence.)
What cultural influences are dying out? (Arrows going out of the circle)
Question 1:

What are the main cultural influences impacting on our society today? (Arrows into the centre show a strong influence and shorter arrows indicate a lesser influence.)

What cultural influences are dying out? (Arrows going out of the circle)

- Internet/media/communications
- Aging
- Good manners
- Education
- Less rigidity-e.g. (indigenous able to attend funerals)
- Youth do not want to take responsibility for community groups-become office bearers
- Have it so easy
- Lost skills-dressmaking/baking
- Parenting by grandparents ‘wrinklies’
- Secularism-Sunday markets V church
- Changed cultural practices
- Acknowledgement of plurality e.g. holiday for Good Friday and Eidfest
- eBay
- Multicultural diversity
- Big and increasing gap between rich & poor
- Spending more
- Superannuation
- Insularity
- Globalization-travel accessible to many more

Question 2:

In what ways is the spirituality of your Grail group being affected/challenged by these cultural influences?

- Aging-need to give more time to doing things for the older people in group
- Secularization of Sunday- less inclined to follow traditional faith practices
- We are open to a variety of spiritual paths
- Global Catholicism- The position of the Catholic church is lower in some countries
- Fewer priests –need to recruit from other countries which broadens understanding of other cultures / time for daily mass does not suit working people
- Sacrament of Reconciliation-less relevant
• Two family incomes challenged ability to ‘practise’ Catholic traditions

Question 3:

In what ways has the Spirituality of your Grail Group shifted over time?
• Things we started (as Grail) are now being done by other groups or Government agencies
• We have remained constant in terms of spirituality/keeping the faith parallel to church or inclusive of the church

Major Challenges for the future:
• Aging. Maybe not a concern-natural phase of life
• Youth-why aren’t they taking up responsibility and challenges
• Young people are working for peace, Palestine, sustainability etc but not in a religious context but they welcome people from the churches in the protest movements
• Maintaining energy and interest to be involved and contribute to parish and sacramental life of the church
Cultural Changes and Spiritual Challenges

For the first part of the TxinTxa process, only the Metro Manila group was able to discuss the assigned topic. We had sent the guidelines to the regions but we did not get any response.

For the second part on “Cultural Changes and Spiritual Challenges”, we had the opportunity to have a regional discussion as part of our 35th anniversary celebration held in Lawa-an, Eastern Samar. There were six representatives from Mindanao: Ermie Sotillo, Flora Dominguez, Adalberta Francis (NLT), Regina Ibarra, Candelaria Mugot (NLT), and Lea Yandug.

The Eastern Samar Grail members were a total of eight women: Docing Ganas, Virgie Dalina and Lolita de Leon from Lawa-an; coming from farther towns were Jeana Costuna, Mavhic Simborios, Emelie Pagapos, Mae Bonafe and Junela Esplago.

Supplementing the Eastern Samar group were Grail friends who have earlier attended the leadership seminars for community change agents in the nineties; three from Lawa-an and two from the northernmost town of Arteche. Monica de Leon and Jeanette Loanzon from Metro Manila gave results of their own discussion to serve as examples for the whole group.

We chose to discuss the second alternative of the second phase: “Shape of your culture.” For us, it was a simpler way to respond to the goal the second phase.

For the major influences on our culture, the Mindanao group saw these as the presence of the Muslim community in their midst, a strong force in relation to the second force of gambling. The Eastern Samar group saw three major influences on culture: politics, a near second is that of child labor and prostitution and a relatively weak third force is that of traditional activities. For the Manila group, the three forces in their order of “strong to weak” in degree were overseas Filipino workers as a part of globalization, good governance with the promise of the new government ushered in by the May 2010 elections, computers/advances in information technology as well as the pursuit of Muslim autonomy.

For the “dying out” forces on our culture, the Mindanao group named in this sequence: family values/respect for elders, the internet with its games and materials on pornography, busy working parents which tend to breed vices and conflicts as well. In almost equal degrees of strength, the Eastern Samar group identified as “dying out forces”, church attendance, religious awareness, interest in the schooling of children. Considering the popular perception of a high value placed by most Filipinos on education as a passport for social mobility, the last mentioned force seemed surprising. The Metro Manila group mentioned in order of importance, respect for women and children as well as Church attendance.

For spiritual challenges, the catechesis of both children and parents as well as the formation of basic ecclesial communities were identified by the Mindanao group. This was echoed by the Eastern Samar group which saw catechesis and evangelization as spiritual challenges. For the Metro Manila team, the spiritual challenges are for the further awareness of the role and contribution of women in society and the Catholic Church through movements like the Grail. This challenge implies both outreach to more and younger women as well as the deepening of the Grail members in Biblical reflection.

Prepared by: Jeanette V. Loanzon December 11, 2010