

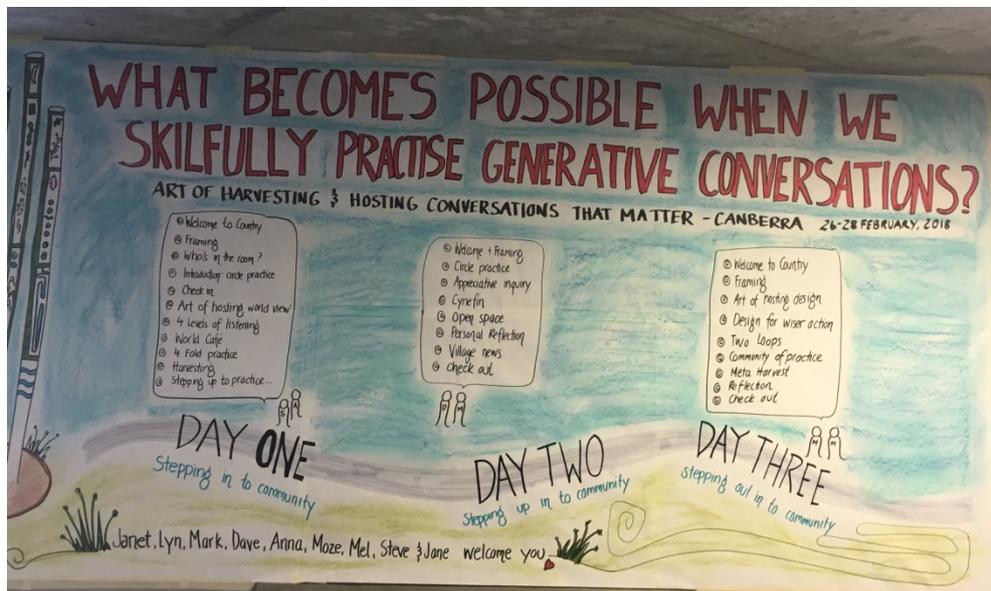
# The Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter

Canberra training course, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture  
26–28 February 2018

Report by Janet Salisbury, Art of Hosting Canberra 2018 hosting team\*

In an era of increasing complexity and big challenges, many people are looking for ways to engage in respectful conversations that generate deep collaboration and thoughtful action. For 3 days in late February, the ACC&C Chapel became home to 52 participants and 9 hosts for a unique training on 'The Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter' (also known as the Art of Participatory Leadership). The participants came from ACT, NSW, Victoria, Queensland, SA, Tasmania and overseas. They responded to a simple question in our invitation:

**What becomes possible when we learn to skilfully practise generative conversation?**



Generative conversations are those capable of producing something new and supporting its development. Our world needs these kinds of conversations more than ever.

Art of Hosting (AoH) is a network that is rapidly spreading and growing all over the world, as organisations, communities, and people from every walk of life discover the power of conversation. It is based on a practitioner network, with local communities of practice. The training offers simple and powerful participatory practices, patterns and processes to create and host spaces for collaborative conversations that generate wise action. These approaches have been used effectively in government, nongovernment, community, workplace and family contexts worldwide to enable the inclusion of diverse perspectives for better outcomes.

AoH is not aligned to any religion or political group but we chose the ACC&C as our venue to bring this approach into an accessible community space in the heart of the Australian capital. The Chapel provided us with large and flexible indoor and outdoor spaces for the different activities during the training. The beautiful grounds provided views of Canberra and quiet spaces for retreat and reflection. The site – which has been a sacred place for First Nations and settler peoples alike –

seemed to further amplify the energy and commitment brought by the hosts and participants. Walking the Labyrinth was a popular lunchtime activity.

A central practice for AoH is to be in a circle and the large number of participants meant that our circle filled the whole perimeter of the Chapel. On the first day, we each shared a few lines about why we were there. The commitment and passion for change resonated powerfully around the circle, setting the scene for the rest of the training. The first and second days alternated between teaching of underlying philosophies and frameworks tools, and opportunities to practise 'hosting' various participatory processes and methods, including Circle, World Café, Appreciative Inquiry and Open Space Technology.



On the third day, we experienced the method of 'Designing for Wiser Action'. Ten passionate participants proposed real projects that they wanted to bring to life in their communities. Other participants formed 'wisdom councils' to help the project leaders to develop their ideas. The range of projects proposed was a powerful expression of how citizen engagement to cocreate wise actions could drive transformational change in the world. The projects included (among others) sustaining a community and practice around non-violent communications; exploring the evolutionary potential of conscious parenting to overcome current patriarchy and economic paradigms; developing regenerative farming practices; engagement with Indigenous people to explore the idea of a Treaty; engaging the Canberra community to cocreate a safe and sustainable future; engaging a NSW small town community in a local food system; and developing a space for networking, nurture, training and creativity for the people who are hosting generative conversations in their communities.



The three days concluded, as it had started, in the large circle. Participants reflected on what they were taking away with them and what they felt called to do in the world. There was much energy

and emotion in the room, as many people reflected on their intention to continue hosting generative conversations in their communities and workplaces. Jane Geltch gave a poetic 'metaharvest' of some themes and quotes from the 3 days. And before we all left, Samia Goudie, a First Nations participant, hosted a smoking ceremony for us outside.

\*[Art of Hosting Canberra 2018 training](#) was hosted by Jane Geltch (Purpose Partners, Qld) and Steve Ryman (a global hosting practitioner); with Mel Geltch, Moze Crozier and Dave Newell (Campfire Co-op, Qld/NSW); and Anne-Laure Romanet (from France via Knowmads, Hanoi). The local team were Janet Salisbury (A Chorus of Women), Lyn Stephens (Australia 21) and Mark Spain (Global Learning).