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# Why Oh (L) Why?..cont.

and funerals. But when I have attended, I have always been struck by the value of the occasion, of having the opportunity for reflection, upon listening to the words of wisdom provided in the service. It doesn't matter to me where the words come from. There is no doubt, in my view, that whether you believe in God

or not, the Bible contains much good advice. Just ask Bob Dylan.

The services I have attended at the Opening of the Legal Year have provided an opportunity to reflect on the role of the legal profession as part of the broader community. They draw upon stories from the Bible to illustrate the importance of values like honesty, integrity,

professionalism, fighting against injustice and upholding the law.

The words of the services have prompted me to consider my own objectives, priorities and direction, and to focus on the year ahead.

I think, once in a while, it doesn't hurt to think about the bigger picture. The Opening of the Legal Year is a good Once in a While.

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## FOR THE RECORD

### Court facilities of concern into the future

Whilst the practitioners in the Northern Territory are, numerically speaking, few, they practice in a wide area. The NT profession works in what are probably some of the most remote Bush Courts in Australia, as well as the imposing NT Supreme Court.

How the Territory Court facilities are to operate in the future is one of the current issues of most concern to the Law Society, and many of its members. It is also a matter of major concern to the Judiciary, Attorney-General and NT Department of Justice.

This concern about Court facilities is panning out in a worsening economic climate brought about by the Global Financial Crisis. Whilst Government revenues are shrinking, they are at the same time managing stimulus packages aimed at 'kick starting' or at least maintaining economic activity. This is in a climate of high arrest rates.

When I first went to Alice Springs in the early 1980s as a tourist, the "new" Alice Springs Law Courts were pointed out to me as "state of the art," and in those early days it even included a Births, Deaths and Marriages office and a "Marriage Room," though I am not sure how many of the good citizens of Alice were married there.

If you go to the Alice Law Courts

today, the impression is of hard working judges, magistrates, lawyers, police court staff, defendants, witnesses and clients coping with sometimes complex matters, in an atmosphere of inadequate premises, and some would even say, organised confusion. There is not enough space, limited privacy and the court rooms are often not big enough even for the number of defendants in cases being presented.

After the recent Opening of the Legal Year service at the Courts, Angel J pointed out the some of the practical deficiencies of Court One.

Law Society President, Duncan McConnel, and I have discussed the issue with both the Department of Justice and the Attorney-General, and they are aware of the issues and looking at ways of extending the Court (possibly a more practical option than building a new Court building). They are aware of the importance of consulting the local profession in any plans. They are also aware of the stimulus that work on the Courts would give to the Alice business community (and also of practical problems that would need to be managed if work was to be carried out whilst the courts were in session).

Darwin has had a variety of Courts, and when I arrived in Darwin there was the old Supreme Court Building (which also dealt with



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Family Court and Federal Court matters) which had been the scene of some notable parties (including one on the night before Cyclone Tracy) and which was to feature in the Chamberlain trial (with the façade even included in the Meryl Streep movie adaptation). There was also the old Magistrates Court in Mitchell Street, replaced by Nichols Place in 1986.

Nichols Place could now benefit from some renovation (and possibly relocation of the Registrar-General's offices) - though noting the courtyard was where Robert (Bradshaw) and I were married, a major case of getting married at work as we were both working in the precinct at the time.

The “state of the art” Supreme Court, opened in 1991, now includes the Federal Court Registry. However, the Family Court and Federal Magistrates Court continue to operate in offices considered inadequate, in spite of the keenness by the Federal Magistrates and registry staff to make things work in the best manner possible. I was at the welcome function for the new Federal Court Judge Justice Reeves, where the new Commonwealth Law Courts was announced. The plans were then apparently put “on hold” by the new Labor Government, but attempts are being made to revive them again, as a stimulus for the building industry in a time of potential recession, and to better serve the public and practitioners, particularly in the family law area.

I will not deal with the Courts at Gove, Tennant Creek and Katherine, but as those operating there know, the biggest issues are perhaps with bush courts, featured in the last *Balance*. Difficulties in taking instructions under a tree or sitting in the dust outside in 40 degree temperatures cannot be underestimated. Conducting proceedings is difficult, and it is hard to see how things can be significantly improved without expenditure of great sums of money, which would appear not to be available in the current economic climate. I understand the Attorney-General, Department of Justice and Chief Magistrate who are obviously aware of and concerned about these problems are looking at options for dealing with these issues. The Society is hoping to meet with CSM Blokland and DoJ to discuss. Moving proceedings to the larger centres would be a costly, and perhaps culturally inappropriate option.

I would appreciate any feedback from practitioners on these issues, and will keep the profession informed.

## www.lawsocietynt.asn.au Your online legal resource

The new Law Society website, at [www.lawsocietynt.com.au](http://www.lawsocietynt.com.au), has finally been launched! Take the time to explore new features, including:

- Facility to RSVP for social events and CPD online, including making online payments.
- The opportunity for local firms/organisations to submit a legal position vacant free of charge.
- The information and forms you need to practice law in the Northern Territory.
- An interactive poll for members to tell us their opinions on current issues.
- A search facility to find a practitioner or firm.
- A listing of firm website links (if yours is not listed, please email [publicrelations@lawsocnt.asn.au](mailto:publicrelations@lawsocnt.asn.au)).

[asn.au](http://asn.au)).

- An up to date listing of Law Society and other professional development opportunities (CPD).
- Facility for members to submit items to *The Practitioner* e-newsletter.
- A members only section where members can update their details and access electronic versions of *Balance*. To access this section you will need to register a login and password on the website. Please note, your login details for the old website will no longer work.
- A listing of legal books available for review.

Your feedback on the new site would be welcome. Contact Rebecca on [publicrelations@lawsocnt.asn.au](mailto:publicrelations@lawsocnt.asn.au).

The screenshot displays the Law Society Northern Territory website. At the top, there is a search bar and a navigation menu with links such as Home, About LSNT, For the Community, Legal Practice, Professional Development, Membership, Legal Careers, Events, Publications, Legal Profession Regulation, Legal Directory & Links, Legislation & Submissions, Media Centre, Members Only, and Contact Us. The main content area features several sections: 'FIND A FIRM, LAWYER OR LEGAL ORGANISATION' with a search bar; 'LAW SOCIETY CPDs' listing various continuing professional development opportunities; 'SOCIAL FUNCTIONS' with upcoming events; and a 'POLL' section asking about the global financial crisis. A large news article titled 'New legal year, new Law Society website' is prominently displayed, celebrating the opening of the Legal Year (OLY) 2009. The footer contains contact information, including the office location in Darwin, phone and fax numbers, email, and a sign-up for the 'The Practitioner' e-newsletter.