

Spirituality and Commemorative Events: The Centenary Of World War One In Australia

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A number of dark commemorative events have been staged in recent years, marking the anniversaries of incidents that are distressing or involve death or suffering (Frost and Laing, 2013). They are a medium for thinking about and remembering the past and potentially promote healing and provide a sense of closure for those affected, yet there is a paucity of research about them from a socio-cultural perspective. This paper examines the role of the Centenary of World War One in Australia in promoting positive social outcomes that are linked to spiritual development and meaningful experiences. This commemoration of the Great War, to be staged between 2014 and 2018, encompasses a varied program of events including exhibitions, parades, ceremonies and memorial services. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders involved in the planning and management of this commemorative event. Findings suggest that organisers are actively seeking to achieve outcomes such as reconciliation, peace, empathy and compassion and encourage reflection on ideals of sacrifice and service. The Centenary of World War One might therefore be understood as an example of a positive event, a term given to events that seek to facilitate 'human well-being and conditions (or various circumstances) for flourishing' (Filep, Laing and Csikszentmihalyi, 2017: 10). The paper addresses the call by Filep, Volic and Lee (2015) for researchers to use positive psychology lenses to explore the social, and in this case, spiritual dimension of events.

Key Words : commemorative event; spirituality; meaning; memory; well-being

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