



Anglican Diocese
of Bendigo

The Spirit

monthly

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Issue 153

Stories of faith

This issue focuses on stories of faith and includes articles from people in the Diocese reflecting on what they have learned about their faith while COVID-19 has substantially changed the way we do church.

Waiting in hope

I had a housemate a few years ago who at this time of year when out and about would joyfully exclaim this every time she saw a blossom tree in full bloom. I couldn't hear it without smiling. Blossoms, wattle trees, magnolias: these are all starting to bloom in my neighbourhood, little emblems of joy and colour breaking through the winter grey. My own tree in front of my house only has a few flowers on it so far, but it's full of buds. Any time now it will explode with colour and life. I look with hope, watching for that day to come.

I've been reflecting on hope a lot lately. Hope is a beautiful thing. It's like adrenaline to our souls, spurring us on, lifting our heads, bringing joy to our hearts. But I think we often misunderstand the hope offered to us. See, we tend to say things like "I hope I can visit you soon" or "I hope I pass my exam" or "I hope to see Machu Picchu one day." When we use hope like that, really what we are talking about is a goal or a dream. It might

help us to plan or study or save, but the outcome is uncertain and may not happen.

Christian hope isn't like that at all. It's not a dream in the distance that we cross our fingers will

follows the winter or the tree full of buds about to bloom. Christian hope is not a wishful thinking but a certain waiting. It is an anchor for our souls (Heb 6:19) because it has nothing to do with me and my planning. Rather, Christian hope is entirely anchored on God's faithfulness: God the powerful One, God the faithful One can and will do what he has promised. We are simply waiting for that final glorious Day to come (Heb 10:23-24). Since Jesus is risen and at the right hand of God, everything is ready for that Day and we are like the tree full of buds simply waiting for the glorious unveiling.

We need hope. We especially need it now, to know in a world that is feeling so uncertain and a future that is looking bumpy that this will not be the end of the story. And this hope isn't just for us – the whole world needs to hear of it, as we prayerfully and boldly take every opportunity to speak of the risen Christ with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:15).

Dawn! Springtime! Blossoms! These are emblems of hope placed in the creation around us. Let them remind you of our much bigger hope in Christ and the glorious Day that is coming soon and very soon. And let them remind us also to be ready to share this glorious hope with a hurting world.

*Karen Reid, Curate
Holy Trinity South East Bendigo*


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The Bishop writes

...and tweets 

Seeing the wood for the trees

I have probably shared this before, but while I was OK at hockey my youngest brother was fantastic! This was in spite of the fact that I was faster and fitter than him, and while his stick skills were better, I could still keep the ball where I wanted it. The thing that distinguished us was his capacity to give attention to the right parts of the game at the right time. I would get absorbed in the detail of what was happening in front of my face whereas my brother could see what was going to occur (or needed to occur) long before it transpired. In other words, I got caught looking at each individual tree but my brother knew the whole forest!

Being able to see the big picture is a real gift for life. In hockey it may enable you to score goals on the run, but in life the effects go much deeper. Too often as people we become absorbed by the demands or detail of the moment and forget the whole sweep of what we are called to. This only becomes more apparent when we are stressed or under pressure. A couple of factors play into this. Pressurised environments or times usually come with a flood of information that we must wade through. Our bodies and minds can only deal with a limited amount of this data which means that we must limit what we pay attention to, and it is

usually what is right in front of our nose. Stress also comes with a flood of emotion as we react to the stimuli we take in and the frustration or disappointment that comes through unmet expectation. This predisposition to reduce our focus and react with emotions related to the pressure is

utterly normal and part and parcel of being human. These tendencies will mean that it is difficult to 'unpick' the what and why of our experience as we focus on its impact.

I suspect that we are

feeling this pressure in the

various facets of our lives. The way that we live out our faith, especially as we engage with each other as church, is one aspect that has clearly changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic and become pressurised and stressed. I don't know about you, but I am missing so many things about our usual way of living out our faith and am running hard just to keep up with day-to-day demands it is difficult to sort out what it is that I should be doing and why I am feeling the way I am.

The Psalms come into their own in

times like these. There are many things to like about the Psalms, but I have been appreciating the two-step dance that they lead me through in the midst of my experience.

The first step is a conscious calling to mind of the ways that God has been and continues to be active, and then having remembered that God is active, giving thanks! I hope that as you read the various stories of God at work throughout the Diocese you will be able to call to mind God's sustaining and nurturing hand even through this most anxious time.

The second step is to name our experience carefully and honestly. Time after time we see and hear the psalmist move from the emotion of the matter to the cause. They spill their feelings on the page and then wonder why they feel this way. Can I encourage you to do this too! Take the sadness and the frustration, the anxiety and concern, and ask 'why' do I feel loss or anger or

unsteadiness.

What are the things I miss? Who are the people I really want to see? What can I not wait to start again so that I may feel encouraged as a Christian? And be like the psalmist; name them and write them down. For God knows that we are not sufficient to bring the pandemic and its restrictions to a close, but he is willing and able to hear our cry.

tlatt

Your servant in Christ,

Book Pedaller

"Book Pedaller" brings books by bike during COVID-19

When the first wave of Coronavirus restrictions hit in March this year, Rev Angela Lorrigan got to pedalling books. Literally.

Whilst she loves riding her bike around Bendigo, it was also a practical way for her to connect and serve the community of St Pauls' Anglican Church, where she is a volunteer Minister. "Oh, I'm all about practical. I love practical," explains Angela, who is also a geologist.

"Back in March, when the Bendigo library closed quite suddenly, people – especially older people – were quite shocked that they couldn't get books," she says. "Many of these people aren't comfortable or able to order books online or read ebooks."

"We put a call out to see if anyone would donate books to an informal 'Lockdown Library' and people were very generous: over 500 books arrived in a hurry!"

After quickly cataloguing the books by author surname, Angela circulated the book list to the St Paul's community to find out who wanted to borrow which books. Each week, she'd then load up her panniers with books and cycle

around the city, dropping off and collecting books along the way.

"I live out Junortoun way and so the furthest I've ridden with the books is out to Maiden Gully and I regularly ride to Epsom and Kangaroo Flat," Angela explains. "I know it's not a long way for people who ride with the road bike bunches every weekend, but with 14 kg of books in the panniers, a 30km return trip makes for a good ride."

Angela has also found herself riding up streets and lanes she never knew existed and exploring different parts of Bendigo. As a geologist, she also finds riding through new parts of town a great way for her to observe our local environment. "There's a lot of building underway at the moment in Bendigo. With some of the extractions, we're seeing rock structures we've never seen before."

Affectionately known as 'The Book Pedaller', Angela has benefited from more than just the physical experience of cycling. She believes it's been a good part of the church's ministry to engage those who she describes as 'electronically isolated'.

Standing on the doorsteps of elderly people's homes, Angela has heard some amazing stories as they compare life during the coronavirus pandemic today with their experiences during the World Wars.

"They would tell me how they were running into air raid shelters all the time and didn't know when the war would end," she says. "It's been so nice to be exchanging both spoken and written stories during this time, albeit at a social distance."

And the most popular books during COVID? "Damascus by Christos Tsiolkas," Angela replies quickly, "followed by Scottish crime writer, Val McDermid." Not surprisingly, fiction has been much more popular than non-fiction, too: "People have been seeking an escape."

As Bendigo resettles into life under Stage 3 restrictions once again, the 'Lockdown Library' has restarted and Angela is looking forward to getting back on the bike: "I've just got to watch out for the magpies now!" she says.

*Nigel Preston
Holy Trinity, South East Bendigo*



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Phone buddies

"We may make a lot of plans, but the LORD will do what he has decided."
Proverbs 19:21

Normally, on Thursday mornings I meet with a group of lovely ladies to study God's word. I've been doing so for many years. We use Know Your Bible study notes, studying a different book of the Bible each term. Each person prepares for the lesson at home by answering set questions. These answers are then shared with the group during the meeting.

Obviously, recently we have been unable to meet - it was time to change plans! Many in the group have no technology so eventually, after much prayer, we decided to set up 'phone buddies'. Each lady shares their answers and prays with one other lady on a rotating roster - so a different pair share each week - and we all have telephones!

Last term we were studying Acts. I found it so challenging to be reminded of the early church's growth, their deep love for one another and their strong desire to tell everyone the Good News. They faced many challenges and opposition, but their reliance on God and the power of the Holy Spirit helped them persevere - and the gospel spread!

There have been so many blessings with our change from our usual Know Your Bible meetings! We get to know each other on a deeper level and have been able to pray for one another in a much more personal way. (Also, we've been accountable to someone else - so we've done our Bible study, whereas maybe otherwise, we would be putting it off till later!). I've had much positive feedback - God has truly used this time of isolation to grow us in love for one another - and for Him - all praise and glory to Jesus!

Judy Smith

Holy Trinity, South East Bendigo



A Bendigo Pilgrim's Progress



Little did I think that 20 July 2020 would be a significant day in my life. To have been placed in ICU in Bendigo Hospital early that morning has certainly changed my perspective on life. This recollection is not a lengthy description of those weeks but relates more to an increasing awareness of the power of prayer, of requiring total trust in God and of realigning my perspective.

On 22 July, Revd Geoff Chittenden from Holy Trinity South East Bendigo sent me a text - "you're on your pilgrim's progress" - by which time I had tested negative to Coronavirus.

Anne, one of Bendigo Health's Anglican Chaplains, was my first visitor and revisited seven days later which was so comforting. On becoming more aware, and on opening the NIV app on my phone the verses which popped up were Phil 4: 11-13. While I am no Paul, these verses are now at the top of my favourites list. I was made aware that God, Jesus, and Spirit were in charge! Another lesson in humility.

The Sunday morning online service from Holy Trinity, South East Bendigo was inspirational. While listening to Edward Barkla teaching on Philippians, his image of the way God is like a rescue lifebelt was like a flash of lightning. It can rescue, but first I have to make the move towards it, take hold of it, climb inside and finally lean heavily on its support.

I am home once again, and although the cause of my illness is still under investigation, it is a joyful feeling.

A final thought: what a blessing to be in fellowship and community with fellow pilgrims who have supported Sandra and me so wonderfully through this ordeal. My thanks to everyone who has upheld us at this time. Keep praying.

Campbell McCullough
Holy Trinity, South East Bendigo



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Unexpected gifts

There is a story that I love about a hermit sitting outside his hut in the moonlight. Suddenly a desperate man jumps out of the trees, threatens him with violence, dives into his hut and takes the few possessions he has - a book, some food, even his bedroll; and then he is gone.

The hermit continues to sit there for a while, and then says, "Oh, if only I could give him the moonlight!"

Over these past few months I have been given simple, unexpected gifts that have saved me from myself.

Some wonderful red toadstools dotted in yellow, growing under one of the silver birches in my garden; two ants, one pulling the other up and down across blades of grass past my feet as I sit outside to eat my lunch. Intrigued, I get up and follow them as they continue on down the slope - such a long way for small ants to travel. On the same day Jenny brings me a beautiful, small and perfect nest she found whilst gardening.

On quiet walks down the road I meet neighbours who are usually at work, now working in their gardens and we stop to have a chat (at a distance!).

A loved granddaughter calls me on FaceTime to tell me about her day and

sends me drawings and letters in the post.

I've received unexpected messages from people I don't often see, writing to tell me they are thinking of me.

I am loved by Jenny, who each morning lights the fire in my study so that I can be warm as I meditate, read and pray.

I am reminded that the kingdom of God is like a happening in the simple everyday of ordinary lives, as people respond to a whispered summons to walk in the seeming weakness of love as Jesus did.

I meet people I have known only in part, differently, through online forums and discussion groups organised by my local church and also the World Community for Christian Meditation. I begin to know more fully the great blessing of community called into being through faith as an engagement in truly building up the other (An engagement in Christ in constructing each other's humanity as Rowan Williams says.)

I am invited to sit in meditation with people from around the world, praying with them, holding the world and its people in the midst of great suffering and hardship, and I know I am part of God's love for all people.

*Adele Mapperson
St. Pauls Kyneton*



Opportunity to witness

We are basically housebound because of our health. But both of us went through a time of asking God 'what is this all about' and there didn't seem to be answers. Then one day he led me to Acts 28:30-31, where Paul stayed at home and God brought people to him. And this is exactly what God has done with us, even through COVID-19.

We have many testimonies of those God has brought to our house. The most recent one was a woman who some may have thought would never be interested in Jesus, covered in tats and piercings (doesn't faze us as I worked with many like this in prison). She sat down on the floor and said, "I've never thought much about spiritual things or about God but I have been on the internet and there are a lot

of things there about what is happening today". That's how our conversation started and we were able to share with her from the Bible. What she didn't know was that I had been praying that people during this pandemic would be drawn to Jesus, that God would bring those who walk in darkness into the light. Praise God!

We have learnt that no matter what our circumstances we can continue to pray for God's people worldwide as well as locally. We can pray for those in authority, all those on the frontline of fighting this virus, those who have the virus, those who have lost jobs and much more.

Personally, we have learnt that "whatever state we are in to be content" and that we all no matter what our circumstances can continue to work to the Praise of His Glory. God is good!

*Muriel and Eric Jencke
Holy Trinity, South East Bendigo*



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Parishioners de-stress with the help of horses

"Powerful yet gentle, horses give us immediate feedback about our inner feelings, and at the same time accept us totally."

Parishioners from St Paul's Kyneton attended a Group Session at Black Horse Therapies, located near Kyneton, earlier in June. This provided an introduction to Equine Assisted Therapy and gave participants an opportunity to unwind and de-stress.

The session was led by Elizabeth Hannah, the Equine Assisted Therapist who is also a member of St Paul's, Kyneton.

Those attending had individual sessions in the horse yard with one of the horses followed by a time of reflection. The other participants shared their observations of what they had seen taking place in the yard.

Participants reported that they found the experience relaxing and that it

enabled them to forget about their daily lives and be present in the moment with the horses.

The experience of connecting and interacting with the horse was a pleasurable one for all present.

"I found the opportunity relaxing and reflective," one participant said. "It gave me a chance to slow down, live in the moment and de-stress. It was great to develop a sense of trust between Pip and me which I don't always experience with people. It was also good to have feedback from the group afterwards. I was greatly encouraged by that."

"I immensely enjoyed spending time with Sammy. I felt myself relax as I wasn't thinking about the multitude of other things needing to be done. It was a poignant reminder of the importance of taking time out of life's many challenges and realising that often simple and grounded encounters, in this case with horses, help you to both de-stress and re-focus and see the way ahead a little more clearly than before."

Black Horse Therapies re-opened its doors during the period of COVID-19 social isolation and began providing assistance to adults and children experiencing stress and anxiety associated with this time.

Elizabeth offers a person-centred approach involving interactions with horses through activities such as grooming and leading. All sessions are conducted on the ground (there is no riding) and in a yard.

A narrative framework is used which involves the telling of stories about what occurred in the horse yard. This gives people new ways of seeing themselves and assists them in discovering strengths and abilities.

Elizabeth has practiced Acupuncture & Chinese Medicine for 30 years. She now includes Equine Assisted Therapy in her practice. To do this she studied for a Graduate Diploma in Counselling & Psychotherapy and trained in Natural Horsemanship. Elizabeth is NDIS-registered.

Sessions are conducted in a beautiful natural setting which people find relaxes and restores them.

*Elizabeth Hannah
St Paul's, Kyneton*

For more information:

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Dealing with isolation

Having lived my life with faith since my early teens it is difficult at first to know where to start.

Initially I didn't think life was much different during isolation, however I feel I have experienced a new depth to my faith as time has progressed.

At first, I like many others did not take the current crisis too seriously, however as time went by it made me examine more, where and what place my faith had in the scheme of things. I became aware of increased community awareness towards caring for others, reaching out to those in need and stronger connections.

The isolation has probably been the hardest with a lack of physical contact with family and friends, however this has also had the effect of making my connection with God stronger, making me aware that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom 8:35)

Of course there are times when it all becomes depressing and dark as the days stretch into weeks and months, without much changing.

That is when the light of Jesus shines through and more positive thoughts take effect. I relish the time to try new things and read, in the quietness and lack of pace, and life again becomes a blessing. It becomes a time of reflection on all the gifts God has given me, my friends and my family. I have seen and admired the resourcefulness of others in finding ways to fill their days. In the slowing pace of life I have enjoyed the time spent with my cats, all having come into my care as a gift from God, and their love to me has been another extension of the love of Christ.

During this time I have felt Christ's presence has always been present and in control.



I think people have become more aware of others, less self centred and more community aware, doing acts of kindness, such as making masks and providing meals for others.

Of course, like everyone else, I miss the usual routines we all have such as attending church; the music and fellowship, the strangeness of not being able to give others a handshake or hug.

There is a fear in where it will end. A sadness at losing loved ones without a real send off, but also an awareness and belief that Christ is in control and all will be well.

Helen Forsyth - Anglican Parish of Kyneton

Davy

With others from St Luke's Bendigo North, we worship twice a week by phone with the Rev Linda Osmond.

Revd Linda has met our border collie Davy. The first time she phoned to link us in to the group she gave him, as well as her two human parishioners, an enthusiastic "good morning!". Davy wagged his tail vigorously, and, unable to see Linda, eagerly kissed my husband then lay down beside us at the table.

Now, when told that "it's Linda's day" Davy settles himself into position. Usually he listens quietly until worship ends.

But last week when my husband was asked to read the psalm, Davy put his paws on Geoff's knee, peered at the prayer book, and made small doggy sounds throughout the reading, almost as if he were giving a simultaneous translation for any dogs who might be listening.

Revd Linda did not turn a hair: "Thank you Geoff," she said. "Thank you Davy,"

and went on with the worship.

Now, as a result of our dog's participation in phone worship at the time of Coronavirus, I read the Te Deum with new understanding of the opening words:

We praise you, O Lord:
we acclaim you as Lord.
All creation worships you:
the Father everlasting.

*Gwynith Young
Bendigo North*



A wider sense of space

Faith in times of COVID-19 - a response

As the weeks have gone by, I have had a vague sense of a journey, of shifting ideas and changing context. I had been fortunate to have a range of friends to share some of these thoughts with, to observe similarities and differences.

One of the main ideas I have worked with has been about the place of our church buildings, as these have been locked, even as we have been locked down. Much has been said about the church not being the building, that it is about 'we the people' who normally gather there for worship. And to a certain extent I agree

But as inheritors of the Western European Christian tradition, we do not necessarily have a 'sense of place' like the one that is so basic to our First Australian brothers and sisters. In that sense I have been thinking how our faith also is very much an embodied



one, starting with God's call of Abraham and his family and household. God gathers us, speaks to us, listen to us, feeds us, and our responses and actions include our speaking, moving, eating, and singing.

All this usually happens in a place, a specially constructed space and one that we might have been part of for many years. Our church buildings have been consecrated for the gathering of God's people. While the building is not

in itself materially 'sacred', everything in it and about it makes sense spiritually and physically when we gather.

So, for the moment, I have a sense of a challenge to my imagination to recognise others as those who usually gather and perhaps explore a wider 'sense of place' as we all work to continue to be God's called people.

Fay Magee, St George's, Trentham

The bells ring

St Arnaud

When the lockdown started our priest, Canon Jan Harper didn't waste any time getting us all onto Zoom for our services. We have pretty much settled into them now and are all connecting quite well.

The bonus with Zoom is that if you are running a bit late you can even turn up to worship in your dressing gown!

However, it seemed to me to be something missing! One day I realised that it was the bell ringing that we no longer heard. I had a quick chat with Jan and she was happy to hear it ringing also. As I am the only campanologist, I usually go down every Saturday afternoon at about 3.00pm and ring the bell. I ring it 33 times, once for every year that Jesus lived.

So, next time you hear our bell ring out in St Arnaud, know that we are still here in the community, although the church is not open, but like Jesus, we are with you always.

*Glenis Wharton
Parish of St Arnaud*



Trentham

Since the closing of our church buildings, the Trentham Combined Churches Committee has provided a roster of people from each of the three local congregations to ring the bell at St George's at 12 noon each day. A brief explanation was posted on our local Facebook page and there have been many positive responses from folk in our community. The intention is

to continue this until we re-enter the buildings for worship.

So for Ascension Day the bell-ringers were invited to gather for a short service of readings and prayers. With five in attendance we were well within the limit for public gathering!

*Fay Magee
Trentham Combined Churches*

Interesting times

"May you live in interesting times"; an English language phrase purporting to be an ancient Chinese curse given in the form of a blessing. Actually, it was probably started in the first half of the 20th Century. A famous use was in a speech in Cape Town in June 1966, Robert Kennedy said:

"There is a Chinese curse which says 'May he live in interesting times.' Like it or not we live in interesting times. They are times of danger and uncertainty; but they are also more open to the creative energy of men than any other time in history."

There is no doubt that we live "in interesting times". COVID-19 arrived late last year and has infected nearly 20 million people and killed over 700,000 and had the biggest impact on world economies since the great depression. We are all impacted by the virus and it seems that we are still a long way from working our way out of it.

With all the fear, the unknown and the insecurity around us how do we see God's hand in all this? Jill and I have certainly had an interesting year. About a year ago we felt that it was right to leave our church in Wallan to attend All Saints Tatura and help old friends, Revd Simba and Helen to run an Alpha course. By the time the course started it was also clear that Jill's job as a professor at Latrobe had run its course

and we were looking at a move to Canberra early in 2020. COVID-19 overlapped with our plans and in late March, just days before the removalists were due, the lockdown started with all states except Victoria and NSW closing their borders. We opted to cancel the removalist and hunker down at home. Now we are once again planning our move to NSW later this year.

I was converted to Christianity as a teenager (at an Anglican youth camp in UK) and we have spent 50 years seeking to hear God's voice in situations that guide the process of our lives. Sometimes I feel that I perceive his guiding voice quite clearly; far more often the clarity comes in retrospect as I look back at events and see God's clear hand guiding and protecting us. Our experiences have cemented a strong confidence in our hearts that, as God's children, we can be sure of His ongoing presence in the twists and turns of our lives (good and bad alike).

One of my favourite verses is 2 Tim 1:12 - "because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day". Despite the uncertainty, the fear and insecurity about us we can be sure that God, who said that we should call him Abba (an intimate but respectful "Daddy" title) is with us and will remain with us throughout this "interesting" time.

*Peter Slay
All Saints, Tatura*

60 years of service

At the Parish of Inglewood's Annual General Meeting earlier in March, Shirley Heather was presented with the Bishop's Certificate of Appreciation for her missionary work in the parish.

Shirley has served on the Mission Committee for 60 years, and as Mission Secretary for 30 - 40 years, and has just retired from that position.

One wonders how many thousands of dollars were raised by her efforts during that span of time! Thank you, Shirley.

*Malcolm Thomas
Parish of Inglewood*



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A tradition that continues...

When 2 or 3 are gathered

In the Parish of Northern Mallee this number started with ten then increased to twenty when restrictions were eased and worship services able to start again.

When it was announced that we were able to conduct services with limits of ten our parish decided to go ahead. We had a meeting of Parish Council on the Tuesday after the government announcement and set up our procedures to go ahead as soon as permission arrived from our Bishop Matt.St Peters, Robinvale was all ready to go by Monday night,just waiting for approval.

After a lot of phone calls by the Wardens we contacted all our parishioners during the week and set up five shortened services spread over Sunday with appropriate breaks for cleaning. It was originally expected that we would have three services at St Margaret's, Mildura and it was unexpected to have such a good result.

These contact calls were wonderful and the excitement of the parishioners in having the church open again was marvellous and uplifting to those making these calls. We set up St Margaret's, Mildura on Saturday with all the appropriate signs, registers and sanitiser. By Sunday we were ready to go.

We held five services at St Margaret's and one at St Peter's which all went very well. As we contacted parishioners to arrange services for the following week everybody expressed their thanks for being able to attend the services and enjoy being with other believers even though 1.5 metres or more apart.

The people who made these hundreds of phone calls to set up these services found that the conversations were lovely and in some cases enabled us to minister to parishioners



having a hard time through this period. Prior to this all parishioners were being contacted regularly but when we offered the chance to attend the Eucharist it seemed to lift everyone's spirits. Everything worked so well that the word got around and so the following week we had six services in St Margaret's and one at St Peter's. Fr Keith Nicholas attended St Peter's and Fr Joe Varghese had the massive job of presiding at all six services in St Margaret's. He certainly deserved a day off after this effort.

Thanks must also go to AV operator Aaron, our cleaners (a big job between services) and those who made phone calls and contacted others on the fringe of our parish. In this time of trouble it has been worthwhile to make the effort to set up these services and we believe that it has brought our family closer together.

Ian Masters, Parish of Northern Mallee

In a 'lifeboat' while the storm rages

The storm of COVID-19 rages and the boat is listing. I too, like the disciples, look across the water, and see Jesus. I am safe for Jesus is still present during this difficult and challenging time as He calms the storm as the COVID-19 turmoil unfolds. So what am I learning during this six month period of self-isolation?

People are courageous and I am full of admiration for the selfless and gracious behaviour I have seen - in saying this I acknowledge the life of Revd Dr John Steele who selflessly was a witness for the Kingdom of God.

I have also learned that hygiene is important and the simple task of washing hands properly for 20 seconds with soap and water is fun,

particularly if you sing happy birthday to yourself twice. Fun and encouragement goes a long way not only for others but also to myself.

I have witnessed some people doing silly things (but then so do I). I am reminded that it takes a different way of addressing daily concerns (thinking outside of the box) and this takes a bit of imagination.

I have learned that the simple but important values of being kind, and

considerate, learned in childhood from my parents so long ago, are good rules to live by - thank you Mum and Dad.

I am reminded when I think badly of people that to be gracious as God is gracious to us, telling myself that the greatest gift identified and shown by Jesus is to love abundantly. Finally, I thank you John for being in the 'boat' with me.

*Sandra Tunley-Cooper
Holy Trinity, South East Bendigo*



Steve Geyer



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June Andrew

Park and Pray

'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.' (Philippians 4:6-7)

The wind was cold and sharp. Definitely not the weather for an outdoor catchup in the gardens surrounding the church.

So, what do you do when faced with a challenge? Well, I thought about it, prayed about it and no, I did not park the idea. I thought about it some more, then put it into top gear and the solution took off, with gears crunching!

Convert the catch up to a "Park and Pray" where the members of the congregation drive in, remaining in their vehicles, warm and cosy, turning off the engine to reflect on life, while I joined with them outside their car window in conversation and prayer.

I had a great afternoon catching up with people. It was a special time. I was privileged to spend time with each of them, joining in conversation and culminating in prayer. Together, we thanked God for the blessings that we had and then prayed for all people and for the world. We counted our blessings, one by one, then turned our prayers to our families, our communities and the world. Our prayers gave us peace and hope for the future. Our prayers kept us focused on the model that we have for a good life, Jesus. Kindness, compassion and humility.

It just goes to show that we can pray anywhere, alone or with others. When you wind the window down and let the Lord into your life, it will never be the same. It might not get rid of all the bugs on your windscreen, but it will help you see the road ahead clearer and have the assurance to deal with the bugs. You may be able to see your life in the rear view mirror, but the view through the windscreen will be as if you have turned on the wipers. You can see the road ahead, the potholes and

ruts, but you are not travelling alone. You have a companion. You can park and pray anywhere.

Judi Bird, Parish of Charlton-Donald



Thank you COVID-19

Recently I experienced one of the most satisfying moments of my ministry to date and it was all thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic...Let me explain.

For a number of years I have been serving the residents of St. Laurence Court (Benetas) in Eaglehawk, first through being appointed to a pastoral care role and later as the visiting priest. Over that time I have had the privilege to build relationships with many of the residents as we gather on a fortnightly basis to worship God and share fellowship together. When it became clear that the pandemic posed a risk to this group, some of our most vulnerable in the community, I was advised that ministry would have to cease for a time and I could no longer serve in what I had always considered the 'normal' way. My mind was at a loss as to how I might continue to pastor that community in such a challenging context. Additionally, the demands of parish ministry and the implementation of new forms of gathering overtook my ability to know what to do for 'my people' at Benetas.

Questions around 'remaining unified in isolation' had become the foremost

questions on my mind and my first response was to quickly adopt the Zoom technology for all of our gatherings. Much time was allocated to preparing for regular morning and evening prayer, our cluster wide Sunday worship and assisting others to adopt the technology. Over the ensuing months the residents at Benetas started to feel like a distant memory and I was feeling helpless to know how I could ever get back to serving them faithfully given the strain of the circumstances. Enter Anne, a member of Common Ground in Maiden Gully, who has recently stepped into the role of Pastoral Care Practitioner at St. Laurence Court!

Anne has been a regular participant in the Harvey Town cluster morning and evening prayer meetings and I was absolutely gob-smacked when one morning she 'zoomed' into morning prayer from St. Laurence Court with a

large majority of 'my people' in the room. I cannot tell you how excited I was when I saw each of them and we could speak face to face, albeit over the screen. It was unexpected, surprising and absolutely delightful to worship with them again. What was even more satisfying was that the technology had bridged the gap between those who worship in our church context and those who worship independently in aged care.

So thank you COVID-19! Without being coerced into change and new ways of gathering this would never have happened. It is precisely the unexpected fruit, such as this, that I believe we need to take stock of as a Church when we consider our future and discern the provocation of the Holy Spirit.

Brendan McDonald, Harvey Town Cluster (Eaglehawk and Maiden Gully)



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In Loving Memory...

Manna not media

As I reflected over the last six months, this question came to mind....

How then should I pray Lord?

'The Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, for we do not know what we should pray...' (Rom 8:26)

I sensed a Divine re-set, nothing would remain the same, and I felt powerless to change anything. I learnt afresh how to trust in Jesus and ramp up my prayer life as the world went into lockdown with physical and social isolation and daily risk assessment becoming the norm.

I savoured spending more quiet time with the Lord, being led daily by the Spirit of God into deep places (Ps 91:1) in the Word of God, and gaining daily light to my path (Ps 119:105)

I learned how to hear and follow the Shepherds' voice (Jn 10:27) and looked forward to our time together free from worldly distractions and time constraints. I experienced a deep intercessory burden for the churches and the body of Christ worldwide as I pondered questions that arose during our time together, watching global suffering increase daily.

Daily my love for Jesus grew as His Spirit led me deeper into the word of God.

I began journaling and as the pandemic unfolded, so the Word became a comfort and I gained new insights

'Surely the Lord God does nothing unless he reveals His secrets to His servants the prophets' (Amos 3:7, Eph. 4:11)

Jesus' generosity towards me and his gifts were humbling and I have been renewed in His love.

The emotional roller coaster I faced at times in this period of enforced seclusion helped me to face and process some of the root causes of issues that had needed healing for many years.

Jesus is so gentle as His Holy Spirit leads us into healing. I felt like the woman of Samaria asking Jesus to give me a drink, and the cripple beside the pool, at Bethesda. I was so thirsty! (Jn 4: 9-26; Jn 5:1-14)

Each day the Lord led me in new ways from weeping in repentance for myself and the church, to rejoicing on the heights and depositing a new song in my heart. (Ps 33:3; 96)

I was also led to search out the meaning and composition of biblical healing oils, and their use for healing and consecration. (Exod.30:22-28,30:31-33,40:49; 1Sam 10:1; Ps 23; 1-6; James 5:14; 1Jn 2:27; Matt 6:17; Lk 4:18.)

I had the opportunity to stay with a friend during this time whose husband was suffering intense ongoing post-surgical pain, not relieved by strong pain medication. I was given boldness to enquire whether he would like me to pray for him. The following week his pain had vanished and he was amazed and thanked me. I was able to tell him it was Jesus who loved him and had healed his pain.

'Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever' (Heb. 13:8)

I believe that God is doing a new thing over all the earth at this time through this pandemic and it's not over yet! My focus was on the Manna not media, receiving Gods nourishment.

I wept yesterday when my daughter sent me a picture of my son-in-law in ICU with two other physicians, all gowned up in personal protective equipment (PPE) caring lovingly for a very unwell man with COVID-19.

As I prayed I could sense Jesus standing with this man offering him comfort and the gift of eternal life, and also beside my son in law in his complex decision-making and sacrificial giving. I prayed for the protection of my daughter and four grandchildren waiting at home and other nurses and health professionals endeavouring to care. I saw other friends and family members grieving the many losses.

Jesus has not left us orphans in His Divine wisdom. I believe this 'time of re-setting' is calling us into being the Bride Jesus is wanting us to be. (Rev 21:9)

So, How then Lord should I pray?

This is my daily question as I listen to the Shepherd's voice.

This pandemic and unusual space in time reinforces that with Jesus we have everything. And, His Grace is sufficient for me. When I am weak, He is strong. (2 Cor 12:9)

All Glory to you Lord Jesus Christ, who was, and is, and is to come!

Penny Lakey, St John's Malmsbury

Singing through the pandemic

Yes, we must keep singing, even if we can't sing together!

It's a very strange world that says "don't sing"! Now we all know why in this time of pandemic using our voices to sing has the potential to be very dangerous.

But the song that's been stuck in my brain for a long time now is "How can I keep from singing" (text and music written by American Robert Lowry). I've recently enjoyed a great gospel version by Eva Cassidy and another

more ethereal one from Enya. All the more reason to keep on singing.

So how do we do it as part of our weekly online worship? Not every parish is able to marshal their own singing group, let alone do one of those impressive online virtual ensembles! I've been working through YouTube for useful performances of congregational songs/hymns with the lyrics also presented on the screen. This is a good way to encourage those watching online to join in a bigger, hopefully better sound! The BBC's Songs of Praise program is of course, the benchmark.

It is important that the recording is in a suitable key for communal singing. It's all very well for Aled Jones to impress us with the extent of his vocal range

but we need something based on the average voice!

I'm also working through online recordings of settings of the Psalms, even though not many of our congregations will have been singing or chanting these in recent memory. But here is another way to musically enrich Sunday online worship: arrange for the text to be available in your pew sheet or on the screen and enjoy listening to some of the many ways the psalms can be sung.

I would encourage you to make the web work for you and your scattered community - how can we keep from singing!

*Fay Magee
Trentham Combined Churches*