



Archbishop's Message
Archbishop Christopher Prowse

Pentecost Encouragement

THE Bishops of Australia met recently and have written a "Word of Encouragement" during this Covid-19 pandemic.

The sending down of the Holy Spirit on the nascent Church filled them with joy and strengthened their faith. We all need an infilling of this joy and faith in our own tough times too.

The Bishops mention the tremendous solidarity people have demonstrated in the pandemic, particularly healthcare workers who have shown "an exceptional spirit of self-sacrifice."

Churches are beginning to reopen to small numbers. "Our doors may be closed but our hearts are still open", the letter states. We notice "your deep desire to return to the sacraments and to resume public worship. There is a real hunger for this."

In this month of May, devoted to Mary, the Bishops note: "At the heart of the community of disciples, even behind closed doors, there is always Mary the mother of Jesus (cf Acts 1:14)." Recently we entrusted Australia to Mary under the title of Our Lady Help of Christians, the patroness of Australia.

The Bishops observed that, "the experience of the shutdown has stirred great energy and creativity among people and pastors". While keen to reopen churches, we also want to keep some of the great lessons of these times regarding our missionary discipleship as an Archdiocese particularly with online pastoral services.

The Bishops are speaking with state and federal government about the reopening of churches. Many of you are keen and may wish to bring this to the attention of your local political leaders.

At least two crucial areas of our Catholic life have been strangely enhanced by the pandemic.

First, there is the refreshed acknowledgement that families are crucial to Catholic life and the health of society. We have been spending more time at home and while this can be a challenge we have seen the priority of family life. St John Paul II liked to teach that society comes through the family.

Secondly, our greater reliance on electronic means to nourish our faith has led us to appreciate the national and international dimensions of Catholicism. On any day we can choose Mass with Pope Francis, Archbishop Christopher or our Parish Priest. It helps us to experience our universal Church more deeply.

I hope you will be able to read the bishops letter written with much pastoral love.

CATHOLIC VOICE

ARCHDIOCESE OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN



As a church community we look forward to welcoming their precious child and supporting the new Mum and Dad.

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A newborn baby is one of life's greatest joys particularly for beautiful couple Marcelle and Damien who have experienced miscarriage.

Getting up from our armchairs

BY FELICITY DE FOMBELLE

ONLINE Mass has created a community of armchair Catholics and transitioning back to the pews will be a challenge, Archbishop Christopher has said.

Church doors were "creaking open", he said, with parishes operating rosters for 10 parishioners at each Mass.

But the Archbishop cautioned that the community had experienced multiple traumas and many people were vulnerable.

"We still have drought in some areas, we had bushfires and now this pandemic," Archbishop Christopher said. "We are proclaiming the gospel in an age of uncertainty,

chaos and trauma."

The Archbishop referred to Pope Francis who wanted to return to normal Mass and was sceptical about an electronic or 'e-church'.

"People from their living rooms can pick any Mass they want, but the church is not in an armchair, it is in a community," Archbishop Christopher said.

"The transition from an e-church to going back to how we were, while keeping some of the great things we have learned, will be a challenge.

"The pandemic has softened our individualistic and narcissistic culture. The communal and family aspect has grown stronger.

"I wouldn't want to lose that as

we click back to recovery mode. It was Pope John Paul II who said society comes through the family."

Catholics across the Archdiocese are phoning parish offices to request a spot at Mass with St Christopher's Cathedral putting on more Masses to meet demand. It has 7.30am, 12.15pm and 5pm daily Mass plus 8am, 9am, 11am, 5.30pm and 6.30pm Sunday Mass.

"The filmed Mass is a pastoral comfort but not a substitute," Cathedral Administrator Fr Trenton van Reesch said.

"It is a wonderful thing but also dangerous as some people might think, we can watch Mass, we don't really need to be there. We need to remind ourselves that God is bigger

than the pandemic."

Up to 40 people used to attend daily Mass at Goulburn and Fr Joshy Kurien said they were trying to accommodate everyone.

"People have been missing it dreadfully, especially those who have struggles," he said.

As well as 9am Mass at Our Lady of Fatima church in North Goulburn, Fr Joshy celebrates daily online Mass.

"I missed a couple of times and the parishioners asked what had happened," he chuckled.

"For me it is a penance, not saying the Mass but celebrating without any people there. It is hard but I offer it up for the people and the church."

Counting down to parenthood

IT is an exciting time for Marcelle Disanayake and Damien Balachandran who are expecting their first child in June. They reflect on their relationship, faith and impending birth.

Marcelle: "I am 32 and moved from Melbourne to Canberra to work in the public service about 10 years ago.

"I was a leader in the Young Adults group at St Christopher's Cathedral and that's where I met Damien. I was born and raised in Melbourne to Sri Lankan parents and Damien is Indian-Malaysian. But we were both altar servers as well as readers and musicians, we both played sport and did pretty well at school. Our values were the same.

"I had never met anybody who felt the same way about their faith and we recognized that in each other quite quickly.

"The most attractive thing about Damien was that we could relate to each other on a deep faith level. We met in 2013, started dating in 2014, got engaged in 2017 at the Cathedral and got married at my family's parish in Melbourne in 2018.

"Having a miscarriage was heart-breaking. It is not really discussed which is so sad when you think that women talk about pretty much everything else.

"Our baby is due on June 22, such a spark in otherwise a very dark year with the bushfires and coronavirus. The first trimester

was hard because of the threat of miscarriage so we were just there for each other and turning to prayer to keep us sane.

"It has been an interesting journey. We are not near our families so we're going through trial and error to see what works for us. It's been really good for our relationship, dreaming of what it will be like to be parents. Damien is amazing.

He makes sure I'm not carrying anything heavy and goes out of his way to make me as comfortable as possible.

"My faith is very strong. I don't always love the institution but you have to be part of it to make the change and make it stronger. There are many things to be proud of in our church and many things to be ashamed of. We need to be less focused on the institution and tradition and more on our faith.

Our parish is St Peter Chanel's in Yarralumla where we are readers and do the music once a month. I love going there. I want our child to grow up in a real parish community and not be the single Catholic kid in the suburb."



Marcelle and Damien's child is due in June

Damien: "I am 31 and a hardware engineer. I won a scholarship to ANU and came to Australia from Malaysia when I was 19. I lived on campus and let's say it was hard going to church on a Sunday morning after a big night out!

"God works in mysterious ways. I started working but my job was supposed to be casual. I went from booking tickets to leave the country to a new person joining our organization who saw value in what I was doing and wanted to keep me on. That's when I decided I needed to find a sense of home, which for me was very much linked to the church.

"Faith is not a huge part of the fabric of society in Australia so when I met Marci I saw someone

who held all these things that were near and dear to me. It seemed you had to be a person in the world or the church. There was a duality there I did not agree with.

"We had to work through differences of opinion from our cultural backgrounds. We drilled down into what really mattered to us which was our faith. We could always reconcile at church and that became an important baseline for us every week to reset.

"I feel incredibly excited about becoming a Dad but I'm scared too! We experienced miscarriage so that was particularly traumatic. Now we have moved to a real state of happiness and feel incredibly blessed.

"My faith is the most important part of myself. Speaking about faith is hard in Australia whereas in Malaysia faith is very much engrained in daily life. I believe in the structure of the church but parishioners feel very remorseful about child sexual abuse and I don't think that has been conveyed well enough by our clergy. The fact the Council of Priests in Brisbane just admitted a woman is truly shocking and clearly not enough.

"It doesn't matter how things have gone for us during the week, the church is our place to start again. During the Our Father if we are not holding hands it feels wrong. We started doing that early on. We hadn't really held hands and it was so exciting so we continued it. It is one of many things about our relationship I relish."

Stirring great energy

This is an edited extract from the Bishops' letter of encouragement to Catholics.

We are intensely conscious of our isolation – not only from each other but also from you.

Australia has certainly suffered because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but not as grievously as some other countries.

Australians in general have also shown the solidarity and good sense, the generosity and kindness needed in such a time. In our healthcare workers particularly we have seen an exceptional spirit of self-sacrifice.

The Churches and other religious communities have played their part, which has meant the suspension of public worship and the closure of places of worship.

This has been a real deprivation, and the bishops understand not only your anxiety about the virus and shutdown but more especially your deep desire to return to the sacraments and resume public worship.

There is a real hunger in this. It is something we all feel.

Even when our doors are closed, our hearts are open. The churches may not yet be fully open, but the heart of the Church, the heart of Christ, is wide open. The celebration of Mass has never ceased.

The experience of shutdown has stirred great energy and creativity among people and pastors, producing unexpected gifts we will take with us into the future. No locked door can keep the Risen Lord out; he is everywhere, even in this time of distress.

"I stand at the door and knock," he says. "If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come to you" (Revelation 3:20). We have heard his voice and opened the door to him who has come to us. That is the reason for our hope, even our rejoicing.

In the hope born of faith we look forward to the time when the crisis will pass and we will be able to resume fully the Church's worship and mission, even in a landscape which may be quite changed.

In the meantime, we are talking with the states and the federal government about the reopening of churches.

The season of Lent may be behind us, but this shutdown has been a kind of long Lent. Now Easter is dawning as our country recovers from the pandemic and looks to build the future.

There is no room for complacency but there is room for the hope that Easter brings to birth, the hope that "after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen and establish you" (1 Peter 5:10-11).

Concern over school enrolments

CATHOLIC schools are concerned about enrolment numbers for next year as unemployment and the financial toll from COVID-19 hit families hard.

Catholic Education director Ross Fox assured families that no child would miss out if parents could not afford school fees.

Speaking to an ACT government inquiry last week, Mr Fox said up to one in 10 Catholic school families were expected to seek fee relief and almost 200 families had already applied.

"We are doing everything we can to accommodate those families experiencing financial hardship," Mr Fox told the ACT Legislative Assembly hearing.

"Our commitment is that no one will be excluded from a Catholic education because of their circumstances."

More than 21,000 students attend the Archdiocese's 56 schools. There are 29 schools in Canberra and 27 in New South Wales.

According to a Canberra Times report, Mr Fox said the Catholic

Education Office would foot the bill for fee relief meaning individual schools will not be out of pocket.

He said schools were anxious about enrolments for next year and principals had urged parents to speak with them about financial pressures.

"Schools have been very clear in their communication with parents," Mr Fox said. "[Schools have said] 'Come to us and speak to us'.

"They do not want students to be withdrawn or leave the school



Catholic Education head Ross Fox

because of the circumstances facing parents at this very challenging time."

A big mental workout for SFX couple

YOUNG Catholic couple Patrick O'Connell and Trish Chipangura never expected to enrol in a liberal arts course together when they signed up for a free four-day introductory program last year.

Both were at uni in Canberra at the time, but the demo lectures, mock tutorials and small campus culture had them hooked.

"It's a different kind of world," Trish, 20, said. "Like you are in your own little nook. We had mock classes about Ancient Rome and studied an Edgar Allan Poe poem.

"Philosophy was the hardest. It was downright confusing. I was so lost. It's such a big mental workout".

The pair, who met as students at St Francis Xavier College in Florey and graduated in 2018, put on hold their university courses in Canberra to enrol at Campion College this year. An early enrolment \$1500 fee reduction helped.

The Catholic liberal arts school is in Old Toongabbie, about 37kms west of Sydney.

Patrick had been studying

archaeology and classical studies at ANU and Trish was doing a double degree in nursing and paramedicine at ACU.

"I did well at school and thought I may as well go to uni but ANU was so big and I was directionless," Patrick said.

"The Campion course focuses on philosophy, theology, literature and history. I liked the intimacy and the teachers know you personally."

While a positive experience for Patrick and Trish, the college lockdown and remote learning have been difficult. Both have now chosen different paths.

Patrick will finish at the end of the year with a diploma and plans to study secondary teaching. Trish has already returned to ACU.

"I wasn't enjoying remote learning," Trish said. "But I gained so much knowledge in just one semester such as how to analyse texts and essay writing."

"A liberal arts education teaches you how to think and gives you broad knowledge and skills," Patrick said.



Young couple Trish Chipangura and Patrick O'Connell at Campion

New Bishop for Wagga Wagga

THE wait is over. After almost four years, Catholics in Wagga Wagga have been informed a new Bishop is on the way.

Former high school teacher Bishop Mark Edwards OMI, currently an Auxiliary Bishop in Melbourne, will become the sixth Bishop of Wagga Wagga, replacing Bishop Gerard Hanna who retired in September 2016 after 14 years in the job.

Indonesian-born Bishop Mark, who grew up in Melbourne and turns 61 next month, is a member of the religious congregation the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, founded in 1816 by French priest St Eugene de Mazenod.

"Our long wait and perseverance in prayer for a new Bishop is now over," Archbishop Christopher Prowse said this week.

Archbishop Christopher has been Apostolic Administrator of the diocese and will continue until Bishop Mark is installed.



Bishop Mark Edwards

In a letter to Catholics and clergy in Wagga Wagga, Bishop Mark said restrictions would prevent a large gathering for his installation "so we will have a quiet beginning after the long wait."

"Because many of you can't come to me, I will come to you," he went on.

"I do plan to move around and be in various parishes and meet as many of you as possible, as quickly

as possible.

"You have waited a long time for a new Bishop. I thank you all for your perseverance, your patience and your good will.

"I am aware that I have much to learn, particularly about parish life and the joys and challenges of being a Catholic in Wagga Wagga Diocese. Keen to listen to your stories and those of the Diocese. I come humbly, with deep interest and love."

Bishop Mark attended high school at Mazenod College in Melbourne and was ordained a priest in 1986. He taught at his alma mater to 1989 before moving to teach at Iona College in Brisbane from 1990 to 1997. Bishop Mark has also worked at the Oblates' seminary, St Mary's, in Melbourne.

Bishop Mark was appointed an Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne in November 2014 and has a science degree and doctorate in philosophy from Monash University.

Brother Bear a hit with children



A PRAYER bear named Br Bear has been a big hit at St Benedict's church and school in Narrabundah. Proudly wearing a cross, the new member of the Missionaries of God's Love visits the children for morning prayer and attends online Masses. Fr Dan Benedetti talks animatedly to Br Bear during children's liturgies and said he is a symbol of comfort and security as well as bringing joy to young and older folk alike.