



St Mary of the Cross Catholic Parish

EMBODYING CHRIST'S LOVE

24th April 2020

Pastoral Letter to Parishioners of St. Mary of the Cross Catholic Parish, Mordialloc and Aspendale

Dear Parishioners,

I begin this letter with a heavy heart as we all feel the pain of the loss of the 4 police who were killed on Wednesday. A tragic loss of life and a deep sadness for our community. I feel for the families who now prepare to farewell their loved ones adhering to the current awkward guidelines for funerals. I'm sure that a memorial service will be held later in the year whenever the restrictions will be lifted. I also feel for the wider police community who all take to heart the loss of one or many of their colleagues. It reminds us that everyday as police go about their duties to protect the community, they do so with a spirit of courage and sacrifice. Not unlike our ANZACs who we remember this weekend.

Many of us may have stood outside our homes at 6am on Saturday to pay our respects to our ANZACs. It is a novel way of remembering them in this COVID-19 time, but the remembering allows the memory of such heroic personnel in this time of war to live on. Lest we forget.

Our recording of masses continues to be a way of connecting with the parish during this time. As they resume their work and study duties, I would like to thank Phil Hills, Trent Alphonso and Tanya Jhoomun who have been involved in the last number of weeks and will have a slightly lesser role in the production of the masses. I have been able to engage the offer of support from St. Bede's college for future recordings. Hamish Dun is currently undertaking an IT traineeship with the college (he completed Year 12 last year) and he has been able to dedicate some of his work for our parish. I would like to thank John Finn (principal) and David Cracknell (Deputy Principal - ICT and Infrastructure) for allowing this to be possible.

Did you know that this Tuesday is the feast of St. Louis'? I'm sure that you did. Normally our school hall at St. Louis would be full of children, their parents and many parishioners to honour one of our patron saints with a special mass. This year only 4 students were present at a mass that was recorded honouring St. Louis' life. I invite you watch this mass sometime and be part of a larger viewing audience. It's on the website.

Did you know that you can make a comment on YouTube having watched one of the masses? I invite you to do so and even give me a “Thumbs up”. Is that a bit presumptuous of me? Also, subscribing to the YouTube channel means that you will receive a notification when a new video is uploaded.

Well I have been giving the “chariot” (bike) a good work out and I have finally made a soup that has been on my hit list for years. Pea and ham – from scratch – with split peas and a ham hock. Yummy!!!! I even tried the béchamel sauce for my lasagne!!!

Please remember that the parish office is still open (remotely) and phone calls and emails are tended to.

Please check in with your neighbours and let me know if there is anything that the parish can assist them or you with during this time.

<https://www.image.ie/life/watch-this-emotive-irish-video-shows-how-important-it-is-to-stayhome-190143>

Stay safe and God bless,

St. Brigid.... pray for us.

St. Louis.... pray for us.

St. Mary of the Cross.... pray for us.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Andrew

ASPENDALE
PARISH CENTRE
37 Dolphin Street
Aspendale Vic 3195
Tel: 03 9580 7981

MORDIALLOC
PRESBYTERY
520 Main Street
Mordialloc Vic 3195
Tel: 03 9580 1018

mordiallocaspendale@cam.org.au
www.cam.org.au/mordiallocaspendale
ABN 30 159 648 648

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17th April 2020

Pastoral Letter to Parishioners of St. Mary of the Cross Catholic Parish, Mordialloc and Aspendale

Dear Parishioners,

Our Easter week continues to feel surreal with our current state of affairs. The great news during the week is the reduced impact of the virus and the “flattening of the curve” which is really positive and a step in the right direction. We have heard that our current stage 3 lock down conditions will continue until the 11th May when a review will determine the next step so in the meantime masses will continue to be recorded weekly and uploaded onto the parish website.

The schools have begun term 2 in a very different way, and it appears at this stage that this new structure will be for all of term 2. Only children whose home is not a safe environment or whose parents are involved in essential services are able to be on site means that most are at home and remote teaching is the new way of school. It has rolled out smoothly with only a few inevitable settling down issues. I thank Michael Russo (principal St. Brigid's) and Sarah McDermott (Acting principal St. Louis') for their leadership, care and concern with this transition to remote teaching and learning.

All baptisms are postponed for the immediate future and weddings can only have 5 people present. Of the two weddings that I had booked in April and May, the couples have chosen to postpone their celebrations until later in the year. It was a difficult decision to make especially after months of preparation but they both want as many of their family and friends to be present on their special day.

Funerals are still part of my ministry, yet the experience is very different. During this week I celebrated the funeral for Peggy Pashly (sister of Barbara O'Callaghan) and for Gavin Kirchner. Both funerals only allow 10 people to be present, yet the live streaming allowed many more to be part of the virtual congregation. I find these funerals so challenging especially when there gatherings afterwards are also banned. I realise even more the vital role that funeral wakes' play in the grief and support process.

I hear of many stories of how people are utilising their spare time. Obviously, we can redirect some of this time into prayer which I did in a creative way. After two

years in hibernation, it was time to dust off the cobwebs off my bike and pump up those tyres. The long bike ride reintroduced me to the beautiful surrounds that we live in and continue to amaze me. My mind was then brought to prayers of thanksgiving for the ability to ride my bike and enjoy the beauty around me. It was also terrific to see so many families out and about together. I won't mention the "sore saddle" feeling that kicked in the next day!

I hope that you are all OK and able to make contact with those around you. If you are part of a parish group, are you able to contact members of your group to say G'day and maybe even continue the group in its work? The Parish Child Safety Committee met on Friday for our monthly meeting via Zoom and we were able to progress a bit further with our work. The Liturgy Committee are due to meet on Wednesday evening so I will propose for those members to meet via Zoom and reflect on the readings for the month of June. If you would like to be part of this meeting (no experience required) please email the parish and I'll send you a Zoom invite.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVGI57fNPCc>

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ABN 30 159 648 648

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10th April 2020

Pastoral Letter to Parishioners of St. Mary of the Cross Catholic Parish, Mordialloc and Aspendale

Dear Parishioners,

There are two ways of looking at how Easter will be celebrated this year. One way is to say, what a shame that we couldn't gather in the church and have the Easter ceremonies as we have in the past or another way is to say, isn't it great that we could still have our Easter ceremonies in the comfort of our homes and to then send the links to others so that they could partake in the online liturgies. It is imperative that we keep looking for the positives in our everyday, in every little part of our day as we stay at home and feel somewhat restrained. How did they cope 100 years ago when the Spanish flu forced people into isolation and there was absolutely no technology let alone phones!

Our social distancing doesn't mean spiritual distancing. We don't isolate ourselves from this special time in our church's celebrations, we just need to do it differently. We are still Easter people, people of hope and joy who commit to a way of life that follows the example of Jesus. I think that this experience will be an opportunity for many who have drifted from their faith to again revisit what their faith means to them especially when we strip away some of those unimportant layers. The Holy Spirit cannot be isolated by a mere corona virus. It is the virus of fear that can lessen the Holy Spirit's effectiveness.

In the recorded Stations of the Cross liturgy, did you recognise the images? These quite small stations are from St. Louis' church in Aspendale. When we attend mass, we tend to walk past the prayer space that they occupy but I invite you when we are back to attending mass to come and pray before the stations. The video allows close ups of each station and an opportunity to reflect on the detail.

I would like to again thank the team who have spent many hours recording and producing the wonderful liturgies that we have all enjoyed. I just have to stand there and look good (not so easy) and then the magic of computer software takes over and there you have it! Thanks especially to Phil Hills who has spent much of his school holidays (he is the Deputy Principal at St. Macartan's, Mornington)

overseeing the production of these videos. Trent Alphonso is now assisting, and I hope to engage St. Bede's college and their offer of help with future recordings.

This Easter Sunday will be like no other. Celebrations for us all will be quite different. I will be connecting via video conference with my family which will include my brother in Newcastle and my cousin in Sydney on Sunday afternoon and we will all have a drink and a catch up together. I hope that you are able to connect with family in whatever way is appropriate.

Take care everyone and I do miss seeing you. I don't think that I could ever get used to this current way of parish life so I too, like you, long for a return to more traditional way of being parish.

I found this video inspirational, emotional and a great initiative. Couch Choir - look it up.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HezxInuN1YA>

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3rd April 2020

Pastoral Letter to Parishioners of St. Mary of the Cross Catholic Parish, Mordialloc and Aspendale

Dear Parishioners,

I received a beautiful card from 2 school children, Leila and Lucy who took the time to draw a beautiful rainbow with a flower and lots of love hearts on the front with words on the inside saying: *"Dear Fr. Andrew, we hope that you are doing OK with everything that is happening. We saw you on Sunday morning standing in front of the church and we thought it would be hard for you not to be able to say mass."*

This card and along with many other emails, texts and phone calls of support continue to lift my spirits in all that is happening at the moment. Thank you! Every effort to let others know that they are being thought of at this time is so important. Let's keep this up with each other.

The Parish Pastoral Council continue to call all parishioners aged 65 + and "check in on them". We will endeavour to ring those who are between 45 and 64 and see how they are going as well.

I thank a small team of people who are assisting with the production of the recorded mass being uploaded onto the website. Thanks Phil, Michelle, Berna, Tanya, Michael and Bernadette. We'll keep this initiative going. Please check the website for updates.

I encourage you to have a break from all the news that bombards us regarding Coronavirus. There is no reprieve and unless we deliberately choose not to watch the news or read the newspaper headline, it is at the forefront of our thoughts. We have to be updated with relevant news but let us be mindful that we need to "turn-off" from that news and fill our minds with news and information of other kinds. This is where prayer and meditation can be of assistance because it allows our minds to have a break. I find meditation most helpful for me.

I need to address the elephant in the room also and that is our Thanksgiving and financial support of the parish. Parishioners who contribute to the Thanksgiving by envelope (cash), may be concerned that their giving will fall behind over the next few months when the churches are closed for liturgical celebrations. During this time, you are under no obligations to make up the arrears, particularly if you are experiencing

hardship. However, if you are in a position to continue your contributions these are gratefully appreciated.

You may wish to change your method of giving to a “set and forget” Direct Debit or Credit Card facility (and a switch back to envelopes later on if you choose). Please email or call the Parish Office to discuss your options.

In addition, many of you generously support the Presbytery (First) Collection on Sundays. As this is traditionally cash only, contributions will be impacted. But if you wish, you can continue to support the Presbytery Collection which provides for the parish priest, you may do so through Direct Debit or Credit Card. Again, just contact the parish office via phone or email to discuss your options.

We are living times of great challenge. These early days of isolation may be received as a welcome from the busyness of normal life or a time of stress and tension especially amongst family members. Not being able to visit and hug our loved ones seems so counter cultural but we are called to be part of the solution to the problem and stay at home. Let’s hang in there and do our bit.

Lent continues until Holy Thursday, so our time of Lenten retreat is for a few more days. Can we embrace these next days of a “new retreat”? Taking some of the extra time in prayer recalling the gospel of the First Sunday of Lent when Jesus went into the desert for 40 days. Those days called upon Jesus to rely on what was truly important. He was tempted in every human way and Jesus gives us an example of how we are to respond. That is to trust in God the Father. We have this remarkable opportunity to strip away those layers of unimportance and focus on what is important. May this time be a time for “new fruit” to emerge.

I leave you with a link to a lovely story appropriate for Palm Sunday.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8j8802Mw-0>

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27th March 2020

Pastoral Letter to Parishioners of St. Mary of the Cross Catholic Parish, Mordialloc and Aspendale

Dear Parishioners,

So much has happened in one week. Not being able to celebrate mass with you has been really tough. I feel like my hands have been tied behind my back and I am still expected to go on ministering as a priest. Being present to you and the sacraments is my lifeblood but that just has to go on hold. I am now asked to minister in other ways that are possible.

Last weekend I was present at all the masses for 30 minutes prior to the start time just to anticipate those who still thought that mass was being offered. It was heartbreaking to announce to those few who came that mass wasn't offered. I was able to hand them a newsletter and refer them to the parish website.

As I mentioned in the last letter, the parish website is our main form of contact with you all. The newsletter, prayer resources and links are all there and hopefully a link to a mass said by me that has been recorded. My hope that is that this will be a weekly mass for all of you to watch.

I have met with the Parish Pastoral Council in a video conference during the week. We will continue to operate as a council addressing the needs of the parish. The most important need is that of staying connected. For those with access to the internet then that is a great start, but we are aware that many parishioners don't have access. We are also concerned about the elderly and vulnerable parishioners, so I have asked councillors to call all parishioners who are aged 70 + to check in on them. This becomes our starting point for maintaining our parish community links.

As government guidelines advise us to stay indoors as much as possible (until the inevitable lock down), we are discouraging people from coming to the parish office. The churches are closed even for private prayer and the parish staff (Bernadette, Susan and Ann) are working remotely from home. Please call or email with any questions as these forms of communication are being monitored remotely. There will be some newsletters on the church doors for parishioners who are passing by and who cannot access the internet but maybe if you know someone nearby who

isn't connected to the internet then maybe you could print off the newsletter and drop it into their letterbox followed up by a phone call?

Our new way of being calls us to look after ourselves and our loved ones. Making sure that we stay healthy physically, emotionally and spiritually is crucial. Eat well, do exercise, check in with family and friends and keep those prayers going. This may be a time to try different ways of praying like Christian mediation or Lectio Divina? What about the De La Daily Prayer app – meditate daily on words from the Founder of the De La Salle Brothers, St John Baptist de La Salle - download FREE from the app store. We may be exercising social distancing but not spiritually distancing!!

Can I leave you with this prayer? What about praying it as a family? What about praying it at 12pm this Sunday knowing that other parishioners are doing the same making us united in prayer?

**Almighty and all-merciful God,
lover of the human race, healer of all our wounds,
in whom there is no shadow of death,
strengthen us in this time of crisis;
grant wisdom and courage to our leaders;
watch over all medical people
as they tend the sick and work for a cure;
stir in us a sense of solidarity beyond all isolation;
if our doors are closed, let our hearts be open.
By the power of your love destroy the virus of fear,
that hope may never die
and the light of Easter, the triumph of life,
may shine upon us and the whole world.
Through Jesus Christ, the Lord risen from the dead,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.**

**St. Brigid.... pray for us.
St. Louis.... pray for us.
St. Mary of the Cross.... pray for us.**

Yours in Christ,

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19th March 2020

Pastoral Letter to Parishioners of St. Mary of the Cross Catholic Parish, Mordialloc and Aspendale

Dear Parishioners,

We are living in unprecedented times with changes to how we live every day. The COVID-19 pandemic is challenging all of us to readjust how we live and interact with each other. It is causing major changes to our everyday lives along with anxiety and confusion. Many of us, particularly the elderly and vulnerable will have feelings of loneliness, isolation and fear. Please know that this is a normal reaction and hopefully will subside as we move into our new reality. This change will be an opportunity for us to be more vigilant in our hygiene practices and how we look out for each other as parishioners.

On 18 March 2020, after prayerful consideration and reflection, the Bishops of Victoria announced the suspension of public liturgies and celebrations of Mass, until further notice for the health and safety of the community. In light of this, all Catholics in Victoria are dispensed from their Sunday obligation until further notice (canon 1248).

I would never have thought that in my lifetime Sunday masses would be suspended. As I still get my head around this change, I know that we will maintain a level of connectedness in other ways. We may not be able to attend a public liturgy, but we can still look out for each other and call one another. May I suggest using a video communication medium like Facetime occasionally to call each other rather than just an audio call. Seeing the person at the other end of the conversation is readily available and more of an encounter than just a chat.

For those able to access the internet, then I would suggest checking in on the parish website often as a way of know what is happening in our parish (www.cam.org.au/mordiallocaspendale). The website will have links to the Archdiocesan news as well as ways to access online Mass and other resources to assist you with prayer and other opportunities to maintain your spiritual life. For those who don't have access to the internet then please pop into the parish office to pick up any printed material that might be helpful. Parish newsletters will be

printed and available at both church entrance doors for parishioners to pick up.

At this stage, the parish office will operate its normal hours. If this changes then be assured that the phones messages and emails are monitored. Feel free to email or call the office for any questions you might have.

At this stage, baptisms, funerals and weddings can occur following the guidelines of a carefully limited congregation and distancing between participants. Confirmations, and first Eucharists are postponed. First rite Reconciliation is available by appointment. St. Louis' church will be open during business hours so feel free to pop in for a prayer. It may be possible that the two churches will be available (limited times) on the weekend for private prayer but I will inform you if that is the case.

As we head into this fourth week of Lent and listen to the gospel of the man born blind seeing for the first time, we are asked to see with new eyes what is happening around us. What are the new opportunities for prayer and connection? How will I experience the God who is with us in this new reality? Let's remember that Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Mt. 18:20). Remember too that the church is not a building. It is the community so gather your family and reflect on the readings or join a group of friends and reflect. Do this during your normal mass going time? There are some masses that can be viewed online so maybe watch them as a way of prayer?

How many times does Jesus say, "Do not be afraid"? Jesus, then, understands all the fears and worries that we have. Jesus understands us, not only because he is divine and understands all things but because he is human and experienced all things. Go to him in prayer. And trust that he hears us and is with us.

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