

## ST MATTHEWS

### 'IN TOUCH'

Dear Parishioners

In these most challenging of times we in the church have been equally challenged as have all across society. On Saturday 21st March all parishes receive notice from Archbishop Freier informing us that as from Monday 23rd March all parish life short of essential ministry must cease. Sunday evening we also learnt that the Government had announced that places of public gathering would similarly be closed with the list of venues including places of public worship.

The Sunday following the Archbishops letter, the 22nd March, I announced that this would be the last St. Matthews service (or parish gathering) until further notice. We assume that this will be for at least six months. More likely than not it will be even longer.

In the meantime, our new vicar the Rev'd Colleen Clayton with her husband Stephen, will arrive on 28th April and begin her own responsibilities as vicar of the parish. Unfortunately, it will be within this period of suspension of parish life. Nevertheless, the positive side of this will be that it will afford her the freedom of gaining a feel for the area and church facilities and prayerfully begin her own planning for when the time is right to begin her public ministry. As she will be praying for you I trust you will be mindful of the strange circumstance and support her in your own prayers. In a word it will assure you ministry will be well set upon a solid spiritual foundation.

#### A TIME OF FAITH

For a good number of weeks, we have all been gradually drawn into the worsening story of Coronavirus. In my own case I have been particularly conscious that the story has deteriorated as we have been approaching the Easter season and consequently it has been my hope that we could at least remain open until after Easter. Unfortunately for the good of all people this has not been possible.

Nevertheless, as we have had to come to terms with our leader's decision, I have found myself reflecting anew on the message of Easter. We are very familiar with its significant themes of Last Supper, Crucifixion, the tomb both closed and empty, and Resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We know the story well and can picture many of these scenes vividly in our minds. We know the sequence of each event as the story meaningfully unfolds. But I've question does it always have to be this way. Can we go through these themes, perhaps in a different way?

I'm proposing that we are actually living the Easter event. Last Sunday it seemed like we were celebrating the Last Supper. We shared the bread and wine but really for the last time until the story completes and we are able to gather again. It certainly is a time of crucifixion. Society has certainly been brought to its knees. The old is passing away. The grief for all that we feel we are losing and the fear of death that some are experiencing with the growing number across the globe brings the issue close to our hearts. In the meantime, we live in a cloud of not knowing what lies ahead. We wonder if the struggle will end and what life will look like beyond. I sense that we will live in this very sober time for a good deal of time. It is very much like the day following Good Friday, Holy Saturday or Easter Eve. A time the earth stood still and very quiet. Our faith calls us to be patient and to trust that a light will shine as a new day dawns. It will come with a freshness and a new and greater vision. Society will awaken to a new and greater appreciation for the gift of life. It will be a resurrection. A New Spirit will energise people with an enthusiasm and compassion for one another. Our special symbol of Hope will be our new vicar. Colleen will be ready and excited to meet and greet us and begin planning for the future with us. Our new era of life in the Spirit will be an exciting time. On that day as our church doors are re-opened, we will truly celebrate by sharing the gifts of bread and wine,

those sacred elements through which we tell the very story we have been living, perhaps even more profoundly than ever before.

May this Easter season be a sacred spirit for you

Fr Geoff, (Locum vicar)

## WHAT IS CLOSED

It is important to understand that all but the essential ministries, such as a funeral, will be included in the suspension of parish life. There will be no public services in the church or gatherings of any parish groups in other facilities, such as a person's home during the shutdown. It will also mean that the Op Shop will not be open. The clear objective is that the church does not in any way contribute to the spread of the coronavirus.

## WHAT IS POSSIBLE.

This does not preclude discovering some parish response. The clearest one is by use of the telephone. Particularly conscious of our congregation, many live on their own and a friendly phone call may be just what is needed.

If you are at all savvy with the internet maybe you could find a streamed service that a number have tried to construct. The bishop has organised an online service you can connect with.

The weekly pew sheet will be available on our website ([www.stmatthewscheltenham.org.au](http://www.stmatthewscheltenham.org.au)) as will future 'In touch' letters and news updates.

The link is <https://youtube/m6rxXOvIPGI>

Of course, there is always Songs of Praise on ABC channel 2 Sunday at 11am. (Don't get too comfortable we need you back in church).

## SUPPORTING THE PARISH

I have two suggestions for further support of the parish.

It's important that the church continues to receive your financial support during this time. Can you please find a way to make your offertory (or to make a donation) either by dropping into the office your stewardship envelope/s (whether weekly or monthly is naturally welcomed). Some will prefer to make a direct contribution via bank details.

Bank: Commonwealth Bank

Account Name: St Matthew's Anglican Church

BSB: 06 3119

Account Number: 10445437

Reference: 'your surname' or 'your envelope number' or 'offertory'

Please pray for one another. When you sing Happy Birthday when washing hands make sure it is a prayer by including someone's name you are concerned about. You might even offer your hand washing prayer occasionally as a prayer to Jesus.

## REFLECTIONS ON THIS TROUBLED TIME

*Following a chat with a gentleman struggling with the pandemic I later sent these reflections with him via email. I thought some of the thoughts might be of interest.*

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Our sense of wellbeing is attached to the core dynamics that shape our lifestyle; relationships, health, finances etc. When any of these are changed or challenged, we are emotionally affected depending upon how much importance we place upon each component of our life. This is why grief is so traumatic. Grief is the loss of things that are emotionally important to us.

The field of psychology once developed a 'grief chart' whereby they prioritised different experiences of life that are most commonly valued by people and numerically valued them 30, 20, 15, 12, 10, 8, ...hence, loved one (30), health (20), home (15), job (12), etc. By designating a numerical value to each pertinent experience, they then suggested you add the numbers of those experiences that have affected you in the last year. The higher the number was an indication of the way you were being affected and if your score was over 100 you were in danger of severe consequences, even a breakdown.

This coronavirus pandemic has potential to affect much of our life, hence the emotional impact society is experiencing at the present time.

The impact can come perhaps in two ways: On the one hand, how it threatens our current lifestyle whereby we fear possible outcomes, or on the other hand, what it takes away from us, our health, freedom of movement or money. Both fear of what might happen and grief of what we have already lost can hit us deeply. We could call it 'Psychic disruption'.

When we don't have known methods to deal with such traumatic circumstances, we can sink into despondency until a way forward appears.

At the moment without solutions (vaccine), humanity is carrying a heavy weight.

People of faith are encouraged to take time to draw upon the means to settle in spirit by their regular means of deeper interior reflection, - meditation, scripture reading, kindness and generosity etc.

On a practical note, if we are encouraged to wash our hands to the tune of 'happy birthday' then why not turn it into a simple prayer and sing happy birthday to Jesus and see how many prayers you make during a day.

There's the story of the old lady/man being asked for their favourite scripture, and the reply came, 'And it came to pass...

Hang in there, Jesus did and rose again.

Fr Geoff