



## On Solitude

### Solitude and Society: faith beyond COVID-19<sup>1</sup>

A pandemic can shake us up and disturb our equilibrium. The recent challenges of the COVID-19 global pandemic have raised acute existential questions for individuals and institutions. A question arises for disciples of Christ, whether in the churches, politics, welfare, education, business, family or any walk of life. I have wondered how we might answer the question: *what have you done with your solitude?* It may sound an odd question but it arises out of the so called 'social distancing' and enforced isolation of people and communities. For some this is a deeply anxious time for all manner of reasons. Quite a number experience this as a time of increased loneliness; something very different from being alone. We can be alone but not lonely. We can be immersed in social relations (in family, work or elsewhere) but still be extremely lonely. Solitude is a kind of intentional aloneness; a way of being that purposefully cultivates habits of being present to self, God and others. Solitude can be restorative and energising. In a recent edition of *The Economist* an article examines contemporary writings on loneliness, aloneness and solitude. The author highlights the interesting interplay between these three dimensions, and how

they might be relevant during times of isolation.<sup>2</sup>

The author notes that 'the human instinct to socialise has always been balanced by an urge to withdraw into solitude'. It was Aristotle who referred to solitude as 'the bird which flies alone'. The writer quotes from the poet John Clare's poem on solitude: 'O thou soothing solitude/ From the vain and the rude.' The British writer John Cowper Powys comments that it is 'only the cultivation of interior solitude, among crowded lives, that makes society bearable'.<sup>3</sup> David Vincent notes that the rise of modern technology is both a blessing and curse, having on the one hand introduced us to 'networked solitude' yet on the other hand made it more difficult to enjoy the benefits of solitude. As he notes, distraction is only a click away! A surveillance culture is hard to escape from and solitude is an endangered species. The author comments that the 'lockdown' and associated social isolation has put the question of solitude 'at the heart of politics'. On the one hand, it has highlighted the tragedy of those dying alone, while for others it has proved a 'strange blessing'.

In the same volume of *The Economist* one letter to the

editor reflects on the way leaders responded to the Plague of Athens (430 BCE). The writer draws attention to the remarks of Thucydides regarding the behaviour of the leaders of Athens at the time who 'stopping at nothing in their struggles for ascendancy', care little for the good of the state 'but making party caprice of the moment their only standard'.<sup>4</sup> He adds in words that ring true for today that 'In this contest the blunter of wits were most successful'.

Perhaps solitude prized by ancient and modern-day religious communities, and the religious traditions of personal devotion, have much to teach a busy and anxious society and its leaders. Perhaps those who have struggled and made friends with their aloneness, and have entered into the gift of solitude, have a resource to offer others in their loneliness. One practical consequence can be observed in the non-anxious person, especially leaders, who do not mask their own insecurities by appeal to well-worn phrases and endless spin but genuinely attend to the tough realities that people face. This capability emerges from the encounter with one's own loneliness, experience of isolation and aloneness and the more fruitful

and character-building journey into solitude.

The Christian tradition, its Scriptures and practices offer important clues for cultivating the habit of solitude. Pre-eminently Jesus was one who actively sought times of aloneness and cherished solitude. 'And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone' (Matthew 14:23). This practice proved essential for the renewal of his energy, composure and purpose as one 'who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45). Evidently solitude is embedded in the very heart of God.

by Bishop Stephen Pickard

1. A longer version of this article will be published in the September issue *Eremos*.

2. For reviews of two such works see *The Economist*, May 2-8, 2020, pp. 66-68, wherein the writer cites (a) Fay Bound Alberti, *A Biography of Loneliness*, OUP, 2020 and (b) David Vincent, *A History of Solitude*, Polity Press, 2020.

3. *The Economist*, p. 66.

4. *The Economist*, p. 12.

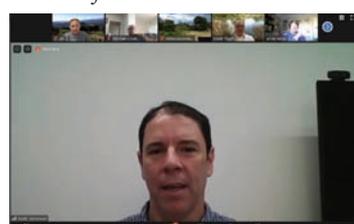
# Virtually Together for the Clergy Conference



In a Diocesan first, the Annual Clergy Conference took place from Tuesday 19 May to Thursday 21 May via the video-conferencing platform Zoom. Over a hundred clergy from all regions joined in during the three days. One of the unexpected advantages of COVID-19 was the availability of a variety of speakers from around the globe to contribute to the conference.

available to us in the love of the father and the son and the presence and empowering of the spirit. 'We can relax in the plan of God that will come to completion, we can be assured of the Spirit's presence and ministry in and through us and we can rest in the peace of Jesus.'

On day one there were two seminars from Scott Harrower, Lecturer at Ridley College, on a theological and practical perspective on dealing with trauma. He expanded on how the church and those people who compose it might be involved in working alongside the trinity in order to restore a sense of safety, community and self to those who have experienced horrific events and trauma and become trauma safe churches. Scott is the author of the book *God of All Comfort: A trinitarian response to the horrors of this world*.



Two speakers were able to zoom in in the early hours of their morning

from the UK for the Wednesday evening session. The first was Amanda Jackson, Director of the WEA Women's Commission, presenting on the topic of leadership with creativity and courage in times of challenge. She shared stories of people she has met around the world along the way and drew on the story of Judge Deborah, whose biblical model of leadership is like that of a mother (caring, pushing, seeing potential, giving life, all the while knowing nothing happens without God), and clergy were reminded that it's what you do as pastors and leaders in the everyday that gives you the mandate to then reach into lives in crisis and challenge.



Nicky Gumbel shared inspirational stories of recent life as the Vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton in the UK, seeing this pandemic as a moment for the kingdom of God to advance. He shared the steps their church has used to respond to the situation: *prayer* – the importance of prayer and hearing the Lord; *pivot* – to services and courses online, which has brought about skyrocketing involvement; *proactive* – seize the opportunities; *positive* – but not overly optimistic; *prioritise* – they have prioritised those people outside the church, aiming services at them.

He also shared how, to his surprise, he has discovered that the Alpha Evangelistic course, which he pioneered, works better online, for three reasons: i) more people come – they have more time, they don't have to travel so it's shorter, and there's greater flexibility for people in different situations; ii) people are more relaxed – they are

sitting in their own home; iii) better connection – people actually opened up more online and formed deeper connections sooner.



Throughout the conference there were local stories, from clergy working in different ministry fields and parish contexts, to share on how their parish or ministry has been affected (practically, relationally, workload, finances, morale?), how it has adapted to restrictions, how this has been received and what changes might have been seen as a result, and any changes they might make for the future.

Stories came from Reverend Gaynor Elder sharing on Hospital Chaplaincy and opportunities she has had to talk to people receiving no other visitors, Reverend Sally Cullen on Rural chaplaincy and Binda parish and the challenges of those without ready access to technology, Reverend Tim Narraway on School chaplaincy during school closures, Jane Carmody on Braidwood parish and how they have continued operating without a parish rector, Reverend Ian Powell sharing about Wanniasa online initiative Godwithscars.com, Reverend Natalie Milliken working in Junee Correctional Centre and the particular challenges for inmates who were released early from the centre without adequate preparation.

The conference ended with a session from Bishop Mark, informing clergy and detailing the Diocesan response to the current situation.



Clergy began each day with morning prayer followed by bible studies from the lectionary led by Jackie Stoneman, former Principal of Mary Andrews College in Sydney, from John 14:18-31, John 15:1-11 and John 13:36-14:6. Clergy were reminded that as disciples we are called out by God to a secure, intimate relationship through Jesus' death and resurrection, no longer of the world but still in it, waiting for the final consummation of his plan, but also of the resources

## Clergy News

Mr Jeremy Halcrow, CEO Anglicare, has advised that the *Reverend Peter Malone* has been appointed Anglicare Manager, Chaplaincy and Mission Formation.

*The Reverend Dr Grant Bell* was collated as Archdeacon for Wagga Wagga and the South West on 3 May at St John's Wagga Wagga by Bishop Mark.

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# Collation of Reverend Jane Simmonds



L-R: Dean Phillip Saunders, Venerable Rebecca Newland, Venerable Jane Simmonds, Bishop Carol Wagner, Reverend Karly Ferguson

The Reverend Jane Simmonds was collated as Archdeacon of Deacons at All Saints Church, Bodalla during the service of Evening Prayer on 16 May.

It was a simple but moving ceremony and Jane said that she was so glad that the service took place in the local church amongst her colleagues, those with whom she has served for some time, and congregation and family representatives.

In her address, Bishop Carol

reminded deacons that they are called to be at the coalface of ministry, to walk with others in their space, wherever they are, and in love and service to bring Christ to them.

Jane is the aged and pastoral care deacon in the parish of Narooma / Bodalla. As the title suggests, she works mainly with older people: residents in the two nursing homes in Dalmeny, and those in their own homes who are sick or too frail to attend church services.

‘The lockdown and restrictions we

are going through, has really brought home to me how socially isolated these valuable older people normally are,’ she said. ‘They can go for days without seeing anyone, without having a meaningful conversation with another person, and all the other things that go with that. Yet these same people have contributed to our society all their lives. They are truly forgotten people.’

**+Carol reminded deacons that they are called to be at the coalface of ministry, to walk with others in their space, wherever they are, and in love and service to bring Christ to them.**

Like so many of us, Jane has been keeping in touch with parishioners and residents at the nursing homes with phone calls, emails, and handwritten cards. During this time she has had many deep and meaningful conversations that may not have happened otherwise.

When she was asked to conduct a shortened Anzac Day service for veterans and Legacy widows at one of the nursing homes, Jane jumped at the chance.

‘I had thought that I wouldn’t be allowed in for a long time. It was such a joy to be able to see the people in the flesh again; for us all to be together, to remember, to pray, to sing hymns, on such an important occasion. We were a very small group, all socially distanced, and with plenty of hand washing.’

Since then, Jane has been continuing to visit residents at that facility, holding a weekly worship service, as well as giving spiritual and pastoral support. She has even started a small Bible study, which is continuing to grow in numbers.

‘People are cut off from their family members and friends. They are just so hungry for meaningful contact with someone from the outside, it is a real privilege to share in their lives.’

There will be many challenges ahead for Jane in her new position as Head of the Household of the Deaconate, but she says that serving people will remain her priority: caring for older people as well as caring for the deacons, however God leads her, one step at the time.

Please continue to pray for Jane and her ministry, especially as she learns more about and adjusts to her new role.

*Story from Archdeacon Jane Simmonds*

# News from the Parish of St Paul's Temora



Reverend Nathan Manwaring performing the official part

In early April 2020 The Reverend Nathan Manwaring, Minister in charge of the Temora Parish, had the Honor of officially opening the freshly-refurbished Chapel at The Temora and District Hospital.

Nathan is also the Chairman of the Temora Christian Leaders Group. The Chapel was damaged some

time ago and after a long-awaited period, repairs were carried out.

So once again this special place in the hospital was open for people to be able to pray, reflect or maybe just sit in silence.

This is somewhere where staff, patients, families or friends can find solitude and comfort.

Our town is very grateful to have this facility available again.



Reverend Nathan and Mayor Rick Firman using COVID-19 greeting

**This is somewhere where staff, patients, families or friends can find solitude and comfort.**

At the beginning of this year St Paul's Temora mainly music Team and families decided to donate the fees from our first term, which is collected each week, to our Anglican Bushfire Emergency Appeal.

It has given us all much pleasure to

be part of the ongoing help Anglicare provides to those in need who have been so tragically affected.

We trust your wisdom in the way our donation of \$1000.00 will be used to support those most in need, God bless you all in what you do.

*Stories by Christine Smith, Temora Parish*



Sue Pike, Co-ordinator of St Paul's mainly music Temora

# A City and Country Church Work Together



*Curtin parishioners Josiah and Michael Simon with Graeme Chard from Braidwood parish*

This story began when Fran Rankin, a parishioner at Good Shepherd Curtin (married to Roger Rankin, who has assisted with the Synod elections for many years), caught Michael Simon after an 8am service one Sunday last year to say that they had been visiting their old church in Braidwood and a number of the people could not hear the service, and enquired whether he might be able to help. Michael gave Fran his phone number.

received a call from Braidwood parishioner Graeme Chard, an experienced electrician, asking if he could assist with their audio set-up.

That was in January around the time of the bushfires, so it seemed like a great opportunity to Michael to help a country church community, whose surrounding areas had suffered from the fires. He also learned St Andrew's Braidwood was without a Rector at the time.

Many conversations followed, and Michael then visited Braidwood in

late February, where they agreed on a plan and the equipment which would need to be purchased. The equipment was ordered (half paid for by generous parishioners) and it arrived ready to install on 4 April. But then COVID-19 got in the way and they had to keep delaying the installation.

On Saturday 23 May, Michael and his son Josiah were finally able to visit Braidwood and install all the equipment and left after they were happy that it is working really well.

***“Unbelievable! I’m just so excited. People are actually going to be able to hear the sermon.”***

***~ Graeme Chard***

A few things he noted happening at Braidwood parish really encouraged Michael Simon during his interactions with them.

First, since the COVID-19 lockdown some of the congregation at St Andrew's Braidwood have been listening to Good Shepherd, Curtin, live-streamed services and the interviews they have been putting together.

Second, Bishop Carol Wagner has been encouraging one of their lay leaders, Jane Carmody, to help run church. Graeme Chard related how supportive this had been for the whole church.

And finally, St Andrew's had been meeting together via Zoom each week for church.

So the church is still running despite having no Rector and not being able to meet physically.

*Thanks to Michael Simon and Graeme Chard for this story.*



*Michael and Josiah Simon testing the equipment*

# Being an Army Reserve Chaplain During 2020



*Reverend Doug Newman, Rector, Batemans Bay, and Reverend Andrew Taylor, Rector, Gungahlin Anglican Church*

It has been a challenging year around the Diocese and we are all now focused on how we journey through this time of the COVID-19 virus and what that might mean for each ministry unit.

Not so long ago, I was deployed in my role as an Army Chaplain (Reserve), to support those impacted by the bushfires. This included visiting and connecting with Batemans Bay, Bega and Batlow areas.

I was reminded that while the virus has impacted everyone a huge number of our parishes on the coast and in the southern mountains are

still working hard to help families and their communities impacted by the bushfires.

The Reverend Doug Newman from Batemans Bay said to me that the magnitude of the rebuilding task is so large that some people in his parish planning to rebuild are only having their destroyed houses removed this week. Others have relocated to temporary accommodation or have downsized to another property, and are finding as the weather changes that they have no winter clothes or heaters and are now having to buy those as they rebuild their lives.

The isolation caused by the virus

restrictions has made maintaining pastoral connections a real challenge for all the fire affected parishes and under-employment is now starting to impact on families and budgets.

During Christmas services this year Gungahlin Anglican Church took up an offering to be passed on to those in need. When the impact of the Bushfires became clear and after discussions with Reverend Doug, we decided to convert the offering into \$50 Coles gift cards that could be used for those in need.

Gift cards were dropped off to

Batemans Bay Anglican, a church in Bega and Sapphire Coast parish, for distribution to those in need.

I would encourage everyone to consider supporting and continuing to pray for those impacted by the devastating bushfires.

In Matthew 22, Jesus calls us to love the Lord our God and to love our neighbour. How is God challenging you to show love in these challenging and unusual times?

*by Reverend Andrew Taylor, Rector, Gungahlin Anglican Church*



*Reverend Andrew Taylor, Rector, Batemans Bay, and Reverend Lou Oakes Rector, Sapphire Coast Anglican Parish*

# Practising Grace in Hospitality



Photo by Spencer Davis on Unsplash.com

*Providing hospitality through gracious and patient witness is one of the key aspects of our Diocesan mission. In the following article The Reverend Elaine Farmer shares an experience of hospitality that meant a great deal to her.*

Hospitality. It's central to Christianity and somewhat sidelined at the moment. Churches closed. No Eucharist. Reduced fellowship. And beyond church? More isolation. The word 'hospitality' only used in relation to an industry. The focus *du jour* seems very much on individuals rather than community. This is understandable but says little beyond how we feel, which is not the whole point. Hospitality is about giving, not just receiving. It's about the other person, not just the one who gives. And what are we giving, apart from a cup of tea or coffee, a meal, a glass of wine?

Henri Nouwen says hospitality means creating a space where enemy can become friend.<sup>1</sup> It's not about changing that person; it's about not fearing difference. From this perspective the finest example of Christian hospitality I have experienced happened in Kuala Lumpur, in Malaysia. The church there—conservative Evangelical Anglican—didn't recognise me as priest so my presence was, I guess, confronting. Yet I was allowed to preach and the first time was, for me at least, unforgettable. It was at St Mary's Cathedral and the day was full of 'firsts'.

I had no way of predicting responses but I arrived during the early service so I could robe alone before anyone could tell me not to. Trading on diplomatic experience and the people's innate politeness, I

suspected I would not be challenged if found already robed. And I wasn't. The Dean, Jason Selvaraj, now Suffragan Bishop of West Malaysia, was an intelligent and thoughtful man, his response to what happened courageous and humbling. With grace and dignity, he invited me to join the procession and conducted me to an archdeacon's stall. I preached from the pulpit. All firsts for a woman. Only once had a woman preached there before. Not robed, she had sat in the congregation with her husband, then preached from the chancel step.

It was a complex situation. I had lived too long in the diplomatic world to be unaware that customs are to be respected, not flouted. I was a guest with the concomitant obligation to respect different ways. But I was also a priest under obligation to behave as such. I had to demonstrate equality with the men, and not shrink from challenge and rejection. Finally, I had become an icon for many Anglican women in Kuala Lumpur who wanted women ordained and would be watching keenly to see how I behaved and what would happen. It is not comfortable to be anyone's icon.

The gospel could not have been more pointedly appropriate. Jesus' parable of the man who invites people to dinner but his potential guests cry off. Servants are sent to invite others including 'the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame';<sup>2</sup> in other words, outsiders, strangers. The situation that day begged the question: who is the stranger in the kingdom of God? In my sermon, I made no political statements about groups the Church has effectively rendered 'strangers',

2. Luke 14:15-24

such as homosexuals and women. There was no need and it would have been impolite—a violation of hospitality. The message was given by my presence, robed, processing, preaching from the pulpit—if anyone wanted to hear it.

Jason heard. On his face I saw a great battle being fought out: gospel against institution and doctrine; faith against culture; change against tradition. Gospel, faith, and openness to change won. He invited me to the altar for the Great Thanksgiving. After the Words of Institution he stepped back and gestured to me to complete the prayer. He administered communion to me and then held out his hands to receive the bread and wine from me. He invited me to administer the host to the people. None of this had ever happened there before and it happened then because God whispered to one man's heart that he might be hearing God's truth, and not just the voice of the world and its ways. And he responded, courageously and graciously. There was a price for him. His bishop held his peace but not all his fellow priests did. Jason was too discreet to tell me but others did.

Jason took the stranger to the altar of God as a welcomed guest to share the feast there. A number of priests present that morning walked out but Jason remained undeterred and modelled a vision of inclusiveness in which the redemptive activity of God can transform and elevate the human soul. He demonstrated hospitality that says all are truly welcome at God's table and whatever we do there, and however we do it, that welcome must above all be evident. God is the true host; priests at the altar are substitutes who must

simply try to do the best they can. And hosts become guests themselves when strangers become gifts to them rather than objects to fear, despise or reject.

The last time I preached at St Mary's Cathedral was the Feast of the Epiphany. Between that first day and this last, Jason and I had often met over lunch at my house and discussed women's role in the Church. He even set himself to a course of reading on the subject. On that last day, as I stood in the pulpit about to preach, Jason announced to the congregation that he had changed his position and now believed that unless the Church ordained women to the priesthood, it was representing a fractured body of Christ. It was hard to continue, knowing myself the recipient of the grace of true hospitality: a gift to the stranger of space to be who she was rather than what some preferred that she be. But tears had to wait; there was a job to be done.

Jason's actions harked back to that Old Testament obligation upon Israel about strangers: *you shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.*<sup>3</sup> And to that unknown writer to the Hebrews saying *do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers.*<sup>4</sup> Sounds nice. It is what we are to aspire to. It just isn't that easy. Sheltering comfortably behind familiar tradition is often safer than stepping out into the light of Christ's gospel. But when we do step out we are reminded that we don't get Jesus without Judas. Sometimes one must die a little to oneself, which is something poor Judas couldn't manage—and neither can we most of the time. But try we must because it's a salutary fact that the three major festivals of the church—Christmas, Easter and Pentecost—all involve the coming of a stranger—a divine stranger. The child in the manger. The traveller on the road to Emmaus. The strong wind of the Spirit. All mysterious visitors who meet us with blessings—incomprehensible blessings—that challenge our beliefs but welcome us to new possibility.<sup>5</sup>

© (The Reverend) Elaine Farmer, *St Paul's Manuka*, 2020

3. Exodus 23: 9

4. Hebrews 13:2. This letter is often attributed to Paul but such attribution is unproven.

5. Koenig John, *New Testament Hospitality. Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1985, p.5.

# What's Happening



Our Diocese is committed to holistic Safe Church Ministry. This means: we commit to our pastoral, duty of care, legal and insurance obligations; with the goal that all ministries are spiritually, emotionally and physically safe; based on the premise that Diocesan parishes and ministries should be person-valuing and respectful places free from abuse and harm, for ministry to God's glory.

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