



**Churches
of Christ**
in Western Australia Inc

ON MISSION JOURNAL

COVID-19 EDITION



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ON MISSION

#MYSTORYTHROUGHCOVID19

There has been so much content bombarding us at the moment, it is easy to get overwhelmed and lost in it all.

COCWA's 'theme' for this unusual time has been geared towards Connect before Content. How have you managed to stay focussed on your mission amidst all the content, changes and decisions over the past weeks? What have you discovered in all of this? What new ways have you connected to God, family, friends and congregation? What would you write if your experience were to be hash tagged as #mystorythroughcovid19

In this mini edition, we read thoughts and reflections from some of our own.

Contributions for the On Mission Journal are always welcome. We'll be running this mini edition regularly and would love to share your story, reflections and thoughts through COVID 19. Please email your article to admin@cocwa.com.au



DOES IT MATTER?

David Bardsley, Bridgetown

As the New Year dawned on 2020, little did any of us know what it would have in store! In fact for Hilary and I, it kicked off with a big change and January saw us step down from Church leadership after 30 years.

HAVING HAD THE CONTEXT OF MY FAITH — DARE I SAY THE RELIGIOUS ASPECTS - MORE OR LESS STRIPPED AWAY, I FIND A RECURRING QUESTION DOGGING ME ABOUT ALL SORTS OF THINGS - “DOES IT MATTER?” OR PUT ANOTHER WAY, “WHAT REALLY MATTERS?”

We set out to pursue our vision for drawing folk of all persuasions together to bear witness as the one body of Christ in our community. We started to attend all the Churches in the town, including the Catholic Church, and we have been made very welcome indeed wherever we have been.

This hasn't come out of the blue as we have been coordinating Churches Together gatherings in town for some time. We have also started “Upper Room” meetings in our home. These are as inclusive as we can make them, gathering folk from any church background (or none!) for informal worship and prayer every two or three weeks on a Sunday evening. It's a supplement rather than a substitute for Sunday morning worship although there are a few attending who don't sit in pews anywhere else. It is evolving into something like “pastoral ministry without a portfolio” although it's nothing like a recognisable ministry from any conventional viewpoint.

But then in March the really big change hit. Everybody and everything is now on hold. Put the two changes together and we had all our familiar ties cut. But surprisingly, starting again from scratch in isolation, we are actually enjoying some really refreshing times using alternative liturgical formats and exploring different avenues for connecting with God. We're actually enjoying the hiatus in many ways and it couldn't have come at a better time as we were at something of a spiritual crossroads.

The way ahead seems far from clear and I'm beginning to think it never will be. Living out our faith day by day with no program or expectations or structures yields incredible freedom to just BE. This hiatus has given us marvellous breathing space but it seems to be more than that – it seems to be opening up a vision of what it is to breathe at all, a deeper engagement with God through his holy breath, the Holy Spirit. I'm coming to understand that much of what I thought was “essential” in the Christian life is perhaps peripheral to the core of what it means to be a Follower. It could even be getting in the way of connecting with God, much of it falling into the “non-essential” category. Looking back, it's as if I've spent lots of time polishing a superstructure within my comfort zone and now I'm beginning to enjoy connecting more firmly with foundational issues,

issues that Jesus himself outlined very simply... “love God, love your neighbour as yourself and tell everybody about me.” It's not exactly comfortable!

Having had the context of my faith – dare I say the religious aspects - more or less stripped away, I find a recurring question dogging me about all sorts of things - “Does it matter?” or put another way, “What really matters?”

Obviously there are some things which matter enormously and if they didn't, life wouldn't be worth living. But the question was brought into sharp focus with the potential impact of this virus. Hilary and I are in a very vulnerable age bracket and there's a disproportionate possibility that we won't survive this period. We may never see our children or grandchildren again. Does it matter? It was a tremendous release to come to the conclusion that actually, no, it doesn't! I would be desperately sad of course because I love them to bits and everybody would be heartbroken but I'm content with how things are between us now and that wouldn't change. Realistically, the worst case is that we lose a few years of contact and that is of course regrettable. But both Hilary and I lost our Dads when they were 15 years younger than we are now. We have really fond memories of them both and, yes, it would have been lovely for them to have seen their gorgeous grandchildren, but the impact of their lives has not been greatly affected by the loss of years. Quality always seems to over-ride quantity. Anyway, it's not our decision as to whether or not we survive and if we don't, we know where we will be!

Having dealt with that big one, we have now been given the luxury of time to consider what else matters. It's time we can use to do a spiritual stock check – how can we focus on things that help us fulfil Jesus commands and commission better? How can we cut through the thorn bushes that have grown up in our communication with God, our prayer life? How can I stay relaxed, revelling in being breathed on by the Breath of God? How can I live more closely the life God intends for me? What really, really matters? Does Church as we know it really fulfil what Jesus has in mind when he calls his followers? I think these are genuine pilgrim questions, don't you?

BLESSED IS

Ronnie Fung, Maylands Church

After the first time I ever went shooting at clay targets, my children asked me, "how was it Dad – how did you go!?"

"I don't know," I replied. "I've never done it before so I don't know if I did it well or not. I don't think I was terrible, but I'm sure I could do much better."

I feel like I could give that exact answer to the question, "How are you going throughout this whole Coronavirus pandemic?" To say that I'm doing great would be a lie. But to say things are terrible would be overstating the truth (at least in my context - I'm sure there are many who are experiencing "terrible"). The phrase I've used that seems to best to describe how I'm going has been, "I'm managing". It's neither of the extremes, but a bit of both.

That has been my personal experience during this pandemic lockdown. There's been a lot of challenges in all aspects of my life: father/husband; church leader & pastor; and even just being a person of character and integrity. On any given day, I would think, "Given the circumstances, I think I'm doing ok with being this ____." (Fill the blank with a role), only to be usurped by this thought just hours later, "I stink at being this ____!" (Fill in blank with the same role).

I've found it hard to find my footing over the last month partly due to the lack of understanding and articulating what I'm truly feeling. It's been an unusual experience of constantly feeling "two sides of the coin":

- It's been great to have all this time with the family and it's been challenging to have all this time with the family.

- I am so blessed to be part of this wonderful city and arguably one of the best places to be during a global pandemic, yet at the same time, being in constant concern for our families living in New York, one of the worst places to be during this crisis.
- All this forced isolation has been a great opportunity to retreat in the Lord's presence but it is also this context of isolation, that has generated so much disappointment in my family because of changes in our plans to visit those loved ones in New York.

Without a doubt people have their own versions of this; I know I'm not the only one.

It has been hard to settle and rest in the joy of the Lord. But the Lord reminded me of two images recently to help me "recalibrate".

The first was an image of a tree planted by streams of water that flourished in all seasons; the second, a house built on a rock that withstood the rising waters of a flashflood storm. The first image brought me to Psalm 1, while the second took me to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. Both the psalmist and Jesus begin with "Blessed is/Blessed are" (respectively) and I was reminded that even when I don't know how to do this, when we can't figure out how to feel or find the joy, we've been given a simple path to be and feel blessed in all circumstances: Blessed is the one who delights in the instructions of God and devours them day in and day out. And blessed are those who do not just listen to those instructions but acts on them.

May God lead you to be the tree planted by streams of water and the house built on a rock.



UNPRECEDENTED

Ian Kirk, Bassendean Church

What an unprecedented time! I asked a 97 year old recently if she had ever seen anything like this. She said "Never; not in my life". Wow!

Who would have thought that on Sunday the 22nd March, we would be following the 1 person per 4 square metre rule, and on Sunday the 29th March, we would be closing our church doors. For us at Basso, it was the first time in 107 years that we had done this!

But during this unsettling time, I found great comfort in Psalm 62: "Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken." We are kept from being shaken because of who the Lord is to us. Praise His name!

I was also encouraged to trust in God's sovereignty during this time of fear and uncertainty. In particular, I considered what God was doing at this time. I even dwelt on the return of our Lord Jesus; especially after reading Luke 21:26-28 "People will faint from terror . . . when these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." God is in control, and we can lift our head high, for it is well with our soul. Praise God!

Before the pandemic, I was asked to conduct a funeral for a well-known Aboriginal lady, with an expected attendance of a thousand people. This number was reduced to fifty, and then two days beforehand, it was reduced further to ten! Yet, what a special service we had as we celebrated her faith

and service, and sang "He raised me up". She was the first Aboriginal teacher in WA, and a lover of Jesus.

What about Anzac Day! At 6am Colleen and I went to the end of our driveway, only to be pleasantly surprised to see our neighbours doing the same thing. With a candle and mobile in hand, we played the Last Post, commemorating Anzac Day COVID-19 way. We then had a great chat with our neighbours, while the sun rose. How brilliant it was to share like this.

Over the weeks, this "connecting with each other", with social distancing measures in place, has really impacted me. It has taught me afresh of the importance of engaging with community people and church people. We were made for this and saved for this.

As a church, we were to start our big physical church build. That's on hold! But what's not been on hold is God doing a spiritual build amongst us. In 1 Peter 2:4-5 we read: "As you come to him, the living Stone - rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him - you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

What a build! All glory be to Him!

#SPIRESLIFECHURCHSTORYTHRUCOVID19

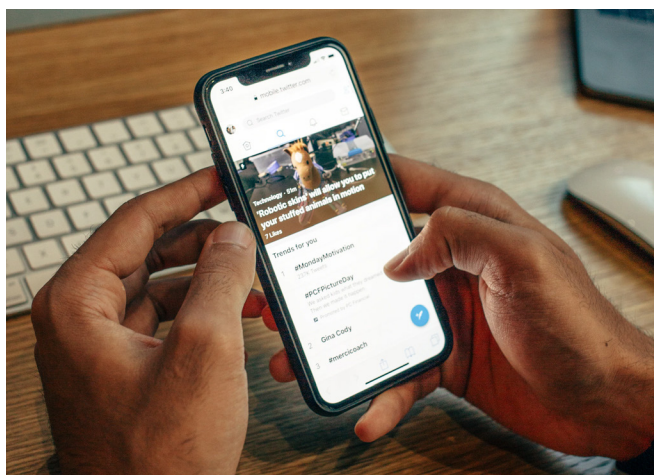
Gordon Bassett, Spires Life Church

1 DEALING WITH CONTENT AND NEWS

Our response has been to stay up to date with federal and state protocols via:

- i) The Prime Minister's announcements.
- ii) The Premier's announcements.
- iii) The Corona virus app.
- iv) Mygov app.

And to pay no attention to the many social media expressions of how best to handle and respond to the virus; nor to explore any wild ideas or conspiracy theories about how and why the virus may have begun.



2 CONNECTION WITH GOD IN THIS DIFFERENT SEASON

For me this is two-fold: firstly I have needed to ensure that I maintain and grow in my personal relationship with God and receive direction from Him. And secondly, in this non gathering season to do my best to shepherd the flock.

So my daily time with God in prayer and in His word and in contemplation is essential.

I know that for many people their routine will have been changed dramatically whereas for me, while there are numerous adjustments because of the necessary protocols, my routine has continued with much the same disciplines as before COVID19.

Our church staff of four, continues to meet at the church office, and in fact we are not all there at the same time, so it is relatively easy to maintain social distancing.

My wife is now working from home, so it works for us to have me working at the church office. With the church staff, roles have changed for them as we have moved from essentially planning, preparing and presenting events for people gathering, to preparing and recording online media presentations for a broader audience.

3 STAYING FOCUSSED ON MISSION

The main focus of our mission remains to reach people for Jesus. So while our Sunday online presentations are to keep the people of Spires Life Church connected, they are also to reach out to people who need to connect to God through faith in Christ.

Spires Life Church has collaborated with The Rocks Church in some of the detail in recording and editing to ensure that our presentations comply with protocols and are presented with excellence. In order for some of this to happen, prior to the protocols tightening up, The Rocks Church worship team and members of Spires Life Church worship team collaborated to record numerous worship songs which are now edited into our weekly presentations.

And in the middle of this restrictive season we celebrated Easter, as a church, on Good Friday and on Easter Sunday, with our online presentations where people are able to "chat" as the presentation unfolds. And the people who are engaging with these presentations are not just our local people, but from most states in Australia and from other places around the world. What appeared as a restriction on the ministry of the church has become a broader reach by the church.

PASTORAL CARE

In this non-gathering season with restrictive protocols, many people are finding it difficult in terms of less interaction with others. Because our church has a strong small groups ministry, each group's use of electronic media via various apps has enabled people to stay in touch on a daily basis, and for weekly small group "gatherings" "zoom" has become the interactive app of choice to process biblical material and to pray together.

We have also put together a "pastoral care grid" or team where people who have not historically been part of one of our small groups have gladly said "yes" to being part of one of our "prayer & care" teams where they receive a call and prayer once or twice a week.

Our Teenage High School Youth meet every Friday evening at 7.00pm via interactive ZOOM including about 50 youth. Our Young Adults also continue to connect on a regular basis via electronic media.



REGULAR COMMUNICATION

Regular communication is a great value always, but particularly in this season, between everyone in the church in order to stay connected. But it is true that the "crisis" gives the opportunity for leaders to exercise leadership in ways that a regular season does not. And communication is essential in order to lead.

So we have done our best to keep people up to date with government protocols as well as how to access our various media presentations. Our communication has also related to financial giving, and to our benefit, prior to the COVID19 restrictions relating to not gathering, more than 90% of our giving was received electronically by direct giving into the church account or via the tithe app. So in this season that previous discipline and routine has served us well. And communication to the church to keep people up to date with the ongoing financial needs in spite of not gathering has been crafted to encourage people to stay connected in this way also.

How have we communicated? We have done this via social media, emails, video presentations and other media depending on whether we are trying to reach the whole church data base or various categories and teams of people within the church. And Elvanto our church management software program is of great assistance in this matter.

And our communication essentially is to keep people connected with one another, with God, with the mission and to be encouraged and to keep a sweet spirit in demanding times.

