

Marist Fathers Australian Province Provincial Circular

No 4 - Aug 2021



From the Provincial

Confreres,

Greetings from lockdown.

Last week on my family's Viber Family -Chat, Bec, wife of my nephew Dominic, sent a message from lockdown: *"I'm really enjoying the small moments of our going for walks together, eating meals together, yes – even working together! Perhaps, oddly, I think I'll look back on this time with a lot of fond memories for all those little shared moments. When we go for walks, we are genuinely joyful when we find a new street we've not walked down before, or a bird's nest in a tree, or seeing magnolias in bloom, or spotting the first green buds of spring."*

Like Bec and Dominic, most of us at this time are experiencing the confinement of lockdown (some of our confreres have been experiencing confinement of one sort or another, often long before the pandemic). But, like them, we may have also found a delight in focusing on the simple things. We may have learnt to discern which of those things around us are truly necessary and to choose to bestow our attention on them.

Whether we wish it or not, in so doing we have entered into the experience of the ancient desert fathers and mothers. To survive and flourish in the desert, they nurtured two essential attitudes of **attentiveness** and **detachment**. Together both

enable a person in the confines of life's situations when to pay attention and when to let go, what to concentrate on and what to ignore, how to survive and how to be detached from what is not really necessary.

Attentiveness, giving our attention, is a gift of ourselves in response to the gift that the other, creation, God, our neighbour, is to us. A turning towards and waiting upon the other as other, setting aside our own desires, needs, judgements, prejudices, allowing space where we may grasp the mystery of the other – the created thing in itself, the life of our fellow human being. Being attentive does not require a furrowed brow, an effort of paying attention, but an open, generous, wondering welcome of a presence. *"True attentiveness leaves itself perpetually open to surprise."* (Simone Weil)

To be so open, or course, requires the detachment required to discern and to embrace what is truly valuable in life. Beldon C. Lane* writes: *"Our conditioning as members of a consumer society prevents us from abandoning hope that we might be able to see and do everything. To move slowly and deliberately through the world, attending to one thing at a time, strikes us a radically subversive. . . Plagued by a highly diffused attention, we give ourselves to everything lightly. . . In saying yes to everything, we attend to nothing. One*

can only love what one stops to observe."

Giving our full attention to the other is a kind of contemplation. As Francis de Sales has said, "Contemplation is simply the mind's loving, unmixed, permanent attention to the things of God."

The desert fathers and mothers learnt from their attentiveness to and detachment from the world around them to be fully present in any given moment to the God, who was always present to them. Their style of prayer grew to reflect their desert environment of simplicity and redundancy: *"Attending over and over to the same repetitive detail with unblinking watchfulness became the highest aim of desert prayer. Only as one's attention was narrowly focused – by means of a simple, repetitive prayer (e.g. the Jesus Prayer) – could one learn gradually to be fully present (to the Mystery), without distraction."* (Belden C. Lane*).

So, through contemplative prayer we can learn the skill to gaze upon our neighbour with the loving contemplation of God, who delights in his people.

With a heart that exercises attentiveness, whether to the small creatures of the desert or to God in prayer, we can become truly available to others, open to the person before us, in all of his or her otherness. *"To love someone is to grant him or her the gift of one's pure and undivided attention, without preconceived expectations of what the other person needs, what we imagine to be best in the situation, what particular results we want to engineer. This is a love finally purged of the ego's calculating desires, a love without strings. It contemplates other people with the same wonder it has found in*



contemplating God.” (Belden C. Lane*)

Attention was a significant item in the thought of Simone Weil. Here Robert Zaretsky* shares an insight from her: *“Reverence is the work of attention. In fact, reverence is attention. The act of giving oneself – turning away from one’s own self and turning toward the world, making a place for others by placing one’s own self in a subordinate position – is true attention. Attentiveness entails the difficult task of waiting, not for the world to take note of us, but for us to take note of the world.”*

Once we have come out of this crisis, let us hope that we not return to the distractions of many things, that we keep on with our giving attention to the fewer important things, so that Bec’s little shared moments continue and not remain only fond memories. Thanking you for your attention, Tony.

* By happy chance, Terry Garrett recently lent me a book Belden C. Lane: *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes (1998)*, which, together with Robert Zaretsky: *The Subversive Simone Weil (2021)*, has assisted me with putting together these few thoughts from out of lockdown.



Provincial Diary

Sep 7

Provincial Finance Committee

Sep 9

Professional Standards Panel

Sep 28

Provincial Council

Oct 19

Provincial Council

CLOC

There were no meetings in July/August. The Provincial had a personal Zoom meeting with the Superior General and Ben McKenna in early July.

Provincial Council

At its July and August meetings the Council treated the following:

- The present status of the Chapter declarations and decisions now before the General Administration.
- Advancing the Decisions of the Chapter – the parishes.
- New members for the Provincial Finance Committee.
- Current Professional Standards matters.
- Marist Mission Centre Report including development of new structure.
- A Register of Benefactors.

Season of Creation

Season of Creation, held from 1 September–4 October is a worldwide ecumenical event which urges all Christians to contemplate and act to protect the gift of God’s creation.

This year’s theme of “A Home for All? Renewing the *Oikos* of God” urges all to work together to do all we can for our common home in crisis.

The Orthodox liturgical year begins on 1 September with prayer to God the Creator. In 1989, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Dimitrios I, declared this day a day of prayer for all creation.

The practice spread to other Christian communities around the world, and in 2015, Pope Francis formally invited Catholics to join in keeping 1

September as a *Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation*.

Meanwhile, at St Stephen’s Lutheran Church in Adelaide in 2000, Norman Habel and the congregation decided to celebrate creation for four weeks. Dr Habel further developed this initiative into a *Season of Creation* with the Uniting Church of Australia. It was eventually taken up by the ecumenical movement internationally through the World Council of Churches.

Various groups now celebrate the *Season of Creation* beginning with the *World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation* on 1 September and continuing until 4 October, the feast of St Francis of Assisi, patron saint of ecology.

While this *Season of Creation* is not an official liturgical season in our Catholic liturgical calendar, Pope Francis has encouraged us to make this a special time of prayer and action, in common with others, in caring for our common home.

Calendar

Provincial Retreats 2021: It is hoped that the northern retreats scheduled for September 12 – 17, at Ormiston, Qld will take place.

The southern retreat has been cancelled because of the uncertainty from the COVID-19 outbreaks. Communities may arrange their own retreats at the scheduled time.

Jubilarians’ Celebration: The Mass and dinner scheduled for Friday, 24 September, has been postponed. Another date may be set for later in the year if COVID-19 permits.

Information

Status of the 2021 Provincial Chapter Declarations and Decisions.

In accordance with Const. 174, the Declarations and Decisions of the Chapter were submitted for approval by the Superior General in March of this year.

As the decisions on **governance restructures** and associated **statutes** were a novel proposal for the Society, the General Administration chose to refer the matter to the Congregation

Deaths

Fr Gregory Laurence Ferguson (Australia) who died on 23 June 2021



Fr Thomas Tuohy (Europe / Ireland) who died on 10 July 2021.

Br Mikaele Cilicewa (Oceania / Fiji) who died on 24 July 2021.



Madge Mullen, sister of Jim Esler died on 14 July 2021.

Mika Waqavotuware, brother of Pio, who died in July 2021. Pio has also lost two nephews to the virus.

for Religious before giving further consideration to their approval.

The Congregation has yet to respond. We therefore still await the approval of these fundamental matters.

In May the Superior General, with the advice of his council, gave his approval to the Chapter's decisions on **parishes**, the future of the **Hunters Hill properties**, **vocations**, and **aged care**.

Register of Benefactors

The province has previously been informed of the intention to draw up

a register of benefactors to be held at the provincial office. For this we need the participation of all in drawing it up. Members are invited to give some thought perhaps in conversation with others, to nominating those people, our benefactors, who have been significant in their support, both financial and otherwise, to the life and mission of the Australian Province.

Please send to the provincial office your nominations with the following information:

- House/Ministry
- Name of benefactor
- Period
- Nature of contribution

"Omnes Gentes" Ministry, Marayong

News from Rome is that Kevin Medilo, the superior of the community, is booked on an Air Singapore flight to Sydney, due to arrive and begin his quarantine-time on September 15.

Of course, these plans can change at any time – as they have already changed a few times.

Health and Aged Care Committee.

The members, announced in the previous circular, will be gathered together for the inaugural meeting and orientation once lockdown restrictions are lifted.

Personnel

Our Elders

The COVID-19 restrictions have again curtailed visits to our brothers in aged care facilities.

Jim Harding moved into Southern Cross Aged Care, Marsfield just as the



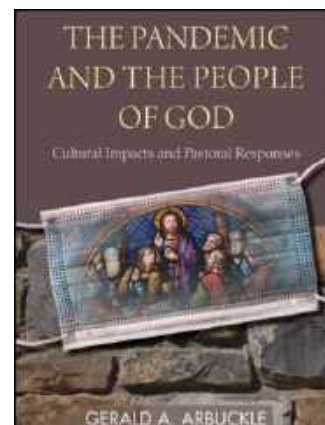
latest lockdown began. Jim has settled in well at Marsfield, joining John V. Walsh, Tony King, Jim Esler, John Burke and Bill Ryder. Jim reports that he is happy to have decided on making the move when he did.

Paul Glynn: Paul has been diagnosed with cancer. He has an enlarged prostate and it appears to have metastasized to his hip and a rib. There seems to be no doubt about the cancer, just what treatment will be given is subject to a number of tests.

Publications

Gerald Arbuckle

Prolific Gerald has produced another book for our times: **The Pandemic and The People of God: Cultural Impacts and Pastoral Responses (Orbis)**



Among the endorsements:

"The best book I have read on the pandemic. After an unflinching diagnosis, the book is a summons to radical, active, transformative hope among those who have the wits and the courage to 're-found' viable community. It is framed according to Catholic Social Teaching but has a deep appeal for those of us outside that particular frame of reference. In Arbuckle's knowing hands the pandemic becomes a venue for radical restorative hope." —Walter Brueggemann, author, *A Gospel of Hope*

"The pandemic has caused cultural chaos throughout the world, and only through creative and inspired leadership that is convinced of the common good can all God's people be led to a refounding of cultural

stability. Like Pope Francis, Arbuckle is convinced that this can be effectively done by living out gospel values as we engage in health care reform, politics, racial and ecological justice, and the economy. These wise pages lay out the agenda for the church's mission in a post-COVID world." —Stephen Bevans, SVD, co-author, Constants in Context

Holiday accommodation

As a twelve-month trial the provincial administration will assist members of the province in obtaining holiday accommodation by way of **rental holiday apartments** at a time and place of their choosing.

Guidelines for booking serviced accommodation:

- The cost of renting the apartment needs to be consistent with the values of our Marist religious life.
- Confreres planning their holidays will contact the provincial administration nominating the intended holiday location and be assisted in finding suitable accommodation, arranging the booking and paying for the accommodation.
- Provincial financed accommodation covers the period of annual leave, i.e. a maximum of four weeks. These may be taken together or in shorter periods according to need.

- Living expenses, holiday allowance and travel are normally provided by the individual's community or himself.
- Family members are not included under this arrangement – unless a cost sharing arrangement is negotiated prior to the booking.
- **Concerning road trips:** The above arrangements are intended to substitute for stays at Currumbin, a single venue that was available to Marists gratis. Previously road trips, involving staying at a variety of places, had not be subsidised. However, arrangements for covering *the cost of accommodation* on a road trip may be negotiated with the administration.

JPICC Corner

Provincial Committee for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

Marist Family Zooms

Members of the Marist Family JPIC have met several times during the pandemic lockdowns, the most recent being on Aug 10.

Discussions included a response to COVID and ecological issues in the Pacific-Asia region, each member undertaking to connect with a separate Marist group, surveying their needs and recommending appropriate responses.



Clockwise from above: Herston celebrations for Michael Carroll (birthday) and Harry Moore (56 years ordained). | In Rome, ordination anniversaries of John Larsen (40 years) and Pat Devlin (50 years). | New signs, Villa Maria precinct. | Kerrie Sanders presenting a self-isolating David Wilson with his birthday cake, Montbel. | Honouring our benefactors, chapel sign retrieved from Currumbin.

