



THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO RESET

This is an opportunity to RESET. I can not count the number of times I've heard someone say that over these past weeks. Perhaps because life is slower, there is a spaciousness that fosters deeper reflection and contemplation, and I've been seeking to make the very best of the gift of having more time. Isn't that what we have so often desired?

So what could it mean for our Cathedral Parish and our Church to RESET? To reset is "setting, adjusting, or fixing something in a new or different way." COVID-19 has already reset us. We are all adjusting and are learning to be more adaptable. Reflection on our practice of ministry and our way of being Church is always needed, but challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic we're asking with greater depth and sense of urgency what's essential to us, essential to our identity as the Church, the People of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit?

We ask these questions and many more while our Church buildings have been closed, when public celebrations of the liturgy and the sacraments have not been possible, gatherings of people have been prohibited and we have needed to stay home, self-isolating. We ask these questions within the context of a much larger global threat to human life, unprecedented in our time, forcing government leaders to respond to both the health and economic impacts of COVID-19, plunging us into a state of emergency.



Daniel Ang writes that "In this strange and unchosen landscape, the Church cannot afford to read off old maps, at least not if the mission to bring people to Christ and Christ to people has higher priority than our methods."¹ Pastoral Care, Faith formation, Service, Outreach, the pursuit of Justice and Mercy, Prayer and Worship are all essential to our communal identity and mission. How are we resetting?

The digital frontier offers us opportunities to adapt and reset. As we enter this frontier we need to discern the effectiveness of such adaptation and resetting, looking to the fruits that are borne of these endeavours. Like many, we've entered this frontier as novices, and what may seem like a naive desire to respond to this opportunity to reach out and connect with people where they are, it demands that we recast our missional imaginations. Over these weeks the vision of Pope Francis for parishes such as ours has resonated with great urgency than ever as he tells us that "The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be

¹Daniel Ang, <https://www.catholicweekly.com.au/big-questions-the-pandemic-our-mission-and-the-new-evangelisation/>

“the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.” This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few.”²

The Coronavirus pandemic has called on the missionary creativity, flexibility and adaptivity that Pope Francis dreams of for a missionary Church in ways that we may never have never thought possible (or necessary). We have intentionally sought to be in the homes of as many people as possible, just when we were self-isolated and unable to come together, when everything from children’s education to their parent’s employment was happening in their own homes – so too we have sought to build the Church at home also. Sarah McDonald recognises that “In this COVID-19 era, it seems the Lord is calling us “home”. May our hearts find rest and rejuvenation. May the gentle nature of domestic life restore a flourishing creativity.”³



The digital frontier has seen us create a Parish Facebook page to connect with people near and far as our first step. Live streaming Masses each day via Facebook from the Chapel at St John of God Hospital was the second. Going digital has also meant a complete rethink of the weekly Parish newsletter. After all, what news did we have? What was the purpose of this weekly communication? Who have we been trying to reach and what have we been trying to say? The very name that we give it reveals so much – was it a Mass sheet? A Pew Sheet? A Bulletin? A Newsletter? All of these presumed a gathered community of faith, yet we haven’t gathered and yet communication is more necessary than ever to bring us together as One Body, One Spirit in Christ. The desire to be connected, the opportunity of more time to read, reflect, pray and be spiritually nourished, offered us an opportunity to reset and adapt this method of communication.

Our daily live streamed Masses that included the liturgies of Holy Week have borne fruit in ways we could never have expected. One email said “11.30am each day gives me a short time to forget that I’m here on my own which I must say is not easy for an extrovert, and know that I am part of the wider prayerful community.” Another person emailed saying “11.30 am is the focal point of my day and that of many by the look of it.” Yet another wrote “God really does work in mysterious ways; who would have thought I would start ‘going to Church’ at a time when going to Church is virtually impossible, and yet it is possible because it is virtual. Curious times!”

The writer of this email continued (their communication is printed with permission),
“I wanted to thank you for the Facebook Live services. I have been questioning being Catholic for a while (not my faith but the way I practice my faith). It wasn’t until I found your services on here that I realised that being part of St Patrick’s Parish is still important to me.... I was determined to keep the faith because I didn’t think the appalling behaviour of others should drive out the people who could stay and help with the healing. But over these past few years I have succumbed to it being all too hard. I couldn’t go on because it made me feel complicit. My faith was there but I couldn’t keep marching with the band. I have maintained that I am Catholic but my heart wasn’t in it anymore...It was amidst all this that I found your Facebook streamed services. Your voice, even more comforting and familiar in this time of being removed from the people closest to us, combined with one shot inside St Pat’s Cathedral, stirred me. It’s partly pain, because now I am torn again but partly peace because there is hope too.”

To reset is to adapt, but authentic and faithful adaptation requires a dialogue between our mission and our context. The way that the mission of Christ is understood by us will subsequently shape our Church, not the other way around. Considering our way of being the Church, Daniel Izuzquiza says that “the primacy always belongs to the strategy, but the strategy, in accord with the basic principle of Christian incarnation always requires tactical alliances.”⁴ Conceived as a strategy of mission, the Church is not an end in itself, and its identity must be shaped by the mission as it is perceived. These questions of identity are important to our Church and our Parish in particular, that must always be developed in the particular context in which we find ourselves. To be a missionary Church that enters the digital frontier in order to proclaim the Gospel is to deconstruct the many borders that we may have erected over time and some of the behaviours that have contributed to a fortress mentality of ‘us and them.’

² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28.

³ Sarah McDonald, <http://animanetwork.org/2020/04/09/reawakening-the-domestic-church/>

⁴ Daniel Izuzquiza, *Rooted in Jesus Christ. Towards a Radical Ecclesiology*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 3.

We have the image of the 'Upper Room' from which the early Church was born, one that emerged from behind locked doors through the power of the Holy Spirit that inspired the disciples to emerge with the courage to exercise their missional imagination. They were sent to new frontiers, to the margins. In these days between Easter Sunday and Pentecost, as the restrictions are gradually being eased, we pray that the Holy Spirit will inspire us, with courage and imagination as we pray

*Come Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created.
And You shall renew the face of the earth.*

Fr Justin Driscoll

Bernadette Franc (Beaufort) reflects on the live streaming of Mass:

It has been a wonderful opportunity to participate in Masses and liturgies over Holy Week and Easter due to the restrictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as this ongoing service.

Whilst not being very tech savvy, I wasn't sure how this would work for me. At times there were issues such as when I tried to share the link with some of my Facebook friends through Messenger. This didn't seem to work for me.

I have been grateful though, to be a part of the live streaming celebrations, as well as being able to view some as a replay. A special thank you to Fr Justin for his very meaningful Masses, including prayers, homilies, reflections and music. I have also found that the very simple background and decor of the chapel at St John's Chapel very profound.

As always, Fr Justin has truly demonstrated the depth of his faith and his humbleness for us all. A wonderful example for all of us at this difficult time, in the most important time of our Church's celebration of Easter.

Thank you again to Fr Justin, St John of God Hospital and those who have helped as Readers.

Susan Begbie, (Ballarat East) also took the opportunity to be thankful for the live-streaming of Mass:

Thank you for having Mass every day. Most days, just knowing that I can log in to Mass and join in helps me to get through my day. On most days, I can not make it at 11.30 am due to work commitments but I do so at night. I do know that I am able to log in to other Masses from all over the world but it is different when it is a familiar face and it is local.