



## Eileen Rice – Principal

### Reflecting on leading during COVID-19.

It has been a tough time over the past few weeks. There is no denying that. In Australia we are generally not used to living with such uncertainty, unpredictability and lack of control over our choices.

The families from our community who own small businesses are really hurting. Many in our community do not know if they will have a job to return to when this is over. Families who have relatives in Italy, England and the US are worried for their health and the 'new normal' of social distancing has taken quite a bit to adjust to.

The complex nature of working from home whilst supporting children to learn from home, and in some instances, caring for preschoolers and infants at the same time, is a juggling act worthy of the cleverest magician. For many the dining table has become an open-plan work environment where on-line video conferences are held, where GoogleClassrooms meet and where glue sticks and crayons, laptops, work phones and workbooks all reside.

Throughout all of this my overwhelming sense is one of pride and deep respect for the positivity and trust in each other that permeates our school community. We have had our fair share of tough times at St Alipius and we have never shied away from what that asks of us. COVID-19 has presented us with another opportunity to respond with love rather than act out of fear. For as St John tells us: 'There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.'

I'm almost overwhelmed by the creativity of staff and families and students; by the commitment to working together to get things done; by the capacity of our staff team to make adjustments to learning that suit the needs and circumstances of students and families; by the hours of additional work that staff choose to do because they love their students.

Our staff team - like all staff teams - worked through their term break to prepare engaging learning programs to be delivered in an unfamiliar format; unfamiliar to staff and unfamiliar to their students. That is particularly tricky when your students are five to twelve years old but the patient, diligent work of our staff team has made that learning accessible to everyone.

This isn't the start in formal education that we planned for our Foundation students, nor is it the career start we wanted for our graduate teacher - or any of our staff and students for that matter. What we do know is that life doesn't often follow the path that we plan and that the more flexible, adaptive and agile we can be, the greater joy we find in the twists and turns, in the detours and unexpected destinations that life offers us.

We are learners at St Alipius. There are so many lessons to be learnt here.

We have learnt to trust our belief that staying connected is primary - and that it *is* possible without being in the same room.

We have learnt new ways to creatively use technology; for fun, for communication, for structuring learning for research and information sharing.

We have learnt anew, how important it is for teachers and students to play to their strengths rather than perform to a schedule.

We have learnt so much from our faith. Not being able to celebrate the Easter liturgies was tough and yet the message of *New Life in Jesus* sustains us. Even the tiny seed knows that in order to grow it must be dropped in dirt, covered in darkness and struggle to reach the light.

We have learnt more about positivity and perspective taking and being grateful. Early on, when we were all like the disciples in the Upper Room at Pentecost, anxious about what could happen, fearful about our changing world, Veronica Lawson and Barry Ryan's invitation to remember how privileged we are to have access to soap and water really touched us and opened our eyes. One of our staff members alerted us to the restoration of the canals in Venice as a positive outcome of this time... and then the smog lifting over the Himalayas and the pollution levels dropping in China gave us cause to be grateful. We have been looking for things to be grateful for every day and the list is huge.

The toilet paper situation had us all riled for a bit. We were, collectively as a nation, so incensed by the selfishness of those who needlessly stock-piled an essential item. We were outraged that competing for toilet paper would lead to fights in supermarket aisles. We were appalled that people would steal toilet paper. We were sad for those who went every day to look for toilet paper only to go home empty handed. It just wasn't fair - there was plenty for everyone if we just bought what we needed.

I pray that we can retain that level of anger and outrage when we look to the inequity of the distribution of resources across our world. The toilet paper metaphor will always stay with me when I wonder why there are wars, why there are people starving, why we have the enormously wealthy and the desperately poor. After all, God made enough for everyone - it is up to us to only take what we need.

COVID-19 has presented us with limitations and possibilities. We are blessed that we get to choose which mindset we take. The limitations imposed now open for us a wealth of possibilities. I am blessed to be able to live and learn within the St Alipius community during this time.