

'Lucere et Ardere'

27 March 2020

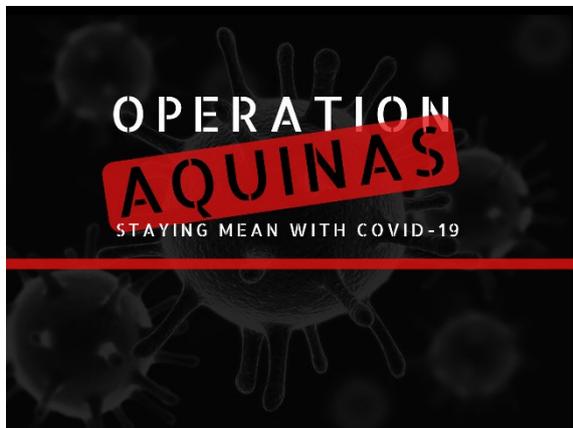
Dear Parents and Members of the Aquinas College Community

No doubt you are giving daily consideration to your family's plans for managing COVID-19. Quite a few parents have contacted us this week, either to advise us of their evolving plans or to talk through their uncertainty with one of our staff team. We are very happy for such dialogue. We are also, of course, in conversations every day with the students, the great majority of whom remain here at Aquinas and hope to continue to do so through this health emergency.

Happily, we are free of any diagnosed cases and, as you know, we have a range of protocols in place to remain so for as long as we can. It is important, nonetheless, for us to be neither naïve nor unrealistic about the weeks and months ahead. This has been part of the message to our students from the start. Given that no-one has immunity from COVID-19, and that there may not be any widely available vaccine for it for twelve months at least, all of us remain susceptible to infection from it.

The rapidity of COVID-19's spread in the Australian community, and the scaling-up of government containment measures, prompts me to write to you a second time this week.

Initiatives introduced this week



On Monday night we met with students to launch **OPERATION AQUINAS, staying mean with COVID-19**. It may be a gimmicky name, but behind it lies a detailed and agile strategy for pursuing each of the three elements of our action plan that I outlined to you in my letter on Monday:

- (a) how we maintain a safe and hygienic environment for those who are here;
- (b) how we support all our students academically; and
- (c) how we care for one another and work together as a positive and supportive community.

Each of these is on track. In particular this week, we have been implementing ways to support students in online learning, a plan which we have dubbed 'Uni on the Hill'. A key element of this is the invitation to each student to prepare a weekly plan that is submitted to the Academic Director. Another element is what we are calling 'Touching Base Face-to-Face', wherein each student nominates a learning buddy or buddies with whom he or she will stay in weekly contact for mutual accountability. Additionally, students are offering tutorial support to one another and even running mini-seminars (with appropriate social distancing, of course!). There has been an encouraging spirit of study amply evident in the College this week. Our goal has been to turn the students' primary focus away from COVID-19 to their university studies. This is why they are here.

In the event of a national lockdown

The next step in the national response is likely to be a nationwide or State-initiated lockdown of some kind. We have planned for this and will brief the students on it as and when it happens. One consequence of such a situation would be that any student who were to leave the College to go home would not be able to return until after the restrictions are lifted. We have been advised that a student wishing to return to Adelaide to university would not fit into the category of essential travel.

For those students who are at home

We want to maintain close and active links with students who are at home, and to include them as part of our learning community as best we can. I bring this to your notice:

- (a) It is essential that each student keeps in touch with his or her House Coordinator regarding their intended movements.
- (b) Students' bedrooms remain their own. They may leave what they want in their rooms, even if they are away for a while. Each room will be cleaned, locked, and not accessible to other students.
- (c) We are developing ways to keep in touch personally with each student and to support them in their learning. We will have more to say about this.
- (d) We are looking at financial arrangements for students who may be away from college for an extended period. I will be able to say more about this in the weeks ahead once we have some clearer bases on which to do our financial modelling.

Thanks

Each day we receive messages and phone-calls of appreciation and gratitude for how Aquinas is approaching these greatly changed and changing circumstances. I am made aware of each of these communications and, although I haven't been able to respond individually to everyone, please know that I have received your message and on behalf of all our team here I thank you sincerely for it. They are still early days – not even the 'end of the beginning' as the expression goes – but we have much reason to be confident for how things will unfold for Aquinas. The mood in the College remains buoyant and our commitment to the care of each of our students undiminished.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael Green".

Brother Michael Green FMS
RECTOR