



'Lucere et Ardere'

Tuesday of Holy Week
7 April 2020

Dear Parents and Members of the Aquinas Community

As this extraordinary first quarter of the academic year winds down during these days of Holy Week, I write to give you an update on developments at Aquinas and to wish you the blessings of Easter.

This week

It has been a decidedly settled week for the students, indeed probably the most focussed and academically productive of the whole term. There is a pervading mood of quiet satisfaction and achievement among them that they are well on top of their uni work and looking forward to some high grades from the assignments that many of them have due just now.

The challenges of adjusting to a more restricted lifestyle seem now to be well embraced. The College community has developed a new rhythm, one that is gentler, more mellow and – ironically enough given that ‘isolation’ is the buzzword – more communitarian than ever. The students just want to be together and they are using the supervised study times, the various initiatives of the HCs and SClub, and different spaces around the College to be so, as much as social distancing allows. The Dining Room and Gleeson Lawn have become the real hub morning, noon and night. The changing guises of these venues include their being the ‘Cher Lloyd Café’ (with a generous team of skilled volunteer baristas) to begin the day and follow the afternoon study session there, and just a giant common room for much of the time, with people painting and drawing together, playing table tennis and video games, chatting and joking, playing bocce outside, doing morning workouts, watching movies. There is a buoyant ambience, and myriad daily examples of care and support for each other.

The mid-semester break

This begins at the end of the week. A number of our South Australian students, who can and for whom it is safe, are intending to drive home for one or two weeks. We need to be super careful with this, of course, but students are well aware of their responsibilities. We will, nevertheless, have many more students at the College than is usual for the Easter break. It should go very well. The students are proving rather inventive for how to occupy time together within the mandated limits. And humour is never in short supply.

It seems almost certain now that the current arrangements for university will continue for at least the rest of the semester. We have surveyed all students as to their plans – both those here and those at home. For the most part, they tell us that where they are now (here or at home) is where they expect to stay. While this may change, it has given us a basis on which to do some planning – pastoral, academic, and financial.

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Next term

In effect, these past three weeks have allowed us to trial how a changed way of living and studying here could work, given that the majority has opted to stay in residence. The feeling among both the staff team and the students is that we can do it, and do it well. In particular, our 'Uni on the Hill' program seems to be a winner. Similarly, the arrangements for keeping everyone healthy, active and connected seem to be now established and accepted. We have also started to plan our remote academic support to those students who are at home, and to keep them as part of the community.

That leaves the matter of finances. We have been doing some detailed modelling around this, as has every business in the country. For those who are at home, I appreciate your patience while we have gone about this. We want to be fair and compassionate, as well as needing to be smart about being here as a going concern on the other side of this health crisis. We have had some productive discussions with our external contractors (particularly the caterers and cleaners), and we have looked at other areas for cost reduction. The two major Federal Government initiatives will help us greatly. On the basis of this, we feel that we can continue to offer normal levels of service and support for the students here, to continue with remote assistance for those at home, and also offer some financial relief for those who are away for an extended period.

As you would be aware, our residency fee is an annual charge and is invoiced in full at the start of the year. Students typically come and go from college during the academic year, as they need and want, but the overall fee remains the same. While we do not normally break it down into smaller segments such as semester, quarterly or weekly rates, many people do pay off the invoice in instalments, the most popular way being quarterly. We are happy for this to happen. During this current crisis, however, presuming that some students may be away for the whole of next term at least, we are able to offer people credits, concessions or refunds in **quarter-year segments**.

This is how it will work:

- ♦ If you have paid only a quarter of the year's fee so far, and you are away for next term, your annual invoice will be adjusted down by 25%; if another term, then a further 25%
- ♦ If you have already paid for Term 2, and you are returning to college after a term away, you will be offered a credit for 25% of a year's fees
- ♦ If you have already paid for the rest of the year and you are away for one or more terms, you will be offered credits in 25% segments
- ♦ If you have already paid, and you are in your final year in college, then you will be offered a refund
- ♦ No credits, concessions or refunds will be offered on the first quarter, if you have already been home for one, two or three weeks
- ♦ Additionally, we ask that a fee of \$500 be paid for each quarter that you are at home, to support the remote assistance we will be offering, and for keeping your room at college
- ♦ If you are away for an extended period and you have employment at the College (that cannot be done from home) or you are in receipt of a scholarship, your pay or your scholarship will be adjusted on a pro-rata basis

We will be in touch directly with each student who is at home with further detail on these arrangements. There is no need to do anything until you hear from us. We are open to treat each case individually and to consider everyone's circumstances.

Easter wishes

This will be an Easter like no other. Without the opportunity to celebrate religious services, or to gather as extended families, and in the face of such uncertain times ahead, with the concerns we have especially for family members at risk, we can be left feeling adrift or tempted to dwell only on what's going wrong. Yet there remains so much for which to be grateful and from which to take heart: the amazing generosity and personal investment of people who work in health care; the many who are looking out for neighbours and those in special need; those who are stepping forward with creative ways for us all to keep connected, purposeful and positive; the simple resilience and indomitable spirit of people.

Easter calls us to look beyond, to keep an eye to the horizon, to what will be. At a time of loss, anxiety and grief, Easter calls us to hope. We may not be able to light the large Easter candles in our churches this year, but why don't we all light little candles this weekend – in our homes and in our hearts? All the darkness of the universe cannot extinguish the light of the tiniest of candles. Let us treasure the hope that each flickering flame captures.

In wishing you and your family all the promise of Easter, I enclose a poem that has a special place in France where it was written. It comes from the pen of Charles Péguy, someone who came to the Christian faith late in life, having spent the major part of it as an agnostic pursuing the causes of socialism and nationalism. He was to die in uniform in an early battle of the Great War in 1914. Péguy talks about 'little hope', God's favourite small daughter.

A happy and holy Easter to you and all whom you love

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael Green". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Brother Michael Green FMS
RECTOR

Portico of the Mystery of the Second Virtue

I am, God says, Master of three virtues.

Faith is a faithful spouse.
Charity is a mother burning with devotion.
But hope is a very small girl.

I am, God says, Master of three virtues.

Charity is she who extends herself over the centuries.
But my little hope
is the one who each morning
says Good Day to us.

I am, God says, Master of three virtues.

Faith it is who keeps watch down the ages;
Charity it is who keeps watch down the ages.
But little hope it is
who goes to bed every evening,
and who gets up each morning,
having slept soundly through the night.

I am, God says, the Master of Three Virtues.

Faith is a soldier, a captain who defends a fortress.
A town belonging to the King,
On the marches of Gascony, on the marches of Lorraine.
Charity is a doctor, a Little Sister of the Poor,
Who nurses the sick, who nurses the wounded,
The poor subjects of the King,
On the marches of Gascony, on the marches of Lorraine.
But it is my little hope
Who says good-day to the poor man and the orphan.

I am, God says, the Lord of the Virtues.

Faith is a church, a cathedral rooted in the soil of France
Charity is a hospital, an alms-house which gathers up wretchedness of the world.
But without hope it would be nothing but a cemetery.

I am, God says, the Lord of the Virtues.

It is Faith who watches through centuries of centuries.
It is Charity who watches through centuries of centuries.
But it is my little hope
who lies down every evening
and gets up every morning
and really has very good nights.

I am, God says, the Lord of that virtue.

It is my little hope
who goes to sleep every evening,
in her child's bed,
after having said a good prayer,
and who wakes every morning and gets up
and says her prayers with new attention.

I am, God says, Lord of the Three Virtues.

Faith is a great tree, an oak rooted in the heart of France,
And under the wings of that tree,
Charity, my daughter Charity shelters all the distress of the world.
And my little hope is only that little promise of a bud which shows itself at the very
beginning of April.

