



*'Lucere et Ardere'*

4 May 2020

Dear Parents and Members of the Aquinas Community

The season of Easter in the northern hemisphere – where Easter's timing was originally determined – is aligned with the promise of Springtime. New buds appearing, life returning, optimism in the air. Aquinas has very much felt that way over recent days, belying the wet and chilly weather that has also arrived. By the end of this week, close to eighty-five per cent of our students will be back in college, and there is a buoyancy about.

#### **Mid-semester break**

The Easter fortnight went very well. With many more students than usual in residence for this time of year, and with all the physical-distancing and movement restrictions in place, opportunities for celebration and socialising were a challenge. Yet, Aquinians are inventive and do not readily shrink from challenge. Significant days were memorably marked – with Easter Sunday's lunch and Anzac Day's dawn service being highlights. Each day saw much small (and virtual) gathering and informal social interaction; the intrigue of the online 'Assassin' game proved absorbing; board games and diabolical jigsaw puzzles took on an interest of their own; physical quests via social media were embraced and the gym was well frequented; even a community garden was constructed and planted. Many students also had assignments on which to work, and they appreciated the physical space and peer support for being able to do this. All in all, there was an easy yet purposeful ambience prevalent.

#### **The second half of the semester**

The chief goal of last week was to help students to bring their primary focus back squarely onto their uni work: onto what they have and can do, rather than on what they may be missing. During the break, the staff team worked on an expansion of our 'Uni on the Hill' strategy which was launched in March. We think it is now a benchmark for how a university residential college can respond to a crisis such as the one in which we find ourselves. It now has its own webspace accessed via the Student Portal, with ten different sections covering academic support, holistic wellbeing, and administrative matters. It is designed both for the students here, and also for the remote assistance we are offering to those still away. We plan to continue to offer normal tutorial support, structured study times, and one-to-one guidance, and we are being creative in re-imagining an engaging collegiate life within the limits that exist. As always, our student leaders and staff have stepped up to the plate generously, people are most appreciative of what's on offer for them, and there is a positive mood around the College which helps everyone.

Across the three universities, and among the various faculties within each of them, there seems to be a range of plans and possibilities for the next two months. In several cases, there may be a chance that some face-to-face learning will resume in a matter of two or three weeks, at least for practical aspects of coursework, while in others that seems quite unlikely. It appears that all exams will be either online or recast as different assessment pieces. Some faculties have settled on their plans, while others seem still to be finalising them. We will ensure that all students are up to speed with what is scheduled for them and how to deal with it. We are also looking at how to provide optimal physical conditions for students who will be doing online timed exams.

### **Parents' weekend**

Over the last several years, we have held a 'Parents Weekend', usually timed to coincide with the intercollegiate men's and women's football. That was to have been this coming weekend. While we are unable to proceed either with that or with the footy, we hope to schedule something later in the year. One of the positive spin-offs of this health crisis, is that we have had far more direct contact with parents than in a normal year. Most of that has been by phone or email, so it would be wonderful this year, even more than others, to have the opportunity to catch up with people in person. But that will have to be a next-semester thing.

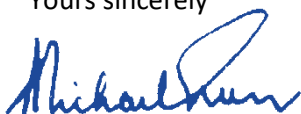
### **What's ahead**

Who knows for certain? The thing about the future is that it hasn't happened yet. What does seem more likely than we might have imagined just a couple of weeks ago, however, is that the gradual lifting of restrictions may begin sooner rather than later. There is a strong desire in the tertiary educator sector in South Australia to match what is happening in primary and secondary schools in the State: normal or close-to-normal operations. Certainly, South Australia seems better positioned than anywhere else in the country to move in this direction. There is also the tease of some local sport resuming next month, but we shall see. We are told, with good reason I am sure, that the pandemic may yet have its twists and turns, and that we shouldn't be getting too far ahead of ourselves.

I do hope, nonetheless, that you feel confident in the support we are giving the students, and with the physical, academic and personal wellbeing environment that we are creating with them. Certainly, we are much heartened by the desire of so many of them to want to be here together, and also by the feedback we have received from students at home. As always, if there is any way in which we can help you, please do not hesitate to contact us.

In the meantime, my warmest wishes to all mums for Mother's Day next Sunday!

Yours sincerely



**Brother Michael Green FMS**  
*RECTOR*