

# Along the track

## This Quiet Time

And so we are being 'let out'. Our weeks of isolation are gradually being eased and we can see that there may be an end to this stage of the dreadful virus. There is a sense of relief and growing optimism. But it has been a time of contrasts.

For many, isolation has been a quiet time, a time to stop and reflect, to enjoy the things we so often miss out on in our busy lives, the joys of family life, times of solitude and peace, time to read, to listen, time to complete the things we may have neglected or put on hold. At other times it has been stressful, bordering on frantic. Home schooling, learning to work from home, living continually in such close quarters day after day, coping with the monotony and boredom of sameness – they can test us out in ways we hadn't experienced before.

So what have we learned so far?

We don't behave well under threat. Remember the panic buying and, despite all the reassurances, we kept doing it, not just toilet paper but pasta and flour, frozen goods, cleaning products, essential supplies. And remember the stories about people coming from all over the place to buy up what they could in country stores? No-one, it seems actually saw them but they had a friend who was told by someone else that it did happen! But so many believed them – why? Remember the rudeness and aggression, especially to those at the checkout points? It brought out the worst in us.

In contrast, the virus has brought out some of our best qualities, food being left at the door for those who could not go out, others shopping for them, people keeping in touch by phone, text or email. There have been so many stories of quiet generosity. There were more people walking, more friendly greetings, food banks reported a spike in donations. Every day brought new ways to bring humour, the funny stories and songs, the poems, the videos all helped. Humour has proved to be a very important safety net. Pope Francis recently used St Thomas More's prayer for humour: "Grant me, O Lord, a good sense humour. Allow me the grace to be able to take a joke, to discover in life a bit of joy, and to be able to share it with others".

We discovered we are not all in this together. The burden of these times was not shared equally. Many had no income. They could not stockpile and an uncertain future awaits. Those in aged care were deprived of life-giving visits from family. The refugees stayed locked up and vulnerable as did prisoners while in contrast others retired to their country or seaside retreats to weather it out. Some lost loved ones and could not farewell them with a final hug

or a final goodbye or through the important rituals of grieving. There will be a lot of families around Australia for whom that's been a delayed process. Just how 'not equal' we are only really emerges at times like this.

We are realising who an 'essential worker' really is. The doctors, nurses, and medical staff, the first responders deserve our gratitude. Their commitment and care have been extraordinary. But let's not forget the cleaners, those who remove our garbage, the warehouse workers, those who drive the transports, the bus, tram and train drivers, the volunteers, the posties, those who kept serving meals on wheels and looking after the food banks, the grandparents and teachers and so many others who brought a little companionship, healing, calm and soul to the situation. Pope Francis described them as "the saints who live next door"

We are being reminded daily of our own fragility, how precious life is. I read recently about one person who knew he was in the vulnerable category so he stayed strictly in lockdown at home. He made perhaps two brief trips to the local shops and caught the virus, which proved fatal for him. None of us is immune. While the elderly may be more vulnerable, others are susceptible too. This quiet time may have helped us to understand what *being wanted* and *being needed* mean. All of us want to feel as if we are needed, that someone needs and values what we do. Some have found that not being able to work has affected them deeply. Who they are is very much tied up with their job. But while our income may be needed, it is easy to overlook that we are loved for who we are, not what we bring home. That teaches a very important lesson – take time to treasure each moment of life, our own, our family, our friends – well, everyone really. Easy to say, much harder to remind ourselves not to take life for granted and not to take loved ones for granted either, just because we may see them often.

Pope Francis urged us to use this time of the coronavirus pandemic to "*rediscover the importance of small acts of kindness, affection and compassion that often go unnoticed in daily life, but they are nonetheless decisive, important,*" he said, "*a hot meal, a caress, a hug, a phone call. They are familiar gestures of attention to the details of everyday life that make life meaningful and that create communion and communication among us.*"

Regards  
Jim Quillinan

Email: [jquillinan@dcsi.net.au](mailto:jquillinan@dcsi.net.au)