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PROMOTING THE SANCTITY OF LIFE



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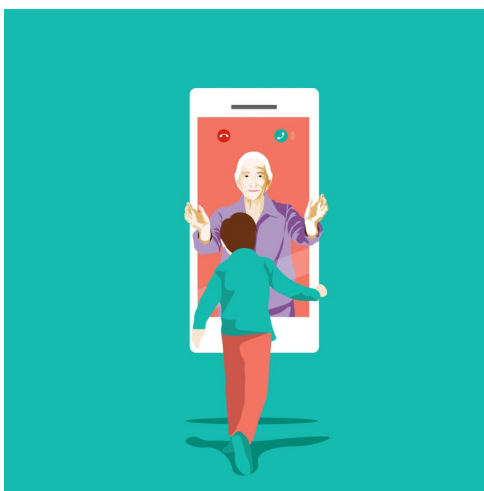
Compassion during COVID-19

by Pastor Gordon Wegener

I have had contact about an elderly woman diagnosed with COVID-19, wanting pastoral care. I am not allowed to enter the hospital, but she will take a phone call. Many of the diagnosed are such vulnerable people, who in hospital are cut off from family and pastoral care.

You may be outside of Victoria, and watching as Melbourne is going through stage 4 restrictions, looking on in fear. I cannot travel more than 5km, except with a permit. I watch people loading up their supermarket trolley, as if there will not be enough for all. A person protests when requested to have a temperature check at a chemist, and we wear a mask wherever we go. Our granddaughter is born at a nearby hospital, and now we can only visit via Facetime, watching her bath.

No matter where we are in the world, this virus has disrupted our lives, and shattered our perceptions. Deep down, it has rattled our concept of God. We always want to domesticate God and what we can expect,



as if our relationship with God were settled and all the rules were clear: be good and God will be good to you, stay away from the bad and you will rise above adversity.

This reveals that humankind has such a high need to control the chaos of life on earth. Up until COVID, we largely believed that we could lick anything, and we have held out for that magic vaccine. I read an article back

in March by David Grossman, with the disturbing thought that instead of winning the war against this plague, that we might lose, a world defeat. It's a thought that is immediately discarded, because how could we possibly lose? After all, we are 21st century humanity!

This triumphal view of humanity can also be reflected in our theology. We don't expect God to be in this chaos, but to stop it. God is supposed to restore things to normal and help everyone feel comfortable again. Isn't that how we know that God is present? When the danger has been avoided?

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Editorial

Dear reader,

It has been some time since you have received a copy of *Life News*. No, Lutherans for Life has not fallen off the face of the earth. On the contrary, our editor had a baby! We congratulate Joshua and Kimberley on the birth of their fourth child, Levi. Understandably, Kimberley has decided to stand down from her role as editor as she continues in this new phase of life.

We thank Kimberley for her service to LFL since 2014. She gave *Life News* a smart new look, introduced us to some beautiful works of art, and produced ten editions of the publication, all while raising a young family and supporting Joshua in his role as a parish pastor. We are most grateful to her, and thank God for her faithful service to LFL and the wider church.

We are now on the look out for a new editor of *Life News*. If you think you may have the skills, time and interest to take on this role, please get in contact with us via email at lutheransforlife@lca.org.au.

Ideally this person would be a supporter of LFL's mission, be willing to liaise with the LFL committee to source suitable material, and ultimately be responsible for the content and layout of two publications a year.

Please do let us know if you or know someone you know might be interested - we'd love to hear from you! If you feel you may have some but not all of the required skills, please do get in contact also.

We are all now living in a new COVID-19 era. This of course presents many challenges for us all, but also opportunities to grow in faith as we cling to God's Word and His promises. In this edition we hear from two writers on their thoughts, challenges and experience of COVID-19 in the State of Victoria.

In the chairman's report, you will read about the activities that LFL has engaged in over the last 12 months, and continues to engage in.

We also thank Margaret and Fraser Pearce who warmly and generously hosted a dinner at their home for the graduating pastoral students of Australian Lutheran College, along with the LFL committee and guest, Poppy Vivian, who is the President of Right to Life (SA). It was a wonderful evening of fellowship and enabled our chairman to profile the work of LFL.

As always, we are grateful for your continued prayers and ongoing support. God bless you.

- LFL Committee



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It is an appealing idea, but unfortunately scripture will not support it. In this richly troubling book, if we are open to it, much of God's best work takes place in the chaos, with people scared out of their wits. Look at Jacob wrestling with God (Genesis 32), and the price of encounter and blessing is a life-long limp.

Perhaps because we know how all these stories turn out, we overlook the wrestling – the stark terror of being jumped on by an unknown assailant, the collapse of the known world, the reduction of everything one has been and done to the terrifying moment of fighting for one's life.

This changes our picture of God, where we thought all ambiguity was gone, all doubt eliminated. Where we find ourselves is living the theology of the cross, a very Lutheran perception. We become aware of the limitations of being human and the hiddenness of God. This theology is grounded not in human potential, but an honesty about human weakness and wretchedness.

The theology of the cross is firstly not about the omnipotence of God, but astonishing compassion. Sympathy or compassion means literally "with-suffering," to suffer with the other. It's not just about pity and keeping one's distance, but absolute joining with the sufferer.

This was the realisation of Martin Luther, that God suffers *with us*. Luther found that our experience of suffering helps to shatter our view that God will use his omnipotence to do what we want. A consequence of our understanding may be that we cower in fear and guilt.

We need the cross to reveal the truth about God, that God is merciful, even in suffering. God's compassion is always to be graciously moving towards us with mercy, that instead of power, there is only steadfast love (Romans 8). Our gracious God is always moving in compassion towards the world. This is not because we, his creatures, are so bad, but because we, like all of God's creation, are so good, so beautiful, so precious, that he gives his Son for our redemption.

This has deep implications for any pastoral care which we are privileged to participate in. No matter whom we encounter, from the pre-born to the elderly resident in aged care, from the jobless and homeless to the CEO, from the Christian to the person of another faith or no

faith, every person is loved and precious to God and is neighbour.

And every person in their suffering may be the ground where I enter compassion, with-suffering, where I meet Jesus (Matthew 25), and God meets me, in suffering.

Reflection and prayer (excerpts from a prayer in the book, *Virus* by Walter Brueggemann)

"We prefer our worship of you should be upbeat. We take our glimpse of your promised kingdom as a venue, where never is heard a discouraging word.

But then ... reality!! Like suffering and death, like pandemic and virus, like loss unimaginable!

That reality breaks our happy illusion of a fairytale life in this world, and we are left with stone-cold fear and bottomless need. So we cry out with urgent imperative: hear, help, save!!

So now, God who hears, helps and saves – hear, act, and make new! Give us courage and patience, end the virus, let us be rich in soul and poor in things, ordered for neighbourliness, free of fear, generous with compassion.

We pray in the name of Jesus who defeated the powers of death, who became the sign of mercy for all. So we hope ... in you. Amen"

Pastor Gordon Wegener is the District Hospital Chaplain in the Victorian District of the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA). He is also the LCA's Coordinator for Continuing Education for Pastors (CEP) and Professional Pastoral Supervision.



Parenting in a pandemic: a mother's word of encouragement

Hi there,

It's been rough lately. This year has been a doozy. Fierce fires and contagious covid have completely changed the shape of what had been planned. The jokes about this year are getting old. The punch line is always that the worst is yet to come. But hasn't it been enough already?

I imagine that life has changed for you in many ways. Maybe you've had to try out new ways of living your ordinary life. New budgets, new schooling, new ways to work. Maybe you are flat out, buried in work, housework, raising children, and too tired and stressed to even care anymore.

Maybe you are stressed, worried about family, health, friends near and far. Maybe finances are tight. Maybe tensions are high. I get it. As a homeschooling mother, my life gets full. It can be too hard. Nothing seems to lessen in difficulty, kids act up, restrictions get tighter as cases of Covid-19 get higher and despair can grow.

It's a good thing that the trials and tribulations of the day aren't all that matter, right?

One of my favourite Bible passages is from the small book of Habakkuk. In it, we hear about the very terrible times Habakkuk lived through. He saw the destruction of people and places he knew. Life forever had changed for him and the Israelites. And yet, this is what he said:

*"Though the fig tree should not blossom,
nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail
and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold
and there be no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.
God, the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the deer's;
he makes me tread on my high places."*
Hab 3:17-19



For you, as you struggle through this wearisome year, what do you think of Habakkuk's faith in his hard time? It can be hard to find peace in these days, not to say joy! But it is where our joy is found that matters. The God of our salvation is the source of our joy. For He is with us through all of these times. For He enables us to carry on. I especially like the bit about God making our feet like a deer's. It's a line that is said more than once in the Old Testament. Deer tread rough places and quickly, their feet carry them through dangerous times and it is our Father who gives them these firm feet. We, too, have these firm feet. We are planted on the solid rock of Christ. Built on that rock, you can stand on the high places. Not because you have strength. Not because you can do it all. It is because Christ strengthens you for the days you face, for the trials that you experience.

This time of quarantine is sad. It's lonely. Even when we feel alone, downtrodden or overwhelmed, our Father is with us. He is taking care of us through these times. Turn to Him. Read His Word. Sing His praises and take joy in Him. He has overcome the world. He has saved you from your sin and the sin of the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He has given you freedom. He gives you hope.

Continued on page 5 ...

These times of trials can pull us closer to God (James 1:2-4). The weight of the world is not for us to bear, to prove our strength and fortitude. We realise that we cannot go alone. We need to turn to our Father for everything, even as our children turn to us when anything goes wrong.

Instinctively, we know that we cannot survive this world alone. We surround ourselves with friends and things to bear the burdens of life. But when all these things are stripped away, as they have been in so many ways this year, we learn again that we must turn to the One who does not change and will always be there for us. We must learn and relearn to rely on Christ.

It is He who gives us the feet to stand on high places. It is He who gives us the feet to run that race of faith on the narrow path. How beautiful are the feet that have this opportunity to proclaim that Christ sustains us, frees us, give us hope and cannot be defeated or changed by anything no matter what this world throws at us. It is through the wounds of Christ, in his hands, in his feet that we first felt forgiveness. Through His lifeblood poured out, we receive life. We receive the remission of sins. We receive hope for the future. No matter what mess we are in, He is with us, loving and forgiving us.

So cry if you need to. Sigh if you need to. But most importantly, friend, run to Christ because you need to. Turn to him and be filled again with the Holy Spirit so that you can stand in these days. You can teach your children, love your spouse, love your neighbour. You can perform all of your vocation because Christ is strengthening you.

It is never fun to be reminded that we are weak when we wish to be strong or to be reminded that we are helpless when we want to be independent. As you struggle through these weighty days, remember that in your weakness, Christ is strong. Turn to Him and let Him be your best friend.

*What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!*

*Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.*

*Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge—
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.
--Joseph Scriven*



Wishing you well, praying for you as you struggle and looking forward to better days.

Rebecca Kramer

Rebecca lives in Ballarat with her husband, Pastor Adrian Kramer, and their four children. She formerly trained and served as a deaconess in the Lutheran Church, Canada.

COVID-19, Luther and the Plague

The COVID-19 pandemic has tended to override discussion of other social and bioethical issues this year. Around 500 years ago Martin Luther was asked for his response to the then bubonic plague. "I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others." Much of which seems relevant to us in lockdown in 2020.

Modern slavery in NSW

"Catholic Archbishop of Sydney Anthony Fisher is accusing the NSW government of being undemocratic and a disgrace after failing to enact a law to eradicate modern slavery two years after it was unanimously passed by Parliament. Launching a new report on 29 July which warns the COVID-19 pandemic has put migrants, refugees and temporary visa holders at greater risk of forced and unpaid labour (and human trafficking and forced marriage), Fisher said the government was stalling for time after having declared the law a moral imperative in 2018."

www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/catholic-archbishop-slams-failure-to-act-on-slavery-as-a-disgrace-20200729-p55gkp.html

Euthanasia in the Netherlands

"A draft law proposing the legalisation of assisted suicide for people over 75 who are 'tired of living' has been presented in the Dutch parliament ..." Opponents express concern that such a law would put moral pressure on the elderly to choose death so as not to be a burden on society. If corona has made anything clear to us, it is that real attention and good care make the difference in a human life.

www.bioedge.org/bioethics/dutch-concern-over-bill-for-completed-life-euthanasia/13486

Do-it-yourself abortion with RU486 pills by mail

"The Australian Government will decide in September whether abortion providers can continue to mail DIY mifepristone and misoprostil pills to pregnant women without an ultra sound or other check. The government decided in March to fund a temporary Medicare rebate for telehealth abortion consultations." Without an ultrasound, the doctor will not know if the pregnancy is ectopic (in the fallopian tube rather than the womb) or if the pregnancy has advanced beyond 10 weeks (increasing the risks of major bleeding or sepsis from retained products in the uterus). Overseas there have been more than 30 maternal deaths with these pills. Without a face-to-face visit the doctor will not be able to assess whether an abusive partner is coercing the decision to abort. (In South Australia this DIY abortion has been withheld by the State Commissioner as all regular abortion clinics remain open).

www.familyvoice.org.au/newspoint/august2020

China persecutes Uyghurs

"A searing report from an American think tank has accused China of genocidal population control over Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang region. An outraged US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that allegations that the Chinese Communist Party is using forced sterilisation, forced abortion and coercive family planning against the Uyghurs is shocking and disturbing. Information gathered by German researcher Adrian Zenz and published by the Washington-based Jamestown Foundation outlines this human rights tragedy ... Taken as a whole, Zenz writes, the findings provide the strongest evidence yet that Beijing's policies in Xinjiang are genocidal."

www.bioedge.org/bioethics/china-accused-of-coercive-population-control-over-uyghur-muslims/13489

Surrogacy

“As the weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic march on, more evidence of the failure of the international commercial surrogacy industry is emerging. Babies are being born to surrogate mothers in one country while the commissioning parents are in another country, unable to see them because the borders have been closed. It is widely reported that more than 100 of these cases exist in Ukraine, more than 40 in Georgia, up to 1000 in Russia and up to 400 in the USA ... Surrogacy is believed to be a US\$20 billion industry, with mothers being recruited in countries like Kenya, Colombia, Guatemala, Belarus, Cyprus, Greece, Albania, Portugal and Nigeria ... Have they been able to find nannies for all the babies? Will all of the parents eventually show up? The potential for things going pear-shaped is immense.”

www.bioedge.org/bioethics/international-surrogacy-goes-pear-shaped/13501

Tolkien & the pro-life ethic of hope

Pro-lifers reading about more progressive laws on abortion and assisted dying with lethal doses can become despondent at times. JRR Tolkien, the noted English don and author of The Lord of the Rings, wrote that “As a Christian, he did not expect history to be anything but a long defeat, though it contains (and in a legend may contain more clearly and movingly) some glimpses of final victory.” Tolkien was no defeatist. As we can see in The Lord of the Rings, good must face up to evil. And good must not give in to despair. Yes, the pro-life movement has suffered many defeats – yet there have also been victories. In South Australia for over 40 years we have defeated euthanasia bills, and this year we have persuaded our State Commissioner Grant Stevens that DIY abortion pills are not needed. Tolkien knew that to be pro-life is to live in hope and work towards final victory.

www.spuc.org.uk/News/ID/384479

Snippets

DR ROB POLLNITZ

Gender Confusion

“There is growing support for a national inquiry into the treatment of children who are unhappy with their birth gender”, says FamilyVoice SA Director David d’Lima. Federal health minister Greg Hunt has initiated some action, arranging for state inquiries into this issue. But Sydney paediatrics professor Dr John Whitehall argues strongly for an independent national inquiry, pointing out the massive surge in childhood gender dysphoria across Australia. There has been a 10,000 per cent increase in just 40 years with a total of 2415 children and adolescents currently undergoing therapy. Gender confusion is more prevalent in young teen biological girls. It starts rapidly, appears ‘infectious’, and seems to be associated with social media. For example, several girls at a high school suddenly developed concerns over their gender identity. Without treatment, most gender-confused children will develop an identity matching their biological sex by age twenty. There is no need to risk puberty blocking drugs, cross-sex hormones and sex-change surgery.” Copies of the July 2020 “Transgenderism: children at risk” Mainpoint article are available via email at office@familyvoice.org.au

UNHRC remains pro-abortion

“The United Nations Human Rights Council on 17 July concluded its most recent session in Geneva. True to form, the council adopted a resolution promoting abortion under the guise of responding to COVID-19. On the topic of ending discrimination against women and girls, it made the radical claim that sexual and reproductive health services, including “safe abortion”, are an essential health service in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sadly this new resolution provides further evidence that the UN is using coronavirus relief funding to promote abortion.”

www.dailysignal.com//print?post_id=672015

A word from the chairman



As with everyone else, 2020 has been a strange year for LFL. We started with quite some gusto launching ourselves into various activities and plans for the year, and now are again picking up various threads and projects. But it feels like there was a 3 - 4 month black hole in the middle there somewhere! You all know exactly what I'm referring to of course, but for the sake of posterity this black hole was the nation-wide lockdown due to COVID-19, which sadly is now back again in some areas of our country.

Recently we hosted our annual dinner for ALC pastoral graduates and their wives at the home of one our committee members, Margaret Pearce. We were joined by the 6 candidates for ordination and had a lovely evening getting to know each other and sharing with them something of LFL's work.

One of the things I spoke about that evening was the need to approach issues such as abortion and euthanasia from a distinctly Christian point of view, rather than merely a political one. An interview with Pastor Tim Keller helped crystallise my thinking on this. He made the point that traditionally Christianity has been concerned about the following four things: racial justice, the poor, the sanctity of human life, and that sex is a gift for a man and woman in marriage. In her public teaching the LCA would affirm these four as being taught in the Bible. Yet in modern times the first two are usually associated with left-leaning progressive politics, and the last two with right-leaning conservative politics. This makes it difficult for Christians to uphold all four as

we live in such a hyper-politicized and polarised time. While LFL has the specific charter to serve the church in its engagement especially on 'life issues', we always want to do that within the broader Christian worldview which sees all four of the above areas as vitally important to the Christian faith. Whatever brand of politics they might be associated with is always a secondary issue for Christians.

Earlier in this year and late last year LFL committee members and supporters have also been involved in:

- Development of a draft action plan based on CSBQ's recommendations arising from discussions on abortion in Australia
- A prayer walk around Woodville Abortion Clinic in Adelaide, organised by a new organisation called "LOVE Adelaide" which was established to respond to Abortion Law Reforms in SA
- Launch of the movie 'Unplanned'
- 2020 March for Life Adelaide, including a speech by Chelsea Pietsch
- Creative Word Fellowship Young Adults Camp in Tandara
- Purchase of a new foetal model which we will make available for groups to borrow.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Kimberley for her work as *Life News* editor these past years. She brought a fresh look and feel to *Life News* and we wish her God's blessings on her future endeavours.

Yours in Christ, Joshua Pfeiffer

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