

Introduction

All Australians have been ordered to work from home if possible, limit travel to essential purposes, adhere to social distancing and congregate in groups no larger than two people. Significant fines and jail time are immediate consequences for failing to follow these new laws. In accordance with Government advice, and that of the Australian Chief Medical Officer, the following arrangements have been put in place throughout Australia. Important to note is that the rate of infection is reported to be slowing in Australia. The isolation of the country is hoped to be a natural and effective barrier to the pandemic. With approximately 6,000 cases and 30+ fatalities the vast majority have been traced to Australians returning from overseas. At this stage there is only limited community transmission. Travel restrictions are in place, including overseas, interstate and inter-regional journeys.

A real consequence of this pandemic is the threat of an irrevocable cessation of ministry and service. Therefore, long term sustainability and short to medium term viability require careful planning.

1. Marist Schools Australia

- i. Continuity of quality teaching and learning is the biggest challenge facing schools. Whilst all schools remain open for the attendance of the children of essential workers, 95% of students are remaining at home as schools facilitate offsite learning. The Marists are the largest provider of boarding schools in Australia. The Australian Health Department has identified boarding schools as high risk environments for the transmission of COVID-19. This has meant that all boarding facilities are no longer operational. Offsite learning arrangements are largely happening online, yet for our many students, from remote and regional areas in Australia, online is not an option. To facilitate the learning for isolated students, schools are working with Catholic education authorities and their State or Territory governments, to provide materials. Teachers are contacting remote students by phone where possible. (*COVID-19 Quality Learning and Teaching*)
- ii. The economic consequences of COVID-19 has seen Australia's jobless double in less than one month. The impact upon families has seen the immediate need for Colleges to provide financial assistance. Whilst some government measures have eased the financial burden, schools have stood down staff whose services are impossible to justify in the current situation. Marist Schools Australia has established a COVID-19 Finance Taskforce. This group is providing advice to the MSA Executive Team.

Attached is advice sent to all schools by MSA in regards to school finance (*COVID-19 Financial advice for MSA Schools #1*)



- iii. Contingency plans have been established in the event that school leaders become infected. Usually this has involved identifying colleagues as stand in personnel as required.
- iv. Naturally all student excursions, travel, professional development, spiritual formation and meetings have been either cancelled or postponed.

2. Marist Formation

The Formation Team has moved to online provision. Daily contact is being made with schools and ministries throughout the country with prayers. On a weekly basis more substantial resources are being provided to nourish faith life during these difficult times. The Team are about to launch an online formation course that participants will have the opportunity to be accredited through the Australian Catholic University and other Catholic tertiary providers.

3. Marist Youth Ministry

The Team have been working very hard to provide schools with online resources to facilitate the *Game Changers* program which was only launched in January. Currently the National Coordinator is consulting with Marist Schools Australia and school principals to determine the suitability of this approach in the current climate. Moves are being made to explore the possibility of young post school Marists, acting as tutors for Marist students in offsite learning arrangements. There has been a reduction in staffing, mainly among temporary and casual staff.

4. Australian Marist Solidarity

The activities of this ministry have been severely curtailed due to travel restrictions and limitations on gatherings, especially of donors. Current budget has been revised and emergency Board meetings scheduled. The CEO has developed a range of contingency plans to mitigate negative impacts.

5. Marist180

Vulnerable young people in out of home care are still being looked after, however with ever increasing government restrictions on movement and travel, April and May will present enormous challenges for the organisation to sustain its services. The CEO, Board and executive team are exploring contingencies with senior government representatives, other Marist ministries and Catholic Church organisations.

Is there some people infected?

One student from Sacred Heart College Adelaide contracted the virus. The College was closed for three days whilst a thorough clean was undertaken. All students and staff who were deemed "close contacts" were instructed by Health officials to isolate for 14 days.

At St Patrick's Marist College, Dundas in Sydney, a family member of a student contracted the virus. The student was deemed a "close contact" and a series of isolation measures were undertaken with members of that school community on the advice of Health officials. The College closed for two days.