

Hundreds attend 'Liturgy, prayer, pastoral care and pandemics'

Australian life in 2020 has unfolded in ways none of us could have imagined. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our experiences of liturgy and public prayer as never before. Providing pastoral care to the sick and dying in high-risk environments alongside health professionals engaged in medical care, has necessitated the development of innovative approaches to this vital work.

The ACU Centre for Liturgy examined this current reality in "Liturgy, Prayer, Pastoral Care and Pandemics," a free public lecture on Monday 12 October. Sr Professor Julia Upton rsm of St John's University (New York) presented the online lecture live from New York.

The ACU Centre for Liturgy welcomed Professor Upton as an expert in both liturgy and public health, to explore the challenge of providing pastoral care in the time of COVID-19. In her lecture, Professor Upton reviewed lessons learned from the renegotiation of what 'community' and 'worship' mean when gatherings are not permitted or are restricted by social distancing, and what kinds of pastoral care can occur for the sick and dying in hospitals and other settings when families cannot visit.

In concluding remarks following the lecture, Director of the ACU Centre for Liturgy Professor Clare Johnson said:

"Today, Julie has been a wonderful witness to hope as she spoke of the pandemic's wave engulfing us and as she explored ways to find meaning in this 'great pause' we have been tasked with. She shared some of the lessons learned from 9/11 in terms of our longing for rituals that hold and heal and what can occur in spite of the restrictions we operate under.

"Julie reminded us of the small, important domestic rituals that help us to maintain our Christian identities while we can't gather in churches. She reported the positives and negatives of our new ways of connecting virtually and explored the notion of virtual presence, asking the vexing question of whether it can be real.

"Julie noted the ongoing nature of trauma and the path to recovery and the new awareness apparent among public-health officials of the challenges of maintaining well-being across a population. Julie has provided us with so many rich themes to explore further."

The lecture provided the opportunity to consider what has been learned so far from the pandemic and what the ramifications might be for future modes of pastoral care in the months and years ahead.

More than 300 people attended the lecture from around the world, including Australia, the United States, Ireland, New Zealand, and Singapore. Attendees from a variety of Christian traditions included bishops, priests and religious, representatives from dioceses, parishes, schools, health care services, media, and ACU staff.

Responses to the lecture were enthusiastic. Cynthia White from Cabrini Health in Melbourne said, "This was truly a five-star lecture and Sr Julia was amazing, inspiring and insightful and was able to touch on many relevant pastoral issues. Really wonderful. Thank you very much."

Maria Arrow from Bathurst said, "I have just left the online meeting Liturgy prayer pastoral care and pandemics and wish to say thank you. I am a teacher at one of our local Catholic schools and want to state this has been the most uplifting and beneficial pieces of PPD [professional development] I have undertaken in a very long time."

Vivien Williams from Calvary Healthcare in Victoria summarised by saying, "A big thanks for this morning's presentation by Julia Upton. What a coup as we live through this pandemic! SO much food for ongoing reflection and action."

Interviews with Professor Upton are available on request

Biography: Sr Julia Upton RSM is Provost Emerita and Distinguished Professor of Theology at St John's University New York. She has worked at St John's university continuously since 1979 in various academic roles. Julia teaches liturgy and sacramental theology to both undergraduate and graduate students. She is a member of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and has a passion for social justice. Among her many publications are *Understanding the Sacrament of Reconciliation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006) and *Worship in Spirit and Truth: The Life and Legacy of H. A. Reinhold* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010). Professor Upton holds the PhD in Theology from Fordham University and postgraduate qualifications in pastoral care. She has been an advisor to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Divine Worship.

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