



LAUNCH OUT LETTERS (LOL) April 2022

When he had finished eating, he said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch".

Luke 5: 4

Archdiocese of Wellington, New Zealand
Journal and Newsletter for Lay Leaders and Ministers

Kia ora koutou. Welcome to the April issue .

The parents of Barbara Rowley, Lay Pastoral Leader of Te Awakairangi Parish, escaped Poland during the Russian invasion in World War II and came to New Zealand as refugees. The ongoing war in Ukraine is personal to Barbara, even if she has lived most of her life here in Aotearoa. Her story made me reflect on the intimacy of pain. In the Gospel reflection of **Vicky Raw** for the Fifth Sunday Gospel for Lent, she explains poignantly Jesus' intimate connection to the pain of the woman caught in adultery. His response couldn't be more visceral than by uncannily challenging those who were intending to stone her, to see that her sin and her struggle were theirs as well—it is their (and our) pain too. In a similar vein, **Margaret Bearsley** shares her reflection on death and dying and how praying our pain is our only way through. Real suffering, whether is directly ours or by others, is personal, otherwise, we are merely spectators of a drama. We can bring this insight to prepare ourselves for the mystery of the suffering and death of Jesus during this Lenten period.

Bridget Taumoepeau continues on with the history of Launch Out. Last March she discussed the lay movements leading to Vatican II. In this issue, she delves more into the history of lay theology and vocation. There are two key principles that shaped the theology of Vatican II--- **ressourcement** that is the process of considering the role of laity in the development of the hierarchical priesthood, as fundamental to the Church's renewal or **aggiornamento**. A must-read for lay leaders.

By this time, many people are getting used to Online Liturgy. And although vaccine passes may be phased out soon, I reckon, Online Liturgy will remain a part of the way our faith communities gather to pray. **Elizabeth Julian, rsm** shared how they organised the Online Liturgy of the Word for the Catholic Parish of Wellington South, down to a fine art. I have attended one and I must say, it is one of the most organised and engaging online liturgies I have attended. Finally, as we try to master online technology, we are not oblivious to the fact that we pay a price for doing so. We have **Neil Vaney, sm** who shares a book review on "Stolen Focus" by Johann Hari where he carefully explains the mental cost of overusing social media. We can use his article to reflect on how we see the effect of "stolen focus" on our ministries.

—Maya Bernardo, Launch Out Formator & Manager

From misery to mercy, from humiliation to dignity Fifth Sunday of Lent, John 8: 1-11

By Vicky Raw
Launch Out Candidate



At the moment it would seem that we are facing crisis after crisis – the report on the scale of abuse of children and vulnerable people, the climate crisis, the large-scale protests across our country and the ever growing geopolitical catastrophe unfolding in the Ukraine. And closer to home I recently learnt that a friend with a 10-year old daughter is about to have an MRI scan for a growth and faces surgery and radiotherapy. When will it all end? Where is God in all of this? What can I do in the face of such monumental events when I feel so overwhelmed?

<http://www.danfergusdesign.com/paint/pages/castthefirststone.php>

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Our Lenten journey so far has taken us from the desert to the top of the mountain, to the two parables about repentance and mercy. In John 8:1-11 we find ourselves at the very heart of Jerusalem and most important place in Judaism – the Temple. This was the centre of the Law and where the Holy of Holies lived.

The Temple was a very ornate structure, with its arches and porticos; various courtyards where people came to listen to the teachers of the Law and offer their sacrifices; the different gates that led into the Temple; the ritual bathing areas outside the gates and the overall immensity of the area on Mount Moriah looking over the Kidron Valley to Gethsemane.

It is in this place that Jesus can be found in our Gospel reading. He was teaching a group of people when all of a sudden there was a great disturbance. A group of scribes and pharisees dragged in a woman who they accused of being caught 'in the very act of committing adultery'. It begs the question, where they spying on her, waiting for her, so that they could catch her in the very act? They were out to humiliate and shame her. Probably she would have been dragged scantily clothed and her embarrassment and shame was there for all to see in the Temple.

But what they really wanted to do was 'to test' (v.6) Jesus – to catch him out. By using the woman as an extreme example of sin they reckoned that they had Jesus stitched up. Their justification for stoning her was based on the Mosaic Law (Deut 22:22-24). If Jesus agreed that she should be stoned then they would say that he was being hypocritical based on his previous teachings and healings of outcasts. If he said that she should be forgiven then they would accuse him of contravening the Law.

However, on closer inspection of these verses stoning was only to occur if 'a virgin is engaged to a man, and another man encounters her in the town and has sexual intercourse with her, you will take both to the gate of the town in question and stone them to death: the girl, for not having called for help in the town; the man, for having exploited his fellow-citizen's wife' (Deut 22:23-24). As I reflect on these two verses, with the eyes of a woman in 2022, I am horrified that what is being described is in fact the rape of a young girl. Why should she be stoned when she was the innocent party? Why would Moses condemn an innocent woman who was being exploited? The scribes and Pharisees in John 8 are willing to have the woman stoned and have let the man go free. They were bending the Law to suit their own purposes. And Jesus saw through them.



<https://www.toolshero.com/personal-development/snyders-hope-theory/>

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He seemed more intent on writing on the ground. He did not engage in their hysteria. Instead he was bent down, close to the ground, at their feet, in the dirt. He had gone from being a teacher, which the crowds had come to listen to, to being like a child playing in the dirt. All he did was stand up for a brief moment (maybe to stretch his back) and then resumed his writing whilst saying "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

This was not what they were expecting to hear. What was it that Jesus wrote that made these men turn away one by one? Was he writing their names and the sins that they had committed? We will never know but whatever it was they went away until only Jesus was left with the woman. We know that Jesus is the guiltless one, free of all sin, and yet he did not throw a stone at her.

I can only imagine that the woman was trembling with fear as she watched Jesus stand up. She must have thought that this was the moment of her death and that Jesus was going to stone her. Instead Jesus did not condemn her but rather said "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore." From her humiliation Jesus restored the woman's dignity. Out of misery came mercy. Jesus was turning the Law around:

*See, I am doing something new!
Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
In the desert I make a way,
in the wasteland, rivers. (Is 43:19)*

His mission was to change people's lives by turning away from sin and to bring new life in fellowship with God to our dead and empty lives.

Despite the ongoing crises Jesus is there, crouching down in the dirt. This gives me hope that amongst the terrible turmoil, the sickness of our planet and people that Jesus in his humanity and divinity walks alongside us in every moment. He may be 'silent' at times but looking closer he is there.



Copied from shutterfly.com <https://www.pinterest.nz/pin/410179478563045862/>

BIRTHDAYS

March

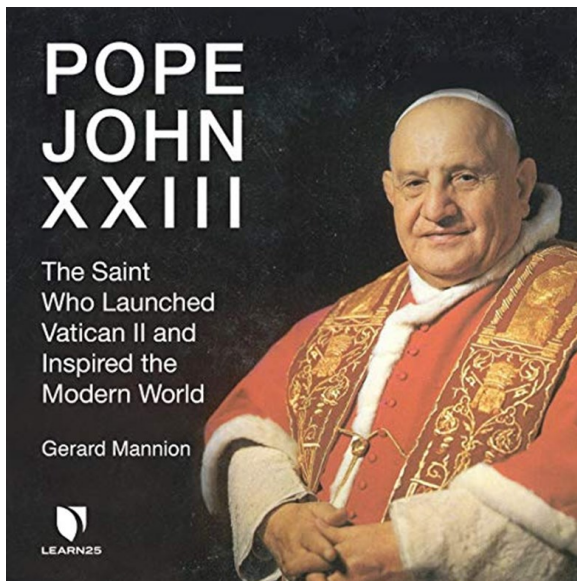
20 Debbie Matheson

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The shaping of Vatican II

(Continuation of the history of Launch Out)

By Bridget Taumoepeau
Launch Out Mentor



<https://www.audible.com.au/pd/Pope-John-XXIII-Audiobook/B074STJ3VB>

Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council (VCI) on 11 October 1962, with the beautiful speech, known by its opening phrase *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* (Mother Church rejoices). The whole tone of his speech was one of hope and joy, looking forward to the future. He referred to his wish to dispel the prophets of doom and put emphasis, not on doctrine itself, but on the way in which it is announced, as well as indicating that the Church should 'use the medicine of mercy rather than the weapons of severity.' In other words, VCI was to be a pastoral council, unlike its predecessors VCI and Trent, which had been much more juridical in nature.

And so VCI began. It consisted of four sessions between 1962 and 1965, producing 16 documents covering many topics, particularly the relationship of the church to the world. This process was known as *aggiornamento* (bringing up to date) but also used the principle of *ressourcement* (returning to the sources). These documents and their promulgation throughout the church, have very much coloured the practice of our faith in the present day.

At the same time Pope John XXIII published some encyclicals on the themes of peace and social justice, which indicated that the church may be opening its doors. Laity were given a prominent place at VCI, in contrast to previous councils. The Laity, of course, are the vast majority of the church, and, as St John Henry Newman said, "the church would look foolish without them'.

aggiornamento (bringing up to date)

The most important documents from the point of view of the Laity are *Lumen Gentium* (the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church); *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World); *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (The Apostolate of the Laity); as well as *Ad Gentes Divinitus* (The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity), which describes the laity

*The process of **ressourcement** (returning to sources) that considers the role of the laity before the development of the hierarchical priesthood*

as "Of primary importance and worthy of special care." §15 also specifically mentions Catholic Action as one of "various types of ministry." The lay movement, Catholic Action, which is mentioned, had been active since the early 20th century. (cf. Chapter One of this series of articles).

The significance of *Lumen Gentium* is its discussion on priesthood, specifically that there are two priesthoods – "The common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood." §10 goes on to say of these priesthoods "each in its own way shares in the one priesthood of Christ." It uses the process of *ressourcement* to consider the role of the laity before the development of the hierarchical priesthood. This is related to the principle that "all the baptised are called to holiness of life." This illustrates the huge shift in thinking about the church, priesthood and laity that occurred during VCI.

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Common priesthood, is known as 'the royal priesthood' (1 Peter 2:9). The full quote adds to the importance of this phrase – 'But you are a chosen nation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of the darkness into his marvellous light.' This common priesthood confers on all, a membership of a priestly people. Biblical and historical studies recognised that the hierocratic form of the Church was but one form, not *the* form of the Church. The study of the Church should not just look at the hierarchy, but at the entire Church community.

Ad Gentes (1965), addresses the missionary activity of the church. It emphasises that clergy and laity must work together, and that the Gospel cannot become rooted in the lives of people unless there is an active presence of lay people. "Therefore, from the foundation of a church very special care must be taken to form a mature Christian laity." (§21).

The Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (1965), offers a description of the lay apostolate. "Christ, sent by the Father is the source of the Church's entire apostolate." Lay people "do not separate their union with Christ from their ordinary life, but actually grow closer to him by doing their work according to God's will." (§4).

The Decree goes into considerable detail about the "Vocation of Lay People to the Apostolate", as well as the objectives of such an apostolate. It refers to "The Temporal Order", meaning the context for laity such as family values, culture, economy, occupations, politics etc, and indicates that laity should be making the temporal order "increasingly more perfect: such is God's design for the world." (§7). It addresses the issues of relationships with clergy and the need for training, both of which will have particular significance in the development of Lay Pastoral Leadership.

The whole tenor of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* is that of collaborative ministry. The parish is identified as "an outstanding example of community apostolate." (§10). It goes as far as to say "In such difficult circumstances the laity take over as far as possible the work of priests..." (§17). The clergy are advised to "...work as brothers with the laity in the Church and for the Church, and will have a special concern for the laity in their apostolic activities." (§25).

A whole section is put aside to address the need for training. Mention is made of the importance of spiritual formation, theology and practical approaches to accomplishing the mission of Christ. (§29). Even in 1965 institutes of higher learning had been created to include the training of the laity, as well as conferences, books, journals, retreats etc.

So, we can see in VCII the extraordinary vision for the future of the laity within the Church. These documents show the link between the deliberations of the Bishops at VCII and the eventual establishment of the Launch Out programme.

Question

From which languages do the words *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement* originate? (see answer in Page 15)

Challenge

Obtain and read the Documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially *Lumen Gentium* (the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church); *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World); *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (The Apostolate of the Laity); and *Ad Gentes Divinitus* (The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity).

The Sick and The Dying: *Prayerfulness and 'At Least's'—A Practical Guide*

By Margaret Bearsley
Launch Out Candidate

It is tempting in this on-going time of pandemic to write something about the terrible world-wide toll of the Covid-19 virus. Or to localise the focus of the article on the impact of Covid on people I know. But one of these days, soon hopefully, the virus will disappear from our memories.



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gonzalo_Carrasco_-_Job_on_the_Dunghill_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

People were getting sick, living with on-going illness, were dying, long before Covid was 'a thing', and people will continue to do so long after the word 'Covid' has slipped from the lexicon. So I'm focusing the article on the non-Covid realm of sickness and dying in general ... not that there is anything general about either of them. They are of course experienced only in individual lives, and the individuals who experience them each walk their own journey.

Sickness and dying seem inseparable from suffering. This seems to be so, whether they are experienced within oneself (OK, the death bit is something I am yet to experience, but I do often think about it "...now and at the hour of our death, Amen"), or perhaps more intensely, when watching on as someone you love is sick or dying.

Indeed, the hardest pain to bear is watching the suffering of a loved one. For the nine years of my husband's illness, I moved from desperate hope that he would recover, to resignation that he wouldn't, to deep suffering as he declined and ultimately died.

Anyone reading this is bound to be Catholic, and is bound to have reflected at some painful time in their own life on the meaning of sickness or the sting of death and loss. Who of us hasn't offered our pain to God?—as St Paul said to the Colossians, to complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the Church (Col 1:24).

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It's extraordinary how changing the focus from one's own suffering, to a prayerful hopefulness that one's suffering might have some meaning, might achieve some benefit for others—the holy souls in Purgatory perhaps? all the suffering in the world?—really does reduce the psychological, self-pitying sharpness of one's own pain. For a moment at least, the pain has a purpose, an external focus. We are moved beyond our own bodily, confined and finite world, into the transcendent world of mystery; into the sacred. Even suffering can be a graced moment; can enable us to touch the divine.



<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-the-u-s-pandemic-response-went-wrong-and-what-went-right-during-a-year-of-covid/>

Prayerfulness when we are suffering

For myself and others, the Book of Job has been a source of personal inspiration at times of illness or when dealing with a loved one who is dying. There is something so relatable in Job's complaints about the injustice of his innocent suffering and loss, and yet his deep reverence for God and his desire to remain faithful in spite of everything. For countless sufferers, these have provided a rock to cling to in the midst of all the turmoil. There is

something extraordinarily comforting in knowing that complaining is a legitimate form of prayer. And again, as with Job, who of us when dealing with sickness and death hasn't suffered the indignity of well-meaning friends who inflict us with their platitudes, stories, and clichés?!

One of the really useful things about reflecting on the Book of Job in the midst of suffering is that it helps us to grasp the plain fact that there is no platitude, no cliché, that *explains* suffering.



<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/02/children-teachers-civilian-casualties-of-the-ukraine-conflict>

We have to accept that suffering is a mystery. We must remember that in all their hubris, the human sciences cannot provide meaning for life or for suffering. Job also reminds us that even the suffering themselves have no right to demand an explanation from God.

“For a moment at least, the pain has a purpose, an external focus. We are moved beyond our own bodily, confined and finite world, into the transcendent world of mystery; into the sacred. Even suffering can be a graced moment; can enable us to touch the divine.”

God's speech from the whirlwind in Job Chapter 38 is a striking challenge to human arrogance:

*"... ⁴Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.*

*⁵Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?*

*⁶On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone*

*⁷when the morning stars sang together
and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy*

...

*³¹Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
or loose the cords of Orion?*

...

*⁴¹Who provides for the raven its prey,
when its young ones cry to God,
and wander about for lack of food?"*

And so we respond in prayer: Thank you Lord for the reminder that the earth is Yours, and all that is in it, the world, and all its people (Ps 24:1). Prayerfulness can lead us to letting go of the self-focus of our own suffering.

'At leasts'

Then there are the times when prayerfulness doesn't help or can't be achieved. The blank bleak times when even hope seems out of reach, brackish, bitter, broken. That's when the *'At Leasts'* can get us through another day.

Well, at least we aren't in Afghanistan, I used to say to myself; imagine trying to cope with this AND the Taliban! Things could be a lot worse, I would conclude.

At the time of writing, all eyes are on the war in Ukraine, so an *'At Least'* today might be: Well, at least we aren't in Mariupol or Kiev, and having to cope with this as well as the with the sirens, the bombs, the abject terror! Things could definitely be a lot worse.

How do we give support to others who are suffering?

The Book of Job is such a useful support for those who are suffering. But the interesting thing about helping our friends who are suffering, is that we wouldn't want to be like Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, Job's friends (you brought it on yourself, mate!). We wouldn't want to be preachy like Elihu (you mustn't blame God!). And we definitely shouldn't be like some of my own contemporaries who would regale me with stories about other people who have suffered, as though their being the bearer of tales of woe might have been of use to me. Our prayers can give great comfort to the suffering; well, for myself anyway, when friends would say to me 'I wish there was something useful I could do, but I will pray for you', I was terribly grateful.

Avoiding *'At least'* is also very appropriate. Do NOT say: *'At least'* they didn't suffer long. That negates the extent of your friend's suffering. But if your suffering friend says an *'At least'*, they are entitled to express their own sense of relief.

Suffering, sickness, death; it's a mystery. Blessed be the Name of the Lord.

Gathering to pray as a community on Sunday mornings in Lockdown

By Elizabeth Julian, rsm
Mercy Sister &
Parishioner of Wellington South Parish

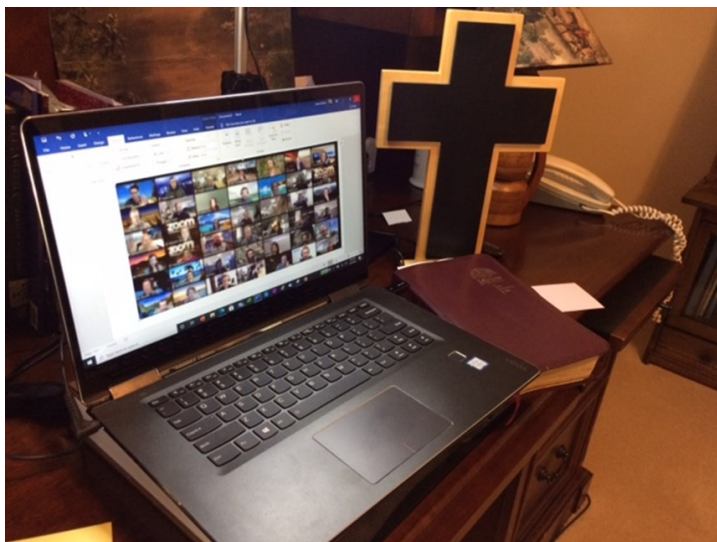
‘The priesthood of the laity in action!’ That’s how an elderly, former Island Bay parishioner described our Sunday Lockdown Liturgies of the Word. What led her to make that claim after Zooming in each week for seven weeks from her Retirement Village in Masterton?

It all began with an email on Fri, 20 Aug 2021 at 09:00 from Wellington South parishioner, Lesley Hooper:

*Hi Elizabeth
I have a feeling we will be still in Lockdown or at least Level 3 on Sunday so I wondered if we could set up a Zoom liturgy and send an invitation out to people.
I am happy to set up the meeting but wonder if you would be able to put a short liturgy together. What do you think?
Lesley*

That was the beginning of a seven week liturgically and spiritually nourishing journey for about 60 parishioners. The week prior to Lesley’s email we had held a parish hui after Sunday Mass in which a parishioner, aware that in the 2020 Lockdown we had not come together as a parish community for liturgy, asked what the plan was if Lockdown happened again. Realising there was no plan, although several requests had been made, Zoom liturgies were suggested.

After Lesley’s email a Lockdown Liturgy Group was formed and met weekly for the duration of the Lockdown to plan each of the seven Sunday Zoom Liturgies of the Word. From our experience here are the key elements:



Steps to take

1. Develop a template for the liturgy planning team. Use the same format as Sunday Mass as far as the Prayer of the Faithful. Then move to the Lord’s Prayer, Sign of Peace, Blessing and Dismissal
2. List parishioners prepared to be: host, welcomer, leader, responder, Te Reo responder, pray-er, cantor, singer (could be a family group), proclaimer (English and other languages), someone willing to offer a reflection/lead Lectio

<https://www.prayerideas.org/zoom-prayer-meeting-and-video-prayer-meeting-how-to/>

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<https://www.atlassian.com/blog/add-ons/using-checklists-jira-can-help-team-agile>

Things to remember:

- ⇒ Zoom etiquette:
- ⇒ Ensure everyone is muted
- ⇒ Have coffee before or after but not during
- ⇒ Don't get up and move around
- ⇒ Links to YouTube songs must be pasted in the Chat for parishioners to click on because of copyright issues.
- ⇒ Scripture readings in other languages can be accessed here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/>
- ⇒ Host can share screen for words of prayers/hymns (the parish must have copyright permission for the latter).
- ⇒ The role of the welcomer is particularly important as people gradually log in from about 15 minutes prior to starting)
- ⇒ Note that only a priest can say, 'May the Lord bless you...' and make the blessing gesture. A lay leader must say, 'May the Lord bless us...' and bless themselves. (I fail to understand theologically why this is so)
- ⇒ Invite spontaneous prayers at the end of the Prayer of the Faithful
- ⇒ After the Dismissal, invite anyone who wants to, to make a coffee/tea and stay for a catch-up chat.

What did we do well?

At an evaluation meeting between the PLT and the Lockdown Liturgy Group in October we found that we had:

- ◇ Unearthed a range of gifts and talents among parishioners
- ◇ Experienced coming together as a wider parish with excellent collaboration among the three communities of Brooklyn, Island Bay and Newtown
- ◇ Grew through the experience, were thinking of others, kept connected as a wider parish
- ◇ Been reminded of the early church community with joy, fellowship, friendship
- ◇ Incorporated Te Reo Māori seamlessly in the liturgy, especially the 'Our Father'
- ◇ Experienced well-prepared lay led reflections on the Sunday readings
- ◇ Had great fun working together and improving each week in a safe, non-judgemental environment
- ◇ Developed skills and confidence during the process – technical and otherwise
- ◇ Provided a very inclusive and welcoming liturgy with people from outside South Wellington present
- ◇ An LPL who had been very active in reaching out to 28 vulnerable people focusing on their key needs (housing, food, warmth)
- ◇ A very active Samoan community well-organised to take care of those in need.



<https://charmssingapore.com/thumbs-up-to-stay-pain-free-by-treating-thumb-joint-pain/>

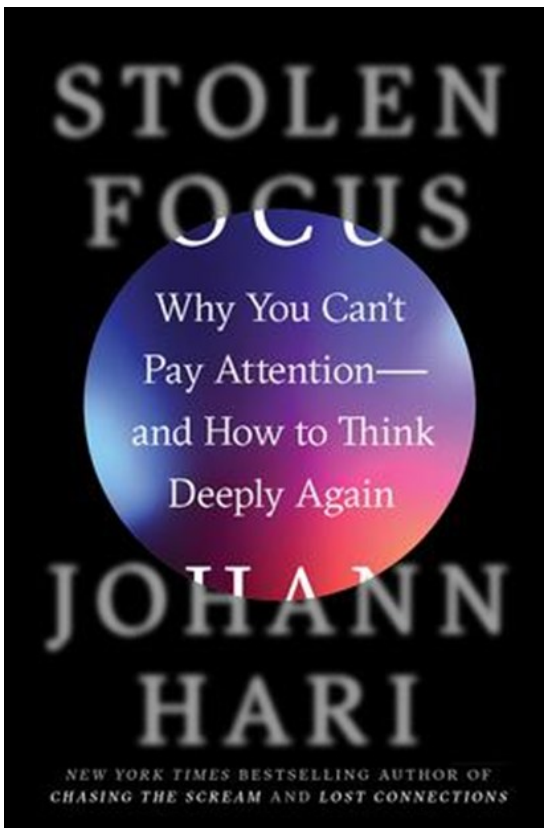
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What do we need to do next?

- **Update the parish Census** to identify: Parishioners' needs, contact details, digital access, skills and talents. Include questions about whether people have email, a landline, a mobile phone, how they receive the newsletter, close whānau in Wellington, living with them, etc
- Clarify privacy rules around this
- **Provide Catechesis** to explain that passively watching Mass on TV is not 'active, conscious participation' in the liturgy
- Parishioners who prefer 'to sit and watch father' could be reminded that Jesus said, 'Take and eat', not, 'Sit and watch', and that they could watch a recorded live-streamed Mass, e.g., from Kapiti at a later time.)
- **Develop our outreach capacity** by inviting members of the different ethnic communities to tell us what they would like to happen next time we are in Lockdown
- **Provide liturgical formation** so that an expanded group of parishioners can lead liturgies, deliver reflections, etc
- **Provide technical training** so that an expanded group of parishioners can host Zoom sessions with confidence in, e.g., using break-out rooms, muting all participants, etc
- **Purchase a Zoom licence** for use by various groups in managing parish life during Lockdowns, as well as for regular meetings and information sharing sessions. (The PLT and PPC would not allow the parish to have a Zoom licence but fortunately a generous parishioner allowed us to use his. As I write this PPC has once again denied our request)
- **Move forward** as one parish across the three very diverse communities of Newtown, Island Bay and Brooklyn in our planning and thinking
- **Encourage more participation** from different ethnic and cultural communities
- **Establish a Telephone Tree** covering the entire Parish for contacting people next time (taking into account privacy rules)
- **Carry forward** the richness of this creative lay-led initiative with its high levels of participation and bring it into the regular Sunday liturgy. Interestingly, although the two priests in the parish were often present, neither offered to help in any way.



The on-line Sunday Liturgy provided the opportunity for parishioners to come together for both prayer and hospitality. A vibrant gathering with inspirational liturgy when many were feeling disconnected from the faith community, it gave us the opportunity to check in with one other. Was everyone okay? Were there some not present we were concerned about? It gave us, indeed, an experience of 'the priesthood of the laity in action!'



<https://www.bookdepository.com/Stolen-Focus-Johann-Hari/9780593138519?ref=grid->

Why Can't We Concentrate Like We Used To?

When looking after your own kids (or grandchildren) or trying to teach in the classroom, have you noticed recently how hard it is to keep them on task. Many of us are also noticing that we too can no longer concentrate the way we used to. Every so often a book comes along which helps to make profound sense of issues like this. A brilliant work has just appeared that makes a lot of sense of such trends. It is called *Stolen Focus; Why You Can't Pay Attention*. The author is Johann Hari. He examines trends such as diminishing attention span, sleep deprivation, obesity, the impact of social media through engines such as Facebook and Twitter, and the massive drop off in the reading of books, showing convincingly how they are organically linked.

Hari spent three years writing this book, interviewing experts from Scandinavia to New Zealand. He then retreated to a small cottage at the tip of Cape Cod, without cell-phone or television, to try to digest what he had learned. This led to an intense struggle and inward journey that still continues. This work has big implications for

everyone trying to pray and lead a serious spiritual life. So I will highlight a few areas that he deals with and try to show how relevant they may be to all of us.

Problems of Focus

To demonstrate this lack of attention Hari cites a number of studies; one based on a study on the computer use of US college students revealed that on average they switched tasks every 65 seconds; even adults working in offices typically stuck at one task for just three minutes. Shifting his focus to concentration among car drivers Hari presents research showing that receiving texts while behind the wheel has an impact similar to driving while drunk. This has deadly consequences; about one in every five car accidents is now due to distracted drivers. (38-39)

The Loss of Reading

Reading the scriptures and reflecting slowly and deeply on the lives and writings of holy men and women is a critical part of growth in faith and contemplation. If you are finding this an ongoing struggle here are some findings that will shed light on this. Hari examines at length the dramatic drop in book reading and the increasing amount of time that users of cell-phones devote to their devices. The proportion of Americans who read books for pleasure has dropped dramatically. 57% of American citizens do not read a book in a single year. By 2017 whereas the average citizen spent just seventeen minutes a day reading, he or she has spent 5.4 hours on their phone. Children between 13-17 in the USA were sending a text message every six minutes they were awake.

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These statistics point to a huge shift in the way in which people have come to understand the world and human life. Whereas books encourage reflection in depth and questions that may reverberate days, even weeks, after reading, social media such as Twitter operate on the model that the world can be digested in bites of 280 characters. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves, how much time do I spend tracking on phone compared to the time I sit asking God to reveal his holy face to me.

Shrinking Sleep Patterns

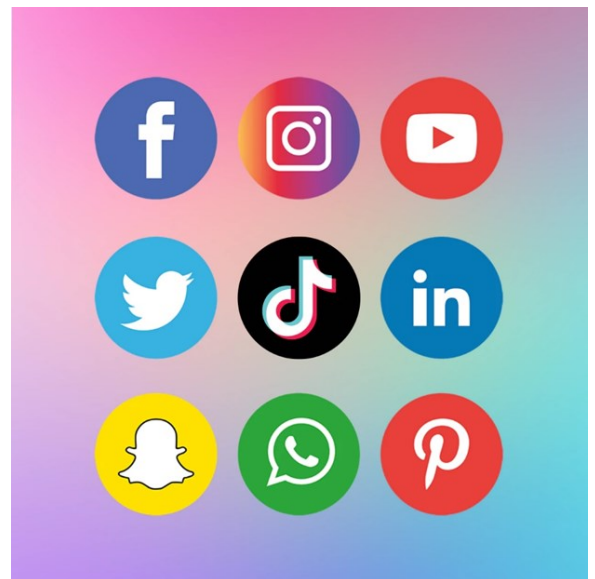
The last five years have seen the publication of a number of studies on the role of sleep in a healthy lifestyle. Studies indicate that 40% of US citizens are sleep-deprived, getting less than the minimum of seven hours needed each night; 23% are having less than five hours a night. So it is no wonder that only 15% of respondents answered that they woke feeling refreshed. It is in this context that Hari begins to analyse some of the deeper causes of this trend. As he points out, TV channels and phone networks make most of their revenue by selling advertising time. The longer you stay awake watching programmes, the more profits grow, so one of their goals is to keep you watching as long as possible. We all live busy lives; it is so easy to compensate by blobbing out in front of the TV or computer screen – but what is this doing to my energy and ability to notice and respond to the demands of love that sneak up on us day by day?

The Growing Power of the Algorithm

Social media companies have spent billions to find ways to increase their viewer numbers, and the length of time these viewers devote to them. This has led to what is now described as ‘surveillance capitalism.’ Briefly it is the ability to record and analyse the interests, desires and opinions of each individual user so as to construct mathematical tools (algorithms) that will suggest more and more items of interest, so keeping viewers scrolling more and more to feed these desires, fantasies and hates. In this context it is the influence of ‘negativity bias’ that is most worrying. For a long time psychologists have known that we will stare at something disturbing and violent much longer than placid and peaceful scenes. A study of YouTube clips showed that words such as ‘hates, obliterates, slams, destroys’ will raise ratings by 20% for each such word. Posts filled with ‘indignant disagreement’ will double likes and shares.

Algorithms that record such trends automatically focus on them, then offer more and more similar clips. This is one of the factors feeding the anger and violence that features so strongly in anti-

vaccination demonstrations all over the world. As Hari notes, “A study by the MIT found that fake news travels six times faster on Twitter than real news, and during the 2016 US presidential elections, flat-out falsehoods on Facebook outperformed the top stories at nineteen mainstream news sites put together.” A secret 2020 Facebook study by a group of its analysts reported that 64% of all those who joined extremist groups had found their way there directed by algorithms that Facebook had recommended. You might feel that your anger and violent feelings have been spiking up over the last few years; are you feeding them without knowing it?



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Conclusion

Near the end of his book Hari lists six resolutions that he made as the result of what he discovered and practical steps he took to implement them.

First was limiting the time spent on his phone by using a lock-up device that will not open till the set time mechanism is up. Secondly, when he begins to get distractions, he switches onto what is called flow in which we get utterly absorbed by something that challenges us. Thirdly - by spending one half of the year (portioned out evenly) not using social media at all. Fourth, letting his mind wander reflectively during his daily walk of an hour, far away from all other distractions. Fifth – insuring that he gets eight hours sleep a night and not allowing himself to look at screens for two hours before going to bed. Sixth, spending more time with his young relatives, letting them play freely, without being managed or over-supervised.

These are big commitments for a best-selling world-known author. Perhaps each of us needs to have the determination to view such possibilities in my life and work. This is not just a matter of efficiency but of following spiritual avenues that will allow me to hear God rather than the phone or computer speaking to me.

Answer (to Question on Page 6)

Aggiornamento is Italian, meaning 'bringing up to date.' *Giorno* is Italian for 'day.' *Ressourcement* is French, meaning 'return to the sources'. It was originally a school of theology, in the mid-20th century, prominent in France. It was interested in a return to early Christianity and the Scriptures. The word is related to 'resources'.



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