

20-5-2021

Liturgy and COVID-19 in Australia: A Strange Mix

Angela McCarthy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/pastoral-liturgy>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McCarthy, Angela. "Liturgy and COVID-19 in Australia: A Strange Mix." *Pastoral Liturgy* 51, no. 3 (2021): 1-11.
<https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/pastoral-liturgy/vol51/iss3/3>

This Article is brought to you by ResearchOnline@ND. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pastoral Liturgy by an authorized administrator of ResearchOnline@ND. For more information, please contact researchonline@nd.edu.au.



Liturgy and COVID-19 in Australia: A Strange Mix

By Angela McCarthy

Editor's note: This article was previously published in the *Australasian Catholic Record* 98(2021), 54-65.

Introduction

Early in 2020 it was inconceivable that our Australian governments would place extremely severe restrictions on church services, almost banning them. But in March we were experiencing the first of the COVID-19-related restrictions about gatherings, and then on Palm Sunday, 5 April, more serious restrictions came into force and our hopes for Easter celebrations, including baptisms within the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, were all dashed. The sudden call for live streaming and the necessary technology meant that there was a great variation in quality among the flood of efforts from many parishes and cathedrals. Like many parts of our cultural life, from cafés to the performing arts, all of whose patronage was decimated by the restrictions, liturgy depends on gatherings.

Responses to COVID-19 Liturgies

Following government directions, each diocese was able to provide clear instructions for Sunday liturgies, weddings, funerals, sacraments of initiation and anointing of the sick. The cleaning and care of liturgical spaces became a normal procedure at the conclusion of any liturgy. As an aside, a positive result from the cleaning of all commonly used hard surfaces, improved personal hygiene practices, and social distancing, was that the incidence of influenza in 2020 was far less than in previous years.¹

The following material has been gathered from different sources and examines responses until October from various Christian communities from differing traditions during the severe nationwide COVID-19-related restrictions on church services. Within these differing traditions there are various eucharistic theologies that affected what each community was able to pursue during the restrictions.

In an October gathering of the Council for Catholic Women (Perth),² there was an invitation to reflect on the pandemic and how we can live through it. A variety of responses was evident, but the surprising element was the disparity between views. Some of the women were very positive in their outlook and experiences, explaining how content they were that now they could attend Mass every day without leaving their lounge rooms and they could find throughout the world many satisfying

1. A graph supporting this statement can be found through the COVID-19 website for Hunter Health, <http://www.hnehealth.nsw.gov.au/Pages/home.aspx>.

2. The Committee of the Council for Catholic Women Perth invited reflections on living through COVID-19 and the new way forward at their gathering on 22 October 2020 in James Nestor Hall, Leederville.

streamed liturgies with good homilists. Some have opted to continue that pattern rather than return to their parishes. This could indicate a lack of formation in what liturgy really requires: the understanding of becoming the Body of Christ. Feeling that they are fulfilling their obligation to attend Mass and that it makes them Catholic perhaps indicates a legalistic mentality that comes from a culture from the past. A question arises: Is it only the obligation to attend that drives this need for viewing the Mass?

At the other end of the spectrum were those women who were repelled by the barrenness of the performance of the liturgy in front of the camera, where it seemed that the priest owned the liturgical action and people were not necessary. It was seen to be sterile, male-dominated and without any sense of the presence of Christ. For those women it was depressing and so they sought other forms of communal prayer to satisfy their hunger. A question that arises from this experience is: How can we liturgically be related and form communion by digital means?

From reflections provided by the members of the Australian Academy of Liturgy by early September 2020, there was also a rich variety of responses, several of which I will relate in most of the remainder of this section. In the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne,³ there was a variety of possibilities offered within digital liturgical spaces: a 'eucharistic fast' using Services of the Word only; Corporate Spiritual Communion, where the priest communicates the sense of corporate worship and, when he receives the bread and wine, says clearly, 'The body / blood of Christ keep us all in eternal life', then leaves a time of silence; and a love feast (or *agape* meal), which is not eucharistic but is a meal that can be shared tangibly with members of one's household during the online liturgy. Similarly to the Catholic tradition, forms of extended communion where the reserved sacrament is taken to a congregation in another place were not encouraged during the pandemic and remote consecration was not possible.⁴

The eucharistic theology of the Uniting Church tradition varies considerably from the Catholic tradition. A Uniting Church congregant gathered the elements for communion in her own home and participated in communion with her digital community:

I gathered the elements, prepared my worship space and connected to the service. In the communion time, the minister spoke words of institution and then proceeded to name each person on the Zoom list. We were individually offered words of blessing that are not said in our usual practice of sitting in our seats, having the elements passed out and consuming at the same time. I felt blessed by the participation in this sacrament in a way that I have not felt for some time. I also heard the names and could see the faces of many dear people called as they were also invited to come, eat and drink. This felt like community.⁵

-
3. Rhys Bezzant, Brad Billings, Dorothy Lee, Andreas Loewe and Charles Sherlock, 'Digital Services and Holy Communion: Advice for the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne', *Australian Journal of Liturgy* 17, no. 2 (2020): 81.
 4. Bezzant et al., 'Digital Services and Holy Communion', 81.
 5. Michelle Eastwood, 'Reflection on Zoom Church', *Australian Journal of Liturgy* 17, no. 2 (2020): 83.

The work for the minister in this situation was very demanding, but as time went on more people were able to assist with the technical arrangements and music. Their bible study group has also been meeting via Zoom and has been so successful that they might not go back to face-to-face gatherings.

A similar experience was described by Nathan Nettleton in regard to his Baptist community and it was so positive that it is their new normal. While some Baptist communities do not usually have eucharistic liturgies, the South Yarra Baptist Community is unusual in this respect. While this differs from the Catholic tradition, their usual 'highly participatory and interactive liturgy' has been remarkably successful using Zoom. Further, some other liturgical aspects of their community have worked better in the digital medium:

The biggest positive though, has been the emergence of a fully functioning cycle of Daily Office prayer. We had resources for this before but could never gather enough of our scattered congregation in one place to make it a regular thing. In the Cyber Chapel we now gather for Matins, Vespers and Compline six days a week, and more than half the total congregation are participating, most of them at least once a day and some more. Not only are they praying, but most stay and chat for half an hour or more, and those conversations usually touch on significant pastoral issues and on ideas, hopes and dreams for the future of the church. There is both a frequency and a depth on conversation that far exceeds anything that was happening before.⁶

A COVID-19-related experience for the parishioners of a Catholic parish in Brisbane was complicated further by the enforced retirement, due to ill health (not COVID-19-related), of their beloved parish priest and the difficulty that his replacement faced in being caught overseas until May. With the parish community reeling from a sense of loss, parishioners worked together to find a solution. From the home of parishioners Michael and Anne, they live streamed a Liturgy of the Word at 9 a.m. each Sunday. Michael is the president of the Australian Pastoral Musicians Network and he described the experience in their *Network Newsletter* in September:

This helped maintain a focus and sense of connection for our parishioners and many regulars who joined us weekly from well outside our parish boundaries. In this period our weekly 'views' were 800–2000 with many regulars, and interestingly, many regulars who were not regular Mass attenders. Each week we remotely shared music, scripture, prayer and excellent, relevant homily/reflections from a lay woman, Anne.⁷

Older members of parishes found it particularly difficult to engage if their technology skills were inadequate and if there was no one to help them. In some parishes, resources were provided that were hand-delivered to their senior members. Pastoral care through telephone calls and socially distanced door knocking enabled positive contact. In one parish the bell was rung on Sundays, with a Facebook invitation for anyone in the community:

-
6. Nathan Nettleton, 'Liturgy and COVID-19: South Yarra Community Baptist Church', *Australian Journal of Liturgy* 17, no. 2 (2020): 84.
 7. Michael Mangan, *Network Newsletter*, Australian Pastoral Musicians Network, September 2020.

‘when you hear the bell, join us in prayer for the safety of all, in whatever spiritual tradition is yours, knowing that all around you, we are praying for you in our homes’. This received some significant positive response from members of a variety of faith backgrounds.⁸

The extensive variety of virtual worship experiences has brought to the surface many questions that will need to be considered carefully. Within a South Australian Uniting Church congregation, those who gathered via Zoom found a new form of engaging within a community:

people have seen each other’s faces in ways that they do not see them in church, seeing people’s faces, not just the baack of their heads. This has promoted some greater intimacy and even the learning of names of members of a worshipping congregation. Chat times before or after worship have been valued. The presider and those leading prayers and offering bible readings, were able to be seen more closely, than in the church environment. Thus, facial expression in the reader and the preacher became much more important.⁹

One of the acute inadequacies of Zoom was the inability to say responses and to sing together simultaneously. An alternative was singing along to YouTube tracks, but this ‘tended to tip the worship experience more towards being audience at a performance’.¹⁰ Copyright became an issue as well, because broadcasting music needs different considerations when used in the digital world, which is completely unlike the recording of usage for copyright purposes associated with church liturgies. Music is integral to liturgy and so the question arises as to how this communal aspect can be successfully incorporated in the digital space.

At Holy Trinity Abbey, New Norcia, Fr David Barry offered observations from his perspective as a monk. The Abbey is a two-hour drive north of Perth and in this rural area internet connection is insufficiently reliable for live streaming. With the closure of the Abbey Church and the oratory (except for the monks), the Abbot, who is also parish priest, used email as his regular contact with the parishioners. New Norcia is a popular place to visit for religious reasons and tourism, but with the Guesthouse, Museum–Art Gallery and college venues for school camps all closed, it left only the Roadhouse/ Post Office functioning. As Fr Barry explained, ‘monks embrace a significant degree of solitude in their community life’,¹¹ but they also found it strange not to have the constant range of visitors. They were acutely aware of the danger to people from the pandemic and to themselves as some of their community are elderly and at risk. However, prayer made a difference: ‘all of these concerns we brought regularly to prayer, knowing that prayer for one another is part of the meaning of ‘the communion of saints’, in which we profess belief in our Creed’.¹²

8. Thomas M. Leslie, ‘COVID-19 Reflections: Worship Without a Church Building, and Where To From Here?’, *Australian Journal of Liturgy* 17, no. 2 (2020): 85–6.

9. Alison Whish, ‘How Have Our Churches Responded to COVID-19 in 2020?’, *Australian Journal of Liturgy* 17, no. 2 (2020): 87.

10. Whish, ‘How Have Our Churches Responded?’, 88.

11. David Barry, ‘Monastic Liturgy in Time of COVID-19: Interim Reflections’, *Australian Journal of Liturgy* 17, no. 2 (2020): 91.

12. Barry, ‘Monastic Liturgy’, 91.

The greatest adjustments to Christian communities around the world had to be made at Easter. With only one week's notice in Australia, it became very difficult to provide adequate digital coverage of quality. Alternatives were available online if one searched, and one such offering was a reflection with readings and music on the Easter Triduum by Dan Schutte that was distributed by the *National Catholic Reporter*.¹³ The music and reflections, as well as homilies, for Schutte's Easter Triduum were of high quality and enabled home use with a deep sense of the Spirit. Fr Barry noted that in New Norcia, where the Triduum was celebrated by the monks alone, 'there was a beauty in the simplicity of the Triduum that connected us with our contemplative spirituality'.¹⁴ With plans for the Easter celebration of Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults cancelled, the celebrations of those rites later in the year allowed a sense of the Easter experience once again.

A further response to the restrictions comes from those who developed their understanding of the domestic Church. Our own family embraced this option. Those who were able gathered in our home and others joined us by Zoom, including some who would not normally attend weekly liturgy. We celebrated a Liturgy of the Word of the appropriate Sunday, which was emailed to those who were remote. The young grandchildren enjoyed being able to read the readings and prayers along with the adults, and when it came to Easter, they decorated the home with great joy. While there was a hunger for Eucharist, there was a profound sense of Church and the presence of Christ in our midst as we gathered to pray and sing and share the Word.

It is clear that the limitations and changes made to our liturgies because of the pandemic have prompted decidedly varying responses from differing Christian traditions. For those rejoicing in the feeling that they are part of a universal Church because of their being able to access liturgies from all around the world, there is a sense of spiritual communion of saints. The hunger for Eucharist, however, must remain. The responses from various Christian traditions described above offer a broader way of examining what we have done in the digital space. In the Catholic tradition the majority of online offerings were of viewing the Mass, and the question remains: Was this the most effective way of gathering the faithful?

Ongoing Impact of the Pandemic

Even though there have been warnings in the past about forthcoming pandemics,¹⁵ COVID-19 showed that no one was sufficiently prepared. Leadership within the Church at every level had to scramble to provide resources and online worship. New pastoral initiatives were required, and varied means of collecting funds from parishioners without church attendance had to be hastily arranged. Creativity and thoughtfulness abounded in Church communities and within the wider community, and one of the most generous and altruistic groups was the arts community. Images of professional singers singing from balconies around the world are unforgettable.

13. This was available through <https://www.ncronline.org/feature-series/the-easter-triduum-with-dan-schutte/stories>.

14. Barry, 'Monastic Liturgy', 92.

15. Bill Gates gave an impassioned warning in regard to pandemics in 2015: 'The Next Outbreak? We're Not Ready', TED Talk, 2015, https://www.ted.com/talks/bill_gates_the_next_outbreak_we_re_not_ready?language=en.

Online contributions of actors, musicians, comedians and artists of every kind lifted the spirits of those isolated.

But what of the ongoing impact? Wittwer notes key criteria that predict the disasters 'with the greatest impact: the loss of, and threat to life, the breadth of effect, and serious and ongoing financial implications'.¹⁶ All of these criteria are present in the pandemic. She includes duration as a further criterion, because it adds serious complexity to decisions for future action. Wittwer also points out that our Christian history contains trauma in the accounts, for example, of the Hebrew exiles, through to the trauma experienced by Jesus' disciples following his death and the struggles they faced in the early Church. 'The church will be changed by this time, and how we respond will determine whether this is a change towards vitality or decline.'¹⁷ There are still many unknowns about the pandemic but the impact will be long lasting. In the intervention phase of recovery, Wittwer points to five key principles to enhance well-being: promoting a sense of safety, calming, self-efficacy and collective-efficacy, connectedness, and hope.¹⁸ These five principles were evident in the primary liturgical activity of the Church.

Instructions from the Church following government directives have been clear and accessible and have therefore promoted a sense of safety. The responses thus far from Church officials in regard to behaviour have been calm. Self-efficacy and collective-efficacy suggest that we have to do things that keep us in some kind of control of our own actions and future. Initially all decisions were made at an official level and, on the whole, Australians obeyed. As the Body of Christ, though, the need is to be able to function using initiative and participation of women and men, clergy and laity, in the decision-making process. Under the current governance structure, that subsidiarity would be hard to effect. Future directions for the Church need to accommodate this level of efficacy, and this challenge will be faced by the Plenary Council.

Archbishop Comensoli spoke of the need for the foundational priorities of 'family, religion, work, education, care and leisure ... each step along our path from [COVID-19] exile must be taken in personal and civilising ways'.¹⁹ With each of these aspects of life prioritised, then the 'tender closeness of God'²⁰ will be evident in our lives and our liturgies.

Connectedness as a principle is a prime aspect of liturgy. We come together to be connected into one as the Body of Christ; for this we have been created. This is not guaranteed through the action, but it is given to us as a means of communion with Jesus Christ. 'Its fruitfulness comes about in a covenantal fashion, that is by the conjoining of the liturgical action and those celebrating it.'²¹

16. Tanya Wittwer, 'Pastoral Considerations for a Pandemic', *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought and Practice* 27, no. 3 (May 2020), <https://hail.to/laidlaw-college/publication/z0YvCh2/article/PCCADzg>.

17. Wittwer, 'Pastoral Considerations'.

18. Wittwer, 'Pastoral Considerations'.

19. Peter Comensoli, 'There Will Be No Return to a Pre-covid World: It Has Changed Forever', *The Age* (Melbourne), 23 September 2020, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/there-will-be-no-return-to-a-pre-covid-world-it-has-changed-forever-20200923-p55ygp.html>.

20. Comensoli, 'There Will Be No Return'.

21. Frank O'Loughlin, *Gathering the People of God* (Bayswater, VIC: Coventry Press, 2020), 115.

If the need to return to online liturgies emerges, then this aspect of connection is paramount. As discussed earlier, some of the experiences of liturgy online that involved increased connectedness make the return to looking at the back of heads of people whose names you do not know unattractive. In online Masses, how can the connectiveness be evident? The congregation does not simply need to see the ritual: they need to be part of the ritual to be safely and fruitfully connected. Special attention needs to be given to those who cannot be in the virtual liturgical space in an ongoing way, as it has been noted that many have not returned to the churches now that they are open: some elderly people, and others with vulnerable immune systems, have not returned to their parish churches because of fear of infection, but they also have no capacity to use the virtual liturgical space. By live streaming Masses, was this the best way to connect people? Could parish communities be drawn instead to much more inclusive and connected ways of celebrating?

The final principle from Wittwer is hope, and the Church has vast experience in the promotion of hope, as it is the core business of our faith, and the resurrection is central:²²

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet 1:3-5)

The celebration of the Easter Vigil, the pinnacle of our expression of hope, is not just for the here and now. It is not only about the presence of resurrection in our lives, but it is the eschatological hope that when Christ comes again all of creation will be drawn back to God (cf. Rom 8:22-23). How such hope is celebrated in pandemic lockdowns needs careful attention because it is expected that the experiences of 2020 will not be the only forced isolations.

Eucharistic Presence and Absence

As declared in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the presence of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist is fourfold: in the person of the priest, in the Word, in the eucharistic species and in the people as they pray and sing.²³ This profound reality of the Church's liturgical life needs constant formation and renewal so that the understanding of all four aspects may be deepened, particularly now that our experiences have been changed by the pandemic. Pope Francis encourages the continual formation in liturgy for all the Church: clergy and laity. He describes the liturgy as 'an experience extended to the conversion of life through the assimilation of the Lord's way of thinking and behaving'.²⁴ When the community understands that

22. Wittwer, 'Pastoral Considerations'.

23. Vatican II Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963), n. 7, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

24. Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants at the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 14 February 2019,

the presence of Christ is utterly real, then being converted through assimilating the Lord's way of thinking will change the community. The conviction of the real presence of Christ, not just in molecules, but in the richest possible sense that brings the community to oneness in Christ, is transformational. As Chupungco declares: 'Without the visible and tangible rites of the Church that we call liturgy the priestly office of Christ would remain invisible and inaccessible'.²⁵

In contemporary times there can be many ways in which we can be present to one another. Through a phone call, people can be present to each other through sound; by Zoom technology and other digital platforms we can also be present visually, which gives us a further sense of communication. However, we know and have witnessed as border closures have been relaxed, that being present bodily to one another has a different power altogether. 'The doctrine of the real presence, especially outside the Eucharistic bread and wine, requires the vivid awareness that in every liturgical rite Christ appears as large as life.'²⁶ Can that sense of Christ's presence be fully felt through digital means?

Over twenty times in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* there is reference to full, conscious active participation. This assures the Church that in doing work for God *together* the presence of Christ draws us in to the life of God through Word and Sacrament. How do we verify that presence? Is it through the embodied experience? In the Middle Ages theologians tried to solve this by using the concept of causality.²⁷ Today we explore how the presence of Christ is disclosed 'in and by the participating assembly'.²⁸ We know and understand the presence of Christ because of our own actions, attention, perceptions and senses. Mitchell affirms that the understanding of presence 'belongs to the definition of all real presence to be limitless, like love'.²⁹ Love can be expressed in many ways but the physical act of touching another person, being with that person in a deeply connected sense, is not possible in the digital space.

Pope Francis further states that the 'liturgy is in fact the main road through which Christian life passes through every phase of its growth'.³⁰ How can people be drawn back to the celebration of the liturgy in a way that is truly transformative and not only obligatory? These teachings anchor in the understanding that the celebration of liturgy is an art, *ars celebrandi*, where music, song and prayer are celebrated in a rich dialogue between the gathered people of God and the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit.³¹

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/february/documents/papa-francesco_20190214_cong-culto-divino.html.

25. Anscar J. Chupungco, *What, Then, Is Liturgy?* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2010), 134.

26. Chupungco, *What, Then, Is Liturgy?*, 138.

27. Nathan D. Mitchell, 'Christ's Presence in the Assembly', *Worship* 80, no. 3 (2006).

28. Mitchell, 'Christ's Presence', 253.

29. Mitchell, 'Christ's Presence', 265.

30. Francis, Address to Participants at Plenary Assembly.

31. Thomas A. Krosnicki, 'By Way of Comment: Pope Francis on Liturgical Formation', *Worship* 93, no. 5 (October 2019): 374.

O'Loughlin questions whether we can receive an apple by email.³² While this question seems frivolous, it refers deeply to the understanding of absence and presence. For Christ to be present in the Eucharist we have to have the ability to feel that presence through our senses, to be embodied in our understanding. He suggests that prayer can take place over time and space, but Eucharist requires a different level of presence in Christ and to one another, so our model of participation in times of pandemic needs to be carefully assessed.

Gribben also notes how 'smells and movement ... mark a healthy human gathering', and in eucharistic liturgy the liturgical furniture, the art, music, vestments, candles, incense all move our embodied action towards the immersed experience of liturgy.³³ The liturgy is an organism and if we are connected only in time, not in space, the organism cannot transcend that situation. Does the community then need to remain hungry for Eucharist as the pandemic proceeds, and then, when the pandemic has passed, need the desire for the presence of Christ within the Eucharist to be deeply appreciated?

The Way Forward: What Should It Look Like?

The human being in embodied form exists in a state of perpetual risk. That sense of risk has increased through the impact of the pandemic and will continue to influence our cultural responses. Transhumanism argues that we should be able to use technology to enhance our human state to lengthen our lives, and to improve our bodies and minds through medical intervention.³⁴ Theologically this can be considered through central themes of 'the place of human hope in the search for perfection, technological dreaming, visionary approaches to technology, utopias, the Incarnation, human identity, and God's promises'.³⁵ This shows transhumanism as a way of responding to risk. To live is to risk suffering, but our developing culture of risk aversion is taking us into an isolated space that is based on fear. As Norman and Reiss state, 'The changed relationship to risk, in combination with the availability of technologies that enable us to interact virtually, we suggest, will be transformative'.³⁶ Sacraments in Catholic life, and the life of other Christian communities, have enabled an encounter with God in a way that interrupts life and is transformative. This interruption allows for the 'piercing of our temporal reality' and a 'connection between the visible and divine'.³⁷ Can we experience such transformative experiences in the digital space? Being deprived of sacramental experience due to a pandemic is disruptive and the embodiment of the Body of Christ through these encounters becomes diminished. As Cardinal Sarah declared in his letter to all bishops:

As much as the means of communication perform a valued service to the sick and those who are unable to go to church, and have performed

32. Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Can You Send an Apple by Email?', in *Flashes of Insight: Let's Talk Liturgy*, ed. Joseph Grayland (New Zealand: You Tube, 7 August 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UWuMRgfLKc&feature=youtu.be>.

33. Robert Gribben, 'Eucharistic Absence', *Australian Journal of Liturgy* 17, no. 2 (2020): 75.

34. Ziba Norman and Michael J. Reiss, 'Risk and Sacrament: Being Human in a COVID-19 World', *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 55, no. 3 (September 2020), 577-90, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/zygo.12618>.

35. Norman and Reiss, 'Risk and Sacrament'.

36. Norman and Reiss, 'Risk and Sacrament'.

37. Norman and Reiss, 'Risk and Sacrament'.

a great service in the broadcast of Holy Mass at a time when there was no possibility of community celebrations, no broadcast is comparable to personal participation or can replace it... Due attention to hygiene and safety regulations cannot lead to the sterilisation of gestures and rites, to the instilling, even unconsciously, of fear and insecurity in the faithful.³⁸

The very fact of the Incarnation, the embodiment of God's love in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, opened humankind to the transcendent—God and humanity linked indissolubly, an expression of the Trinity, a relationship of love and redemption. By using digital technology to keep us safe in an era of risk we must not lose our capacity to encounter God, through Christ, and become open to the transcendent in our lives.

Pope Francis speaks strongly about the inability of digital connectivity to connect humanity in real ways. Digital media 'lack the physical gestures, facial expressions, moments of silence, body language and even the smells, the trembling of hands, the blushes and perspiration that speak to us and are a part of human relationships'.³⁹ Such relationships are necessary in the celebration of Eucharist and the changes wrought by the pandemic should be used as an opportunity to embrace a better way of being community.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this article various responses to the impact of COVID-19 were described and reviewed. The responses ranged from wonderful developments of a new normal for interactive liturgy to severe disappointment. The ongoing impact of the pandemic brought together views on the risks associated with gathering as human beings and forming necessary connections. Eucharistic presence and absence were examined with an understanding of how the Second Vatican Council desires the Church to encounter God through the liturgy with full, conscious and active participation. The liturgy is the source and the summit of our faith,⁴⁰ and we are called to become one in the Body of Christ. In examining a way forward, the idea of transhumanism, which can have both positive ways of engaging with technology and destructive aspects as well, was described along with an understanding of the deep need in liturgy for the connectivity that enables our humanity to become transcendent.

Some core ideas for further consideration in a pandemic and post-pandemic world are presented below:

1. The immediate response to the restrictions because of COVID-19 could be viewed as ill-conceived in the way it primarily presented liturgy as live-streamed Masses.

38. Robert Sarah, 'Let Us Return to the Eucharist with Joy', 15 August 2020, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-cardinal-robert-sarah---let-us-return-to-the-eucharist-with-joy-58368>.

39. Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, 3 October 2020, n. 43, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

40. Vatican II Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 10.

2. Simply filming eucharistic liturgy is not sufficient, as it does not allow for the organic action of becoming one in the Body of Christ.
3. Using digital platforms needs to be interactive in some way. Zoom and other interactive digital means have been successful, because the people who are celebrating together can see each other and can contribute.
4. Interactive digital forms of the Liturgy of the Word, and of the Liturgy of the Hours, with smaller groups could be developed so that communication can take place. They could be a more valuable form of liturgical gathering.
5. Decisions, preparation and participation in relation to digital means of liturgy need to involve women and men, laity and clergy.
6. The domestic Church needs to be resourced and supported in times of isolation.
7. Those who remain isolated and cannot return to church gatherings need to be pastorally supported and liturgically connected in some way.

We have become risk-averse, so how we encourage a sense of safety and welcome becomes critically important and gives us an opportunity that should not be missed. This pandemic—as a global event—gives impetus to reconsider the common good. The approach should be bottom up, starting with the domestic Church, parishes and educational communities. Meanwhile, even though we now can attend Sunday liturgy and receive the Body of Christ, we continue to thirst for the Blood of Christ.

Our love for Christ can be measured by our love for one another—and not just for the ones around us, but for all humanity.