

20<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear Students, Parents and Staff,

As I sit down to write this communique, the equilibrium between students and staff remains in beautiful balance. Staff challenged our Year 12's to a volleyball tournament over lunchtime, and the outcome of the multiple games was a tied result. It was played in a great spirit, reflective of the high regard built up right across our community.

We are seeing some students for whom the usual end of term pressures are magnified because of the other uncertainties surrounding them. For our Year 7 students, they have been working hard to build new relationships and adjust to a new learning environment; it is reasonable to expect that they may be more emotionally vulnerable over the last week of term – continue to encourage all students to eat well, exercise and maintain healthy sleep routines. And at home, make sure you express your love and gratitude for the beautiful young people that they are. Young people still look to the adults around them to echo their response in times of uncertainty.

It has been a very demanding week for everyone in education. Our staff team have been working hard to deliver our normal educational program. There has been very significant disruption to the student and staff experience as a result of the cancellation of many of our co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. The disappointment that this has brought has been substantive. We are also planning resolutely for a possible, unknown period of shutdown.

It is challenging for a community to respond under these circumstances, and our staff team are professionally supporting the; wellbeing, faith development and learning and teaching that is being delivered here at school as our first priority.

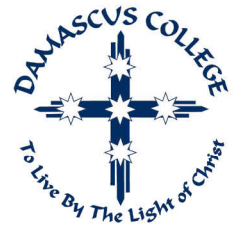
Concurrently we are preparing to roll out a remote learning plan if we are required to close. I include details of that plan with this correspondence. Please take the time to familiarise yourself with the attached manual.

I thank families for being conservative when you have a young person who is feeling unwell or showing symptoms of illness, for keeping them home. It is vitally important to everyone's health under the current circumstances that you continue to do so. If a young person presents at school with symptoms of illness, we will ask you to collect them. When students are well enough to return to school, we will support them to catch up on their learning and make the appropriate modification for what has been missed.

Staff are advised to take the same approach with those students who, for very valid personal reasons, are in home isolation. Staff have many and varied demands on them at the moment, and I have asked them to prioritise current delivery and

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preparation for shutdown. Families will appreciate that we are in challenging times. The Damascus staff team are deeply committed to the best interests of our students, and I ask for your understanding at this time.

On Wednesday, the Bishops of Victoria issued new guidelines regarding the celebration of liturgies and sacraments. Public liturgies and celebrations of Mass have been suspended. All Catholics in Victoria are dispensed from their Sunday obligation until further notice.

While we are working one week at a time at the moment, we have had to look ahead to next term for some things. At this stage, we have decided to postpone Year 10 work experience and CPDA activities which were due to commence from May 4-8.

I wanted to revisit advice regarding our hygiene practices here at school.

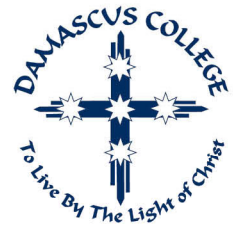
On the advice of the Australian Government Department of Health, we are actively taking additional precautionary measures to minimise the risk of COVID-19 (coronavirus) in our school. These include:

#### **Damascus College Hygiene Practices**

- Increasing the frequency of cleaning our restrooms around the school.
- For our classrooms, our cleaners are paying special attention to the wiping of door handles and hard surfaces, and additional time is being spent by our maintenance staff cleaning doors, handrails and hard surfaces.
- Providing additional hand sanitiser, soap and tissues in many locations around the school. We have ordered a number of additional sanitiser stations which are expected to be delivered and in operation soon.
- Posters on hand washing and coughing best practices have been put up around the school, and the message reiterated through our daily messages.
- All non-essential school excursions and activities have been postponed or cancelled.
- No indoor gatherings at school of over 500 people – assemblies, events etc. Please note that the additional restrictions on public gatherings of more than 100 people do not apply to schools, but we are working to observe these restrictions.
- Regularly educating and reminding staff and students on hygiene and cleanliness best practices, including:
  - Wash your hands frequently with soap and water
  - Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth
  - Practice good respiratory hygiene – cover your mouth and nose with bent elbow or tissue when coughing/sneezing, then dispose of the tissue immediately
  - If you are unwell, please stay home. If COVID-19 symptoms present, please consult your GP and self-isolate if necessary
  - Stay informed and follow the advice given by healthcare providers

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- Providing regular communications to families and students on best practice for basic hygiene

I remind families as per my communication yesterday that the final day for students for this term will be Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> March.

I shall provide another update early next week.

If you have specific questions or concerns, please contact the College and we will do our best to address these.

Enjoy the weekend

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M Byrne".

Matthew Byrne  
Principal