

# *Love Inspires*

## Heartfelt Messages of Hope

<i>Come and Go: A Poem</i>	2
Foreword	3
Preface	3
How we started	4
PART 1 We are never alone	5
PART 2 We can cope	9
PART 3 We can see the rainbow	15
PART 4 We can dream	21
Epilogue	24

*Come and Go*  
by Jamie Kanawati



Thinking about the past,  
Many things have come.  
Leaves fall,  
Leaves grow.  
Trees come,  
Trees go.



Then it comes at last,  
Nature turns numb.  
Birds chirp,  
Birds fly.  
Trees freeze,  
Trees die.



Spring arrives fast,  
After the loss of a chum.  
Seeds fall,  
Seeds grow.  
Flowers bloom,  
Flowers show.



While the sun rays blast,  
The meadow is glum.  
Flowers giggle,  
Flowers rise.  
Tree sits,  
Tree cries.

*A simple poem about the cycle of life throughout different seasons, expressing our own personal journey.*

## FOREWORD

Despite the inconveniences we are experiencing, I consider that the Coronavirus pandemic represents an important *Pause Period* in our lives that has made us appreciate many things that we took for granted. The Pause Period provides us with ample private time that helps us to strengthen our relationship with God and with our family members, and to reverse our priorities, to improve the quality of our life.

I pray that when this pandemic is over and life goes back to normal, the benefits we gained during that period will not fade. *Roni Sikh*

## PREFACE

Faced with a calamity, the human being frequently feels powerless, or at least bewildered. Yet, as Christians we should always put our trust in the Lord, knowing that He never forsakes us. Our vision and outlook on things are usually restricted to the present. But God has plans for us. What appears today as a punishment might have a good outcome in the future. These difficult and uncertain times do test our faith in God the Almighty, but they also test our commitment to each other and to our society.

A lesson we learned from our brothers and sisters in need was how grateful they were for our continuous service to care for them, during the pandemic. They feared we would stop our activities on which they relied for survival. But we kept on going with our team at St Michael's Meals, reaching even more people than before.

Many outbreaks have come and gone, and COVID-19 will be no exception. What will certainly remain is the wisdom we learned from the experience: never doubt God's love for us!

“Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these” (*Luke 12: 27*).

Our Lord Jesus used the imagery of flowers in His teaching found in St Luke. We wanted to include images of flowers in these pages as an expression of happiness, health, colour, peace, regeneration, love and INSPIRATION, and as an apt reminder of Jesus' words to seek His Kingdom, to not worry, and to know how precious we are to Him. *The Editors*

## HOW WE STARTED

Early in the lockdown, in April 2020, I approached some members of our community, asking them to write a daily message to boost the morale of St Michael's parishioners. The idea was to send daily messages of hope to around 350 mobile numbers, using WhatsApp, and reaching out to more people on Facebook.

Each entry started with the following heading:  
“Let's stay connected”, a daily message of Hope

Good morning parishioners. I invite you not to hesitate to call me at any time 24/7. If you know of anyone who is lonely, out of resources or needs any kind of support, please let me know, I have an enthusiastic team that is always willing to help.

I wish and pray that you are all safe and well. We live in difficult and challenging times with unprecedented conditions that test our resolve. One can feel powerless, yet we should always rely on God's Providence and even use this time for spiritual growth. I will certainly do that and invite you to do the same. We all place our protection in God's hands and grow spiritually by increasing our awareness of our very special and divine nature. You all deserve the sacrifice of Jesus and are indeed the temple of the Holy Spirit and if you are in constant touch with it, you will experience real contentment, which will enable you to spread love, care and hope around you. Though you feel powerless, do not feel helpless. Though you are lonely, do not feel alone. Just recharge your spiritual batteries to enhance the quality of your connection with God. And for sure do not forget to be very wise in protecting yourselves and those around you. God bless you and keep you safe and healthy.

*Fr Gerges*



PART 1  
*We are never alone*

Have you ever been through an impasse and did not feel the hand of God helping you out? God is there, all the time, watching over us. So, let us put our trust in Him and fear not. Jesus, who went all the way to the Cross to save us, will not abandon us. We are his children, and his love has no boundaries. He has protected us more times than we can count. We thank you God for always being there, even when we do not know it. We will never walk or be alone!

---

Good morning parishioners, Christ is risen, He is truly risen. May He protect you and your loved ones throughout this difficult journey leading you to a safe ground. I thank you God for “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me (*Psalm 23: 4*).

*Fr Gerges*

In this time of great uncertainty and fear, we can trust God:  
For every day God thinks of you (*Psalm 68: 16*);  
Every hour God looks after you (*2 Thessalonians 3: 3*);  
Every minute God cares for you (*1 Peter 5: 7*);  
Because every second He loves you (*Jeremiah 31: 3*).  
Remember, trust is like a sticker, once it is removed, it may stick again, but not as strong when first applied.  
Let's keep our focus on God and all will be ok.

*Julie Maakrun*



(1*Corinthians* 13: 4-7,13) Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. *St Paul*

#### THE POWER OF PRAYER

To the believer, prayer is the most powerful force on earth. With the present restrictions, which closed our churches, hopefully not for too long, we can pray at home, while driving, going to the shops or just when we are having a moment/s of silence.

Prayer allows our soul to engage in heartfelt conversation with God, to step into a meditative state, which brings us closer to Him and to each other. Through our physical eyes, we see the world differently, we get a glimpse of what heaven is about.

Things happen when we pray. Things change when we pray. Mountains move, and perhaps more importantly we change. Do not underestimate the power of our prayers. *Psalms* 107: 28 reminds us: “Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble and He brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm and He guided them to their desired haven.”

Prayer is truly our Christian way to remain connected. *Roda Kanawati*



“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”  
(*Jeremiah 29:11*)

We can surely feel the hand of God in this current pandemic, guiding humankind, allowing us the opportunity to focus, to put God in the centre of our day. He is imploring us to prioritise our families, for only God can shut down businesses, keep everyone home, focused what is truly important. He has silenced those who normally have the biggest stages and the loudest voices, distractions no longer exist. The most common excuse not to pray is “I don’t have time”. Our Lord has given us the precious gift of time, and we must use it wisely.

Thank you, Jesus, thanks be to God for this extraordinary gift that we have been given, Lord I offer this day to you. *Randa Habelrih*

Just listen to the news: war, pain, lies, illness, and hate are everywhere. Yet, through the dark climate, humankind is able to offer unconditional love. Search high and low, you will never find anything more beautiful than love. Love is unpredictable, unexpected, uncontrollable.

Your heart beats, sometimes so hard your chest can barely contain it (Stardust). Humans can love those who love them but also those who hate them (Jesus).

There is nothing greater than LOVE (St Paul).

*Fr Gerges*





Despite all our sufferings and difficulties, we must always turn to God because he is love, and his love will strengthen us.

We must choose to see this current pandemic as a gift.

God will never abandon us; He is always with us, even now during this time of physical isolation and economic devastation. We must hold on to the hope which the resurrection of our Lord brings.

Jesus himself experienced unimaginable human suffering. He suffered and died for our salvation.

We do not become holy by living a comfortable life, we grow in holiness when we join our suffering with that of Christ. We develop a deeper relationship with God when we extend our love and share our blessings with others, even when we are hurting.

*Randa Habelrih*





## PART 2

### *We can cope*

Two people can look at the same event from two different angles. Although both will be affected by it, a pessimist may dwell on the negativity of the experience and its effect on his very existence. An optimist, on the other hand, may consider it as only a temporary setback in a continuously otherwise beautiful life. Realistically no situation, good or bad, lasts forever; but perhaps we should be more flexible and always expect a brighter tomorrow and trust that God will never abandon us.

---

Your spiritual health depends solely on you. You own a box of spiritual wealth within. Spend ten minutes daily alone in meditation to grab from this box. You may journal your discoveries, so you can keep an eye on your progress. God bless you.

*Fr Gerges*



Enhance your mood by boosting your happy hormones (incl. serotonin, endorphins, dopamine...):

1. Expose yourself daily to the sunlight for 15-20 minutes (don't forget your sunglasses).
2. Start a few minutes of physical activities such as walking.
3. Call a friend to tell them a joke.
4. Search YouTube for a song you miss and enjoy listening to it.

This will produce enough body chemistry to help you remain **HAPPY** and **HOPEFUL**.

*Fr Gerges*

I was moved by the use of musical therapy to combat quarantine measures and the psychological effects of the virus in the Mediterranean-bordering countries of Europe. As people sang from their terraces, it was a hopeful reminder that music has guided us through pandemics since ancient times in the Levant and beyond. The poignant echo of folk songs that brought happiness and hope to so many is a reminder that, like all other pandemics, this too will pass. My best wishes to you all. *Jack Bittar*

#### WE ARE NOT ALONE

How challenging it is to listen to the news and see that all over the world churches are empty on Sundays, where the Life, Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ are celebrated. But also, all over the world Christians are glued to their television sets or live streams to participate in the ceremonies that were playing on their screens. Coronavirus has made us stronger in our beliefs and that we will get through this. It has made those with younger families stronger in their relationships with each other doing more things together. It has made young adults pick up the phone and ask their parents *R U OK mum and dad, can I do anything for you?* So, in light of all that is happening around us, there is HOPE for a better world in the near future. If you are missing someone just pick up the phone and ask *R U OK*.

Christ is Risen, He is truly Risen.

*Norma Ghattas*

As we continue to self-isolate, and where one day feels like the next, it is important that we remember each day we have a choice to make:

Each day, is *Choose* day:

*Choose* to smile;

*Choose* to love;

*Choose* to be kind;

*Choose* to reach out;

*Choose* to be happy;

*Choose* to pray;

*Choose* to place all your cares in the hands of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

*Julie Maakrun*



The best wonder that this pandemic created is giving us a chance to participate in liturgies all over the world with our brothers and sisters in Christ whether Melkite, Maronite, Coptic, Orthodox or Latin through Facebook or YouTube. You get to marvel at the beauty of each one of them, although, there is a difference in the celebration, they are all united by spreading the word of God and the Eucharist.

Technology united all the churches around the world and made us appreciate how much we need a united Christian community in our lives. We miss the physical interaction with each other and with the Eucharist. Let us take this time to pray for the unity of the church around the world. It is a battle we are going to win because we believe in the resurrection of Christ. Our hope is to see each and every one of our brothers and sisters united under one church.

*Mirvat Zoughaib*

#### SOCIAL DISTANCING, YES!

But we still can be connected. We have been restricted in our social interaction like never before: no gatherings, kisses, hugs, handshakes or embrace. Deprived of our usual expressions of love and empathy to each other, may be, but nothing should stop us from picking up the phone, giving a call to a relative or a friend, showing our support and compassion. Believe me this call to the receiver can be a Godsend. It can transform the person's mood and bring Hope. Let us take care of each other, for kindness is more contagious than the Coronavirus!

*Roda Kanawati*



## AND I SMILED

As a centenarian, my mother has obviously special needs and the family had to place her in a nursing home. This was, understandably, an agonising decision, not without regret or doubt.

With her limited hearing and poor knowledge of the English language, we thought that without daily visits from family and friends she would be miserable and that is why we maintained a daily contact for a couple of years before the Coronavirus pandemic and the present total lockdown.

After explaining her emotional needs to the nursing home administration, they agreed to bring her to see us from behind glass doors, with us remaining on the outside. We did this for some ten minutes almost every day, and curiously my mother seemed happy and well adapted to the situation.

Recently I went with my sister to see her as usual. We rang and asked for her to be brought to the door, and we waited and waited. We rang again and finally she appeared in her wheelchair. She said hello but seemed eager to leave. Then she uttered: “Sorry, I am busy playing Bingo”.

The visit lasted less than 30 seconds and I drove back home. On my 30 kilometre drive I could not stop smiling. My mother is certainly not unhappy nor suffering much from the lockdown. What an example to all of us!

*Naguib Kanawati*



## THE YEAR 2020

2020 will long be remembered as the year of the global pandemic COVID-19. We will remember self-isolation, social distancing, empty supermarket shelves, loss of jobs and income and most of all loss of lives.

We have missed our children and grandchildren and our friends, but we have HOPE that all will be OK soon.

As the laws start relaxing and life gets back to normal, let us remember to thank God for all that we have, and because we have put our trust in Him we will get through this.

Let us thank all the doctors, nurses, health care workers, carers, police force and fire brigade and all who have put their lives in jeopardy to save others. Please stay safe and remember that Jesus Loves Us.

*Norma Ghattas*

## BELIEVE

Bad times are perhaps for us an opportunity to reflect on the good times in our lives and to think of the many blessings God has given us. But trust that as the good has ended, so will the bad.

Remember that following our severe drought we had an abundance of rain; it filled our dams and watered the land everywhere.

I strongly believe, as light follows darkness and summer follows winter, good times will certainly follow the present affliction. While being careful, let us free ourselves of worrying and fear and remain positive.

*Naguib Kanawati*



## ONE CAN CHANGE

I am a workaholic and I know it. I love my work and usually spend over 12 hours a day there, the first to arrive and the last to leave, then again think of things related to it, even in my sleep.

I have long passed the age of retirement, but always thanked God that there is no compulsory retirement age in Australia, as I could not imagine life without doing what I am doing at present.

Then came the Coronavirus and the forced lockdown and we were only allowed to work from home; yet unfortunately my work is not of the type that could adequately be done from home. I felt as if I was a train going at the speed of 200 kilometres per hour and was only allowed one metre to come to a complete halt.

A shattering experience! but that was 3 weeks ago. After all the initial difficulties and what seemed like the hissing and screeching of the brakes, this train came to a stop.

I looked around me and realised what I had sacrificed for years: the beauty of sharing more time with my wife, my family and my friends. Yesterday we had a Zoom meeting with our son, his wife and our grandchildren. It was delightful to be able to see them all and to talk to them, even though only on the computer screen.

How many beautiful things in life we take for granted until we are deprived of them! The dreadful Coronavirus did open my eyes and I am grateful.

*Naguib Kanawati*





## PART 3

### *We can see the rainbow*

When we see a rainbow, we know that the storm has passed, and the sun will break through the clouds and shine again. We should turn to God with a thankful heart because He always promises us a new start and a hopeful future. Without such a belief our lives would be empty and senseless. Hope is a great motivator, helping us to persevere through the dark times. Whenever things do not go our way, we should never lose faith. A rainbow is like a ray of light that will guide us from the present situation to a better and happier tomorrow.

---

Every morning we wake-up, it is a new day with new hope, as good humans we aspire for stronger faith, peace, love, caring, sharing and resilience in these extremely difficult times of social distancing. We must keep believing in hope as miracles happen every day.

If at times we feel down or sad, we should say a spontaneous prayer coming from the heart and think then of the nicest memories we have experienced with family, friends and the Church community, then guess what, smile and hope will come again.

*George Ayoub*

For me, there is a difference between WISH and HOPE. ‘Wishing’ means we have doubts something will happen, but ‘Hoping’ shows more confidence. As Christians we HOPE, and our hope is based on our TRUST in Jesus Christ. COVID-19 is not the first pandemic we have faced, yet they have all gone away. Perhaps this is a wake-up call telling us people have gone too far in their denial of God. But God is merciful, and I have HOPE, and hope makes me optimistic.

*Naguib Kanawati*





There is a crack of light under the door. It is not slammed shut as firmly as it was a week ago. There is a glimmer of hope, but like a small child learning to walk, we must take baby steps and not rush headlong into the full sunshine.

Let us take joy in the little things: we cannot hug our grandchildren, but we can see them on FaceTime. We can go for a walk and enjoy the crisp autumn weather. We have time to take stock of things, to ponder.

Yes, it is hard. Yes, some days are better than others. We can feel impatient and angry. But there is always God's eternal light shining down on us, warming our faces, and brightening our hearts. This is the light of hope.

*Jane Karame*

Let this time of pandemic be an experience where we show who we are as Catholics. Let our works show Jesus Christ in us. Whether we are at home, work or feeding the homeless. When you are at home serve your family well, when you are at work serve your colleagues well, when you are helping help well and with love.

Follow Our Lord Jesus Christ, where the strongest among you serve the weakest. Just remember this, every time you meet and see a person you are meeting and seeing Jesus Christ. Stay safe and the peace of Our Lord be with you always.

*Charbel Haddad*



## THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST IS OUR HOPE

When we go to sleep every night, we have no assurance of what tomorrow will bring but still we do have plans for the next day.

Where there is life there is hope, there is a better future ahead. We must not lose hope.

Every day we are faced with challenges and we get through because we never give up.

Be positive in life, for there you will find hope and encouragement.

Easter took us from the tragedy of the cross to the hope of the empty tomb. Easter tells us that there is hope for eternal life for Jesus has conquered death.

“But those who hope in the Lord, will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (*Isaiah* 40: 31)

Stay safe my friends for tomorrow will be better.

*Mirvat Zoughaib*



THANK YOU

These two words play such an important role in our lives, like “I love you”, “I am sorry”, “Please”. “Thank you” does not only express our gratitude but also conveys our deep appreciation for an act of kindness or a simple gesture. Julie’s inspiring message was about “Choices”. I chose “Thank you” for all the good news we are receiving, despite the isolation which has been imposed on us.

Thank you, God, for the gift of life  
Thank you, family, for the gift of love  
Thank you, companions, for the gift of friendship  
Thank you, congregation, for the gift of sharing  
Thank you, Abouna, for the gift of giving  
Thank you all for the gift of caring

*Roda Kanawati*

To the beautiful congregation of St Michael’s: I was inspired when I read about children drawing rainbows with chalk on the footpath outside their homes. They also wrote messages of HOPE, such as “We’re all in this together” to be read by passers-by. May those sweet, innocent children bring us joy in these troubled times.

*Jane Karame*



## WE CAN SEE THE LIGHT

The rate of increase of new Coronavirus infections has drastically declined in Australia over the past few weeks, and we hope this trend will continue. With most cases thought to have international travel history, the imposed border restrictions should hopefully further improve the situation. In addition, the lockdown, although proved very difficult, brought some wonderful results. To gauge these, we may simply compare the present situation in Australia with those in Italy, Spain, USA, and other places. As we all know, some of the lockdown rules have already started to ease and most probably more lifting of restrictions will come soon. The expectation of positive outcomes should also make the present reality less painful, for Hope is what keeps us going in the face of adversity, it motivates us to make the tough present conditions we are living through more bearable. We should pray and have faith that things will work out, even though they seem difficult at present. We can definitely see the light.

*Naguib Kanawati*

During this time of forced physical isolation, we fully appreciate how reliant we are with our social relationships. We are social beings, being alone is not natural and we can't wait for the restrictions to be lifted. Take a moment to think about those for whom nothing will change when the restrictions are lifted. There are people who have no-one to reunite with. Let's give thanks for our family and friends and for our relationship with Jesus. Our faith has and continues to play an important role in giving us strength during this period of isolation. We are truly blessed. Let's think about how



we can extend our blessings and share them with those who are lonely, who have no-one in their network and for those who do not have a relationship with Jesus.

*Randa Habelrih*

## *Hope, Peace & Love*

**H**earts of hope, peace and love  
**O** God, to You we turn like a dove  
**P**rince of the world and beyond  
**E**mbrace us, we humbly need this bond

**P**lease, listen to our supplication  
**E**nlighten our heart, we ask with desperation  
**A**ppease our anxiety and fear  
**C**oz you are the Almighty and Creator of all  
**E**liminate our pain and our affliction heal

**L**et us lean on each other at all time  
**O**n our clergy, friends and family in the prime  
**V**igorously we reaffirm our faith and belief  
**E**ndlessly singing Hosanna in the Highest with joy and relief  
*Roda Kanawati*



PART 4  
*We can dream*

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose (*Romans 8: 28*).

Three things stand out from this piece of Scripture:

1. That all things come under God;
2. He is always at work;
3. He has a purpose for each one of us.

So, we have permission to plan, to dream – dream big – and never despair, always trusting in the knowledge that God has everything under control.

---

Since fear and dread and worry  
Cannot help in any way  
It's much healthier and happier  
To be cheerful every day  
And if we'll only try it  
We will find without a doubt  
A cheerful attitude is something  
No one should be without  
For when the heart is cheerful  
It cannot be filled with fear  
And without fear the way ahead  
Seems more distinct and clear  
And we realise there's nothing  
We need ever face alone  
For OUR HEAVENLY FATHER loves us  
And our problems are HIS OWN



**By Helen Steiner Rice**  
*Prepared by Norma Ghattas*



New Beginnings

How often we wish for another chance  
To have a fresh beginning  
A chance to blot out our mistakes  
And change failure into winning  
It does not take a new year  
To make a brand new start  
It only takes the deep desire  
To try with all your heart  
So, never give up in despair  
And think you are through  
For there's always a tomorrow  
And a chance to start anew

**By Helen Steiner Rice**

*Prepared by Roda Kanawati*





## EPILOGUE

These were the heartfelt thoughts of some members of our congregation at St Michael's Parish. They all reflect the Hope and Trust that we draw from our belief in God. We sincerely wish that these messages have been and continue to be of some comfort to our readers.

A common denominator that binds all these ideas together is certainly Love: Love for God, Love for our neighbour, Love for our brothers and sisters in humanity and Love for oneself. Love permeates all what we do, being at home, at work or even with strangers we come into contact in the street. Love is the core of our very existence.

*Love inspires!*





The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (*Galatians 5: 22-23a*).