

The 1919 flu pandemic and the Diocese of Melbourne

Colin Reilly

The influenza pandemic of 1918-1919, popularly known as the Spanish flu epidemic, resulted in at least 12,000 but perhaps up to 16,000 deaths in an Australian population of 5.4m – a mortality rate of close to three deaths per thousand.¹ If the death rate was uniform across the population, probably six to seven thousand Anglicans died.

In a less connected world, Australia was spared the level of mortality experienced overseas, where it is claimed there were more deaths from the influenza pandemic than there were fatalities in World War I. The worldwide death toll from the flu pandemic was estimated at between 20 and 25 million² compared to a military death toll of 9 to 11 million and a civilian death toll of about 11 million in the First World War.³ Other estimates were 'that 500 million, or one-third of the world's population had been infected and 50 million-plus had died'.⁴ The higher estimate of deaths from the flu epidemic in Australia of 16,000 is far fewer than the 62,000 Australians killed in the Great War.⁵ Victoria's influenza death toll was over 30% of the Australian total.⁶

In Canada many church and public meetings were cancelled and the relatively new communication device the telephone became more popular to the extent that Bell Telephone appealed for public restraint in using the network.⁷ In St Paul Minnesota an order was made against the advice of the health commissioner to close the city, including churches, which resulted in the number of new cases declining after ten days, and the immediate reopening of businesses and churches.⁸

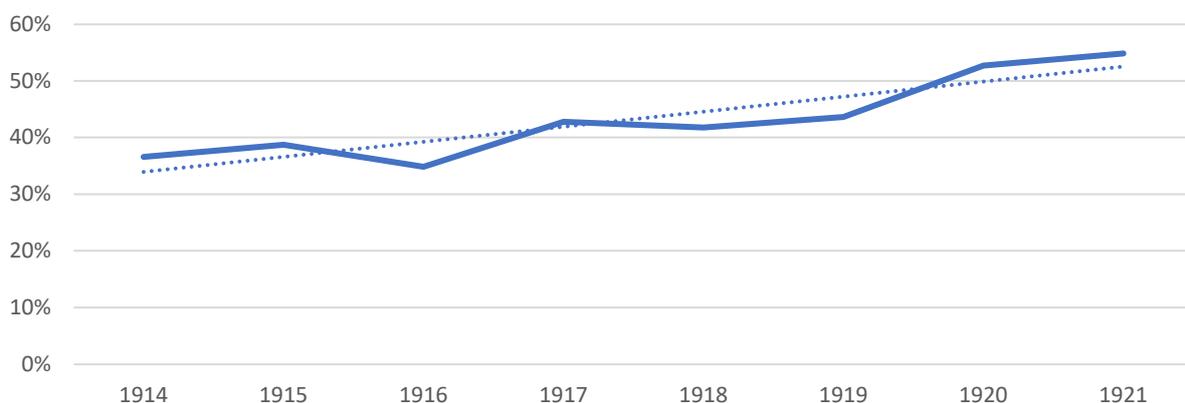


Figure 1 Proportion of active clergy with telephone numbers in the Diocese of Melbourne, 1914 to 1921⁹

¹ Curson and McCracken, 'An Australian Perspective of the 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic'.

² Wilton, 'Spanish Flu Outdid WWI in Number of Lives Claimed', 2037.

³ 'World War I casualties' Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I_casualties accessed 14 April 2020.

⁴ McEntee, 'The Spanish 'Flu in Melbourne, 1918-19'.

⁵ State Library of Victoria, 'Australian Casualties in World War I' https://guides.slv.vic.gov.au/wwone_soldiers/casualties accessed 2 April 2020.

⁶ McEntee, 'The Spanish 'Flu in Melbourne, 1918-19'.

⁷ Wilton, 'Spanish Flu Outdid WWI in Number of Lives Claimed'.

⁸ Ott et al., 'Lessons Learned from the 1918–1919 Influenza Pandemic in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota'.

⁹ Anglican Church of Australia. Diocese of Melbourne, *Yearbook of the Diocese of Melbourne*. Clergy were early technology adopters – the earliest data found for landline telephones in Australia was 15% for the whole population in 1960 (Source: International Telecommunications Union <https://ourworldindata.org/technology-adoption> accessed 16 April 2020).

While in the Diocese of Melbourne there was an increase in the use of telephones by active clergy from 1919 to 1920, this was part of a long-term trend and may also be explained by the return of younger wartime chaplains to domestic ministry, which could also account for the dip in 1916 as they left for overseas service.

The flu arrived later in Australia than in New Zealand, where a report from Napier NZ dated 4 December 2018 said 'all the churches there have been closed for three weeks ... what the war left the fludemic¹⁰ is finishing'.¹¹

The impact of the Spanish flu was for a relatively short period – in NSW there were two waves, from mid March to late May and then in June-July 1919¹². In Melbourne it appears to have been late January to February and then May-June.

A meeting was held in the St Paul's Cathedral buildings on 31 January 1919 at which representatives of the Church of England, Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational and Baptist Churches, the Salvation Army and ecumenical bodies resolved to

assure the Government of the willingness of all the churches to co-operate with the health authorities to minimise the effects of the prevailing epidemic.

The conference recommends that services be held on Sunday next, the Government regulations to be observed, or, where practicable, services shall be held in the open air.

They issued a

CALL TO PRAYER

In view of the danger of the invasion of this country by serious epidemic sickness, we invite all Christian people to earnest prayer to Almighty God that the danger may be averted, and to maintain themselves without undue fear or panic in an attitude of quietness and confidence, submitting themselves cheerfully to such regulations for the prevention of infections as may be issued by properly constituted authority.¹³

The advertisement for services at St Paul's Cathedral for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany and the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary warned 'In accordance with the regulations issued by the Board of Health, all worshippers must wear masks, and the same regulation prohibits the choir from singing'.¹⁴ On 1 March the Cathedral advertised that the Cathedral was open for private devotion but the only services would be intercessions 'to still meet the requirements of the Government'.¹⁵ Normal services were reinstated, possibly as early as 9 March, but certainly by 23 March.¹⁶

The deputational work in Victoria of Bp Banister of Kwangsi and Hunan in China 'had to be abandoned owing to the outbreak of pneumonic influenza'.¹⁷

¹⁰ This novel portmanteau word did not make it into the *Oxford English Dictionary* but can now be found on Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

¹¹ 'The pestilence at our gates' *The Church of England Messenger* 10 January 1919:642.

¹² Curson and McCracken, 'An Australian Perspective of the 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic', 103.

¹³ 'The churches: willing co-operation promised' *The Age* 1 February 1919.

¹⁴ *The Argus* 1 February 1919.

¹⁵ *The Argus* 1 March 1919.

¹⁶ *The Argus* 22 March 1919.

¹⁷ *The Argus* 3 February 1919.

'Chaplain A.I.F.' lamented in a letter to the editor of *The Argus* on 8 February that the 'recreation hut for the use of sailors and soldiers' in the Cathedral grounds had been closed because of the epidemic.¹⁸ *The Age* reported on 11 February that permission had been given to re-open it on the condition 'that not more than 20 persons shall be permitted to congregate within the building at one time'.¹⁹ An appeal by Mr Greenwood MLA to raise funds for an open air lounge raised £78/6/- in one day.²⁰ By 2 May the amount donated had reached £780/4/-.²¹ The recreation hut was extended with 'a tent, without side walls' at the rear and Mr Greenwood's suggestion 'to have an open-air lounge on the Swanston street frontage of the Cathedral has been warmly endorsed by the Archbishop and Cathedral Chapter'. This was supported by the managers of the League of Soldiers' Friends and plans were hoped to be implemented by 3 March for a 'lounge, which will be a striking counter attraction to city liquor bars, will accommodate at any given time a large number of soldiers, for it will extend practically the entire length of the cathedral's Swanston-street frontage – at any rate from the south-western to the south-eastern doors of the sacred edifice'.²² The new lounge was opened on 25 April with 'manifestations of enthusiasm' by Brigadier-General Brand.²³

In February the *Messenger* reported on contradictory statements from those in authority and the varying church responses to 'the Government Regulations to avoid infection of the disease. In most churches services were held out-doors. Where otherwise the masks were worn by the worshippers, but it was strange and regrettable that there were any exceptions to this rule, because Christian people are expected to set an example of obedience ... In some cases frequent short services were held in church to avoid any large gathering, and at the celebration of Holy Communion none present communicated except the celebrant ... Pious people who were prevented attendance at church observed the hours of service by reading the service with their families. The church bell ringing for daily prayer reminded the people of the need of prayer when they could not themselves go to the House of God'. *The Messenger* enjoined its readers to 'Take precaution; don't take panic' while solacing them with the text 'Thou shalt not be afraid for any terror by night: nor ... for the pestilence that walketh in darkness: nor for the sickness that destroyeth in the noonday (Ps. 91:5,6)'.²⁴

The editorial in this issue reflected on the suggestion 'that after a war there generally supervenes a plague of some sort' and there were notes on 'The influenza scourge' from a New Zealand clergy wife.

On 10 February the Archbishop wrote to Canon Snodgrass of St Paul's Geelong asking him to release one of his curates 'to meet the present grave crisis owing to the spread of sickness. I want one or two more Chaplains ... He will, of course, be inoculated and every precaution will be taken to secure his health'.²⁵ On 12 February he reassured the Revd Walter Green, Vicar of Murrumbena, that 'Of course everything must be postponed, and the dates for the events in your Parish can be decided later'. On the same day he set out the pastoral arrangements being made in a request to Canon Hughes, the Vicar of St Peter's Eastern Hill:

I have arranged with Archdeacon Hayman for special Chaplains to be set apart to visit those who are suffering from the present epidemic. The difficulty, however, is to secure men who are willing to take this special work. You express your willingness to act as Secretary, but I feel there is no need for this.

¹⁸ *The Argus* 8 February 1919.

¹⁹ 'St Paul's Lounge Reopened' *The Age* 11 February 1919.

²⁰ 'Open-air Lounge for Soldiers' *The Argus* 12 February 1919.

²¹ 'Open-air Lounge for Soldiers' *The Argus* 2 May 1919.

²² 'Soldiers' Open-Air Lounge: Immediate Erection Sanctioned' *The Age* 19 February 1919.

²³ 'New Lounge Opened: A City Home for Returned Men' *The Argus* 26 April 1919

²⁴ *Messenger* 7 February 1919:676.

²⁵ [Archbishop of Melbourne] *Letter Book 8 Apr 1918-10 Dec 1919* p 467.

As you have been inoculated, will it be possible for you to set yourself apart in isolation and become one of the special chaplains?

And in response to the parish treasurer of St Peter's Mornington:

The Regulation that masks should be worn at Services is made by the State, and in this matter I can advise nothing but obedience. If your people refuse to wear these masks in Church you run the risk of punishment. Could you not hold the services for a while in the Vicarage Grounds? Or anywhere in the open air, say under the shelter of a tree? My hope is that the tyranny will pass over soon and the pestilence be removed, but our bounden duty is to obey regulations and, at the same time, not to forget the duty of prayer and worship.²⁶

In mid-February Archbishop Clarke wrote to his parishes in a letter published in both the morning papers.

The pestilence which has visited us at the end of four years of war is an illustration of the extent to which the lives of all of us are in the hands of God. As we have borne the war patiently and bravely, so now we are called upon to face in faith and confidence this dire pestilence. Our foremost duty is to recognise that the regulations of the Board of Health are put forth in the interests of the whole community, and to obey these without murmuring or complaint.

The conditions under which services in the Church are permitted have resulted in practically limiting for the present the habit of church-going. Every parish will have its own anxieties and cares. In very many parishes open-air services are being held, but the pestilence and the responsibility incurred by everyone in connection with it are a call on our religious faith. The vestries of the several parishes are already placed in positions of anxiety, but I have every confidence that our churchpeople will recognise the difficulties caused by the present distress, and will see the vestries are able to meet their responsibility without discharging anyone from office or seeking to limit the payments made to them. Our prayers to God must be redoubled, both for our own protection from danger and for the speedy removal of the causes of so many deaths. This world is God's and not ours, and our happiness lies in submission to the Divine Will, and in the exercising of all the wisdom and prudence which are part of that Will, and without which we cannot hope for a blessing upon our lives. Everything will be done by those in authority in the Church to assist the State in its measures of prevention and cure, and already a very large number of our churchmen and churchwomen have offered their services in different capacities, and are bravely seeking to do their duty, as they have done during the four years of war.²⁷

He advised the Minister of Health of this and assured him that everything would be done by the Church of England in Victoria 'to co-operate with you in such Regulations and restrictions as you may deem necessary for the health of the whole community'.²⁸

Arrangements were made to liaise with hospitals and for chaplains to visit them on request.²⁹

Annual parochial meetings were being held in the open air.³⁰ The Church of England Men's Society picnic and the observance of Men's Sunday were postponed and capitation fees were not being made by the branches.³¹

²⁶ *Letter Book* pp 473, 475, 477.

²⁷ 'Church and Epidemic. Anglicans Support Minister' *The Age* 14 February 1919; 'The Anglican Church. Archbishop's Letter to his Parishes' *The Argus* 14 February 1919.

²⁸ *Letter Book* 13 February 1919 p479; most of this letter was reported in *The Age* and in full by *The Argus* on 14 February.

²⁹ 'Anglican Clergy Organise' *The Argus* 21 February 1919.

³⁰ *The Age* 24 February 1919.

³¹ 'Plight of Church Societies' *The Age* 24 February 1919.

Dean Godby wrote to the Editor of *The Argus* seeking donations of money and clothing to support the Mission to the Streets and Lanes and the Anglican sisters ‘working among the poorest of the poor, for whom they have to provide medicines and often food, and who are not infrequently in need also of clothing’.³²

Despite the reported change in the mode of services the overall number of services and the estimated number of communicants plateaued rather than declined in 1919:

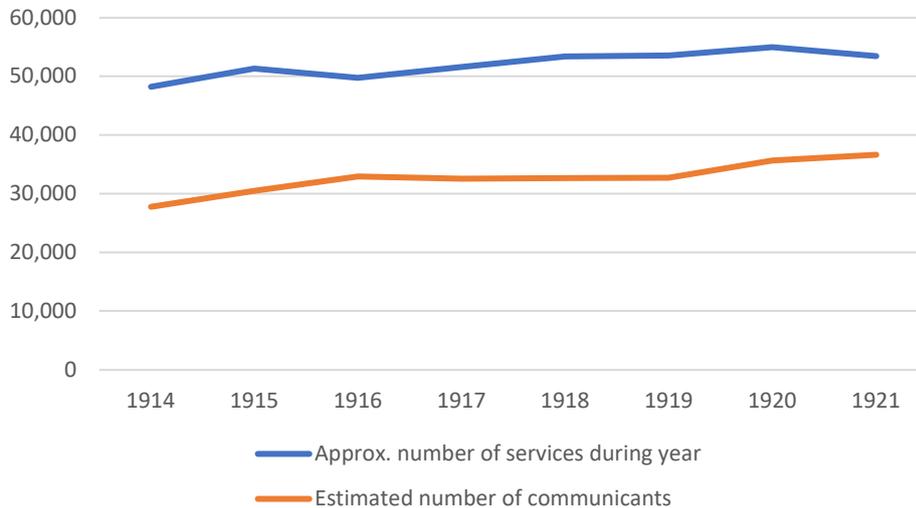


Figure 2 Parish activity indicators: Diocese of Melbourne, 1914 to 1921³³

The 21 February edition of *The Messenger* included ‘words of counsel and comfort in an experience which is without precedent to most of us’ from the Archbishop.

In March it was reported that church secondary schools would ‘extend the period of each term this year to make up for all, or nearly all, the time lost through the epidemic’ but there would be no fee relief ‘because the usual salaries have to be provided’.³⁴

Canon Langley of St Mary’s Caulfield wrote in March 1919 ‘My heart is full of thankfulness to God that he has spared you the threatened visitation of the dreaded influenza. There have been a few cases, and our Church has lost one ... Services in the open-air have been quite a happy experience. It was said a preacher needs “unction, gumption, and oxygen.” Preacher and congregation felt the better for an unlimited supply of at least the last-named element on some of the hot Sundays of February. Attendances were small at first, but last Sunday we were getting back to the old figures in numbers and collections.’³⁵ But in May he observed ‘The dread visitation of pneumonic influenza was not over, as we thought, when worshippers once more returned to services in church, and emergency hospitals were closed. Though the general public, after the first scare, seemed to forget the danger, it is never more real than at the present time. We seem to have been through three successive phases. First, **ignorance** of the presence of danger; then a time of **insecurity** of mind, when precautions were taken; and, now, there has succeeded a state of **indifference** – until the dark shadow falls across the home, or some friend is stricken down. It is no time for indifference as the safety of the body, or the salvation of the soul. An attendant at a recent funeral remarked to me “All this ought to make people think and

³² ‘Assisting the Poor’ *The Argus* 24 February 1919.

³³ Anglican Church of Australia. Diocese of Melbourne, *Yearbook of the Diocese of Melbourne*.

³⁴ *Messenger* 7 March 1919:725.

³⁵ *S. Mary’s Church Chronicle* 22, no. 5 March 1919:6.

prepare to meet their God.” The only wise course is, **safeguard the life that is, and make sure of the life to come.**’ He went on to urge parishioners to notify and ‘**Send for your clergyman** in cases of serious sickness, and don’t wait, until by some indirect and much-delayed means, he finds out that his ministrations are needed in your home’.³⁶

On 29 April 1919 the Revd C C Edwards, priest in charge of St Mary’s Warburton, in forwarding the parochial returns to the Registry, observed ‘The influenza epidemic has been very severe in different parts of the district & it has been impossible to get the people together earlier for annual meetings’ [they were supposed to be held before the end of February].

A correspondent to the *Messenger* used the influenza epidemic to raise the question of the common cup at communion, recommending the introduction of individual cups. A leading article in the same issue listed the various arguments on both sides and invited correspondence on the subject while counselling calm: ‘Would it not be better to hold from action [i.e. change] until authority has spoken?’.³⁷ There was one response in the next issue wondering whether the ‘cleansing of the so-called individual cup, failing laboratory facilities’ could do ‘more to spread than hinder the trouble’.³⁸ ‘A M M’ wrote in favour of individual cups, suggesting each communicant ‘would naturally bring their own little cup’.³⁹ ‘Commercial Traveller’ hoped ‘to read some authoritative ruling on the matter’ because of the ‘diversity of use growing up in our midst’.⁴⁰ And there the matter rested in the *Messenger* at least. But the Archbishop did write to the Vicar of Thornbury admonishing him for the practice of intinction which he and others had been practising and advising him to ‘return to the proper Church methods of administration’.⁴¹

The new parish of St Agnes’ Black Rock was stricken by the death of its 32-year-old vicar, the Revd Wilford James, on 5 May from pneumonic influenza.⁴²

On 19 May the Archbishop wrote to the diocesan bishops of the Province:

I send you a draft letter which I think we might send at this time to our people throughout the Province. My own feeling is that whilst the State deals with the pestilence in its own way, it is our duty as Bishops to address our people in our own name.

If you are able to agree to the letter, I propose to let the Presbyterians, Methodists and others know what we are doing, and I have little doubt that they will take similar action for their own people. This method of proceeding commends itself to me more than any joint letter, which the Roman Catholics would probably refuse to sign.⁴³

The Bishops of the Province of Victoria felt ‘it our duty to call all to prayer for repentance of our sins, and for enlightenment of our minds’ and appointed ‘Sunday, 8th June, as a day on which we invite all our people to assemble in their Churches, and to join in intercession for protection from the pestilence which walketh in darkness, and for grace to amend their lives according to the rule of God’s Commandments’.⁴⁴

³⁶ *S. Mary’s Church Chronicle* 22, no. 7 May 1919:3

³⁷ *Messenger* 2 May 1919:829, 838.

³⁸ E T Carter [lay representative St Mark’s Fitzroy] *Messenger* 16 May 1919:859.

³⁹ *Messenger* 30 May 1919:882.

⁴⁰ *Messenger* 11 July 1919:882958.

⁴¹ *Letter Book* ca 19 May 1919 p 653.

⁴² *The Age* 7 May 1919; *The Argus* 7 May 1919; *Messenger* 16 May 1919:851.

⁴³ *Letter Book* pp 646-651.

⁴⁴ *Messenger* 30 May 1919:873.

On 10 June the Archbishop wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury to suggest that in additional collects proposed earlier that year for the Book of Common Prayer⁴⁵ ‘the work of the Clergy’ should be referred to in prayers ‘In the time of any common plague or sickness’ and ‘Hospitals and Infirmaries’.⁴⁶

Another young Melbourne priest, the Revd George Benjamin Rogers, had on 13 June ‘succumbed to the influenza, and left a widow and four children wholly unprovided for. His work was admirable, he was a member of our Clergy Provident Fund, but being young his widow receives no permanent benefits’ so the Archbishop petitioned the Walter & Eliza Hall Trust on her behalf. The parish of Melton raised £300 to purchase a house for her, and the Archbishop made a further request for support from the Queen’s Fund.⁴⁷

In the Australian Anglican church there were at least eight clergy deaths in 1919 attributed to influenza.⁴⁸ This represents a death rate of about 0.6% in a population of about 1400 Anglican clergy compared to 0.3% for the whole population. For Melbourne the clerical death rate was 0.9%.

The 1919 *Year Book* at 56 pages was much thinner than the editions for 1918 (242 pages) and 1920 (295 pages) but this was attributed to industrial disputes in the printing trade. Unfortunately, the individual parish statistics for 1919 were not published, so we can only track changes at a diocesan level. Some indicators of church life suggest the flu epidemic may have had a deleterious effect. The number of baptisms and confirmations fell while funerals increased. On the other hand, marriages continued their post-war recovery.

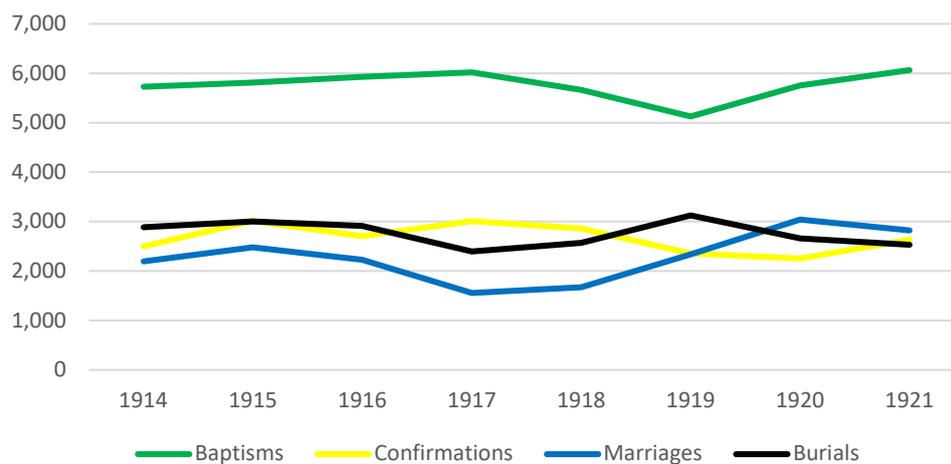


Figure 3 Pastoral offices: Diocese of Melbourne, 1914 to 1921⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *Chronicle of Convocation* February 1919.

⁴⁶ *Letter Book* pp 704-5.

⁴⁷ *Letter Book* 28 July 1919, pp 798-99. She was also allowed to stay on in the Melton vicarage for some weeks (*Letter Book* 14 August 1919 p 840). On 27 August Abp Clarke wrote to thank General Finn as Secretary of the Trust ‘for the cheque for £50, which shall be used for the benefit of Mrs Rogers’ (*Letter Book* p 857). *Letter Book* 22 September 1919 p 897.

⁴⁸ Cable, Cable, and Blain, ‘Cable Clergy Index’. – the Revd Wilford Downs James died Brighton emergency hospital Vic 5 May 1919 at the age of 32; the Revd Henry Mervyn Archdall Pearce died Royal Prince Alfred Hospital NSW 12 June aged 38; the Revd Arthur Phillips died Temora NSW 21 June aged 50; the Revd Donald Alexander Kerr died Toowong Qld 5 July aged 60; the Revd John Best died Katoomba NSW 8 July 1919 aged 63; the Revd John Ralph Hunter died Campbelltown NSW 24 July aged 49; the Revd Reginald Francis Joseph Lawrence died West Guildford WA 11 Oct aged 31;

Letter Book 28 July 1919, p 798.

⁴⁹ Anglican Church of Australia. Diocese of Melbourne, *Yearbook of the Diocese of Melbourne*.

Parish finances also suffered slightly, but quickly recovered. Live income rose from 1918 to 1919 by 4%, but rents and endowments fell by 32% and total receipts by 2%. Clergy remuneration and music costs were stable but church expenses fell by 4% and property outlays by 11%, presumably in part because labour was difficult to find. There was a substantial fall of 18% in donations to missions and external causes.

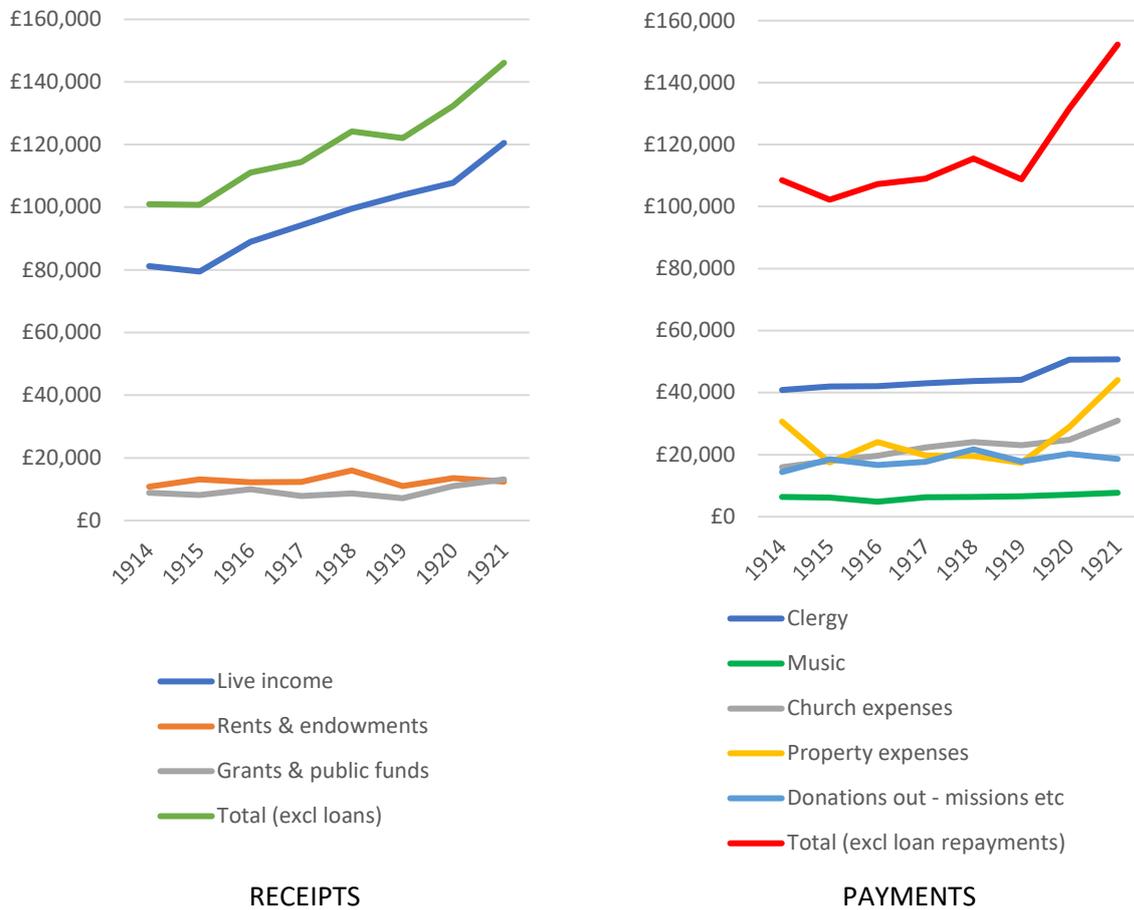


Figure 4 Total parish receipts and payments: Diocese of Melbourne, 1914 to 1921⁵⁰

Nor did the epidemic seem to affect some other indicators of ecclesiastical health. The number of deacons ordained, which at that time mainly took place around St Thomas' Day – 21 December, was the highest since 1914 as recovery from the First World War began.

⁵⁰ Anglican Church of Australia. Diocese of Melbourne.

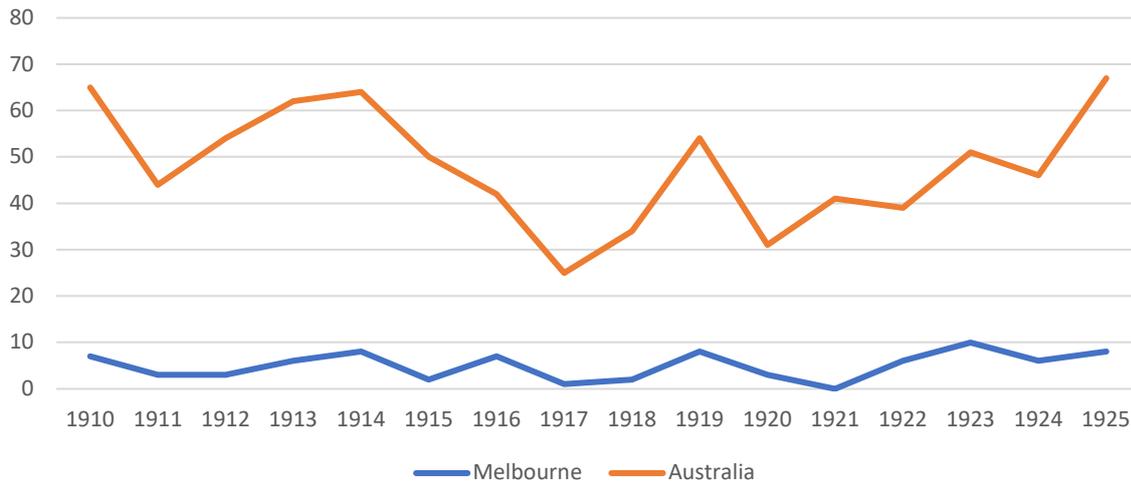


Figure 5 Ordination of deacons: Melbourne and Australia, 1910 to 1925⁵¹

In his Presidential Address to the October 1919 Synod (his last before retiring later in 1920) Archbishop Clarke spoke of how the Church must find ‘a new spirit of religion in ourselves’ to address a post-war world and focused on a number of organisational issues without mentioning the flu epidemic. No motion before the Synod referred to the epidemic. The ‘Report of the Proceedings of the Archbishop-in-Council’ included:

INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC

That the Archbishop be authorised to spend the sum necessary to provide for spiritual ministrations to the sick.⁵²

There was no report on the cost of this ministrations. The only other mention of the epidemic in the minutes of the Archbishop in Council and its Standing Committee was a grant in July of £50 to St James’ East St Kilda ‘in consideration of the loss sustained by the Parish owing to Mr Nankivell’s [priest in charge] services at the Exhibition Hospital during the Epidemic’.⁵³

The Social Questions Committee’s work had ‘been interfered with by the influenza epidemic and other causes’ and they concluded their report by saying:

The Church has not been nearly emphatic enough in denouncing the view so widely held, and vigorously promulgated, that the world-sickness of today is due to material causes, and can be cured by material means. We must boldly proclaim, whoever we offend, that it is not Arbitration Courts, or trade organisations, or political action, or Leagues of Nations, that can make all things new. Only God in Christ can do that.⁵⁴

But surely the ‘sick community’ they were commenting on was a metaphor for a fallen world, not a reference to the epidemic.

In other reports to Synod ‘Owing to the outbreak of influenza, the annual outing [of the Church of England Men’s Society] had first to be postponed and then abandoned.’⁵⁵ The Diocesan Board of

⁵¹ Reilly, ‘Ecclesia Anglicana Australis: A Database of Information about Clergy and Organisations in the Anglican Church of Australia from European Settlement to the Present Day’.

⁵² *Diocesan Synod, 1919 Report of the Proceedings of the Archbishop-in-Council subsequent to the Meeting of the Diocesan Synod, held on Monday, 7th October, 1918* p2.

⁵³ *Council of the Diocese Minute Book* 4 July 1919:273.

⁵⁴ *Social Questions Committee. Twelfth Annual Report.*

⁵⁵ *Church of England Men’s Society: Annual Report 1918-19* p5.

Education also postponed its Annual Conference until 1920 because 'The epidemic of influenza has hindered the work of organisation, and has added largely to the burdens and anxieties of the persons with whom the success of the Conference would rest'.⁵⁶

The Warden of the Community of the Holy Name, Canon Snodgrass, reported that

The work of the Mission in almost all its branches has been seriously hindered by sickness among the Sisters, and great discomfort and inconvenience to all from the still prevailing epidemic ... In order to help in providing food and necessaries for influenza patients among the poor, the Dean of Melbourne [Charles Godby] appealed for contributions in the "Argus," and by this means the Sisters received the sum of £150, which was of the greatest use, and enabled them to help those in need.⁵⁷

Canon Snodgrass also reported that

Both Homes [for children and babies] have been severely affected by influenza, and all the children have had to be temporarily removed, most of them to Montrose. So far there have been no deaths. The Committee would like to express their thanks for much kind help received at the Homes during the outbreak of sickness. The Brighton Red Cross, Red Cross Kitchen, and Brighton and Sandringham residents sent food, and gave assistance in other ways, while Dr. Weigall, with the help of the Automobile Club, conveyed the children to their temporary home at Montrose.

... The Committee have again to place on record their cordial appreciation of Dr. Cecil Tucker's services to the institutions, and to thank him specially for his kindness during the outbreak of influenza.⁵⁸

While society generally banded together in responding to the influenza crisis, this was marred by at least one episode of sectarianism when Archbishop Mannix's offer to have the temporary hospital at the Exhibition Building staffed by the Sisters of Charity was at first accepted and then rebuffed by the State Government.⁵⁹ *The Messenger* expressed the view that 'Mr Bowser [Minister of Public Health] may find he has formed a dangerous precedent in allowing a religious denomination to control a vast public hospital' but would have welcomed the Roman Catholics as 'independent helpers'.⁶⁰

Parallels with COVID-19

The effects of the 1919 influenza epidemic in Australia, while severe, were nowhere near as damaging as in the rest of the world. For this our situation as a relatively remote island nation was the chief reason. Australia appears to be similarly advantaged with respect to COVID-19 in 2020. In both cases government intervention has been early, invasive of personal freedoms and apparently received with little complaint, but in 1919 for shorter periods and with less interference with the general economy. In neither case were effective medical antidotes available, quarantine and social distancing being the chief remedies to prevent the spread of infection. It is too early to tell at the time of writing (16 April 2020) the outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic for Australia, let alone the Diocese of Melbourne, but in social and economic terms it is probably already greater for the church than the 1919 pandemic. It is possible, though, that on present indications the health impact will be considerably less.

⁵⁶ *Diocesan Board of Education: Report and Statement of Accounts for the Period ended 30th June 1919.*

⁵⁷ *The Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Church of England Diocesan Mission to the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne* pp5-6.

⁵⁸ *The Twenty-Fifth Annual Report of the Church of England Home for Children and Babies' Home* pp5-6.

⁵⁹ Hayes, 'Archbishop Mannix and the Spanish Influenza: A Week in 1919 [Includes an Appendix of Reprints of Contemporary Documents]'. For the context of this dispute see also McEntee, 'The Spanish 'Flu in Melbourne, 1918-19'.

⁶⁰ 'The Exhibition Building' *The Church of England Messenger* 21 February 1919:701

References

- Anglican Church of Australia. Diocese of Melbourne. *Yearbook of the Diocese of Melbourne*. Melbourne, n.d.
- Cable, Kenneth, Leonie Cable, and Michael W Blain. 'Cable Clergy Index'. Project Canterbury. Accessed 14 October 2012. <http://anglicanhistory.org/aus/cci/>.
- Curson, Peter, and Kevin McCracken. 'An Australian Perspective of the 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic'. *New South Wales Public Health Bulletin* 17, no. 7-8 (2006): 103-7.
- Hayes, Brendan. 'Archbishop Mannix and the Spanish Influenza: A Week in 1919 [Includes an Appendix of Reprints of Contemporary Documents]'. *Footprints* 22, no. 2 (December 2005): 17-44.
- McEntee, Walter. 'The Spanish 'Flu in Melbourne, 1918-19'. Anglican Historical Society [Melbourne], 15 May 2019.
- Ott, Miles, Shelly F Shaw, Richard N Danila, and Ruth Lynfield. 'Lessons Learned from the 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota'. *Public Health Reports* 122, no. 6 (2007): 803-10.
- Reilly, Colin. 'Ecclesia Anglicana Australis: A Database of Information about Clergy and Organisations in the Anglican Church of Australia from European Settlement to the Present Day', 2020.
- Wilton, P. 'Spanish Flu Outdid WWI in Number of Lives Claimed'. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 148, no. 11 (1993): 2036-37.

Acknowledgment

I am indebted to Hazel Nsair and Leonie Duncan of the Melbourne Diocesan Archives who pointed me to most of the contemporary records cited in this paper.