

Sounds of pastoral ministry

Pastoral care is a ministry full of sound. Sounds can be heard in many ways, most certainly through the ears and through the heart.

My ministry in pastoral care and graphic design/marketing at [Mount St Joseph, Milperra](#) requires me to listen in many ways. No two days are the same. Each day I walk into the day with an open grateful heart. So, how does this happen, what does it sound like?...

At 5am I hear my alarm clock burst forth with its rhythmic chimes. Next, I read the scripture of the day, hearing my heart connect to God's word, my thoughts chug forward like a kayaker paddling one stroke at a time (some mornings the paddling is slower than others!). Opening my heart to God's word gives me a focus. I make a conscious choice not to look at email or other messages on my phone. Soon, I usually hear my shoes lacing and my feet touching the pavement, I gaze at the stars and thank God for the gift of this day. I run, reflect on scripture, pray for those in need and simply listen to where my heart is being drawn. As Mary MacKillop reminds us: "Listen to the whispering of God to your own heart." Making time to listen gives me space to re-centre and enter the day with my heart being raised to God, open and ready to listen.

It is near impossible to describe an average day in a secondary school. For me, it's a joy to step into the unknown. And if you try to plan too much, well, you're kidding yourself! As I drive to school I may listen to an audiobook, podcast, music or simply have silence. Many faith traditions focus on listening and opening to God. We can follow our Christian roots back to Judaism remembering [the Shema](#) prayer ([Listen here](#)): To hear each day with vulnerability, truly listening with courage to God in our lives today. We see instruction to listen and how to live faith in Deut 6:4-9 in a form of law on the heart.

My key soon unlocks my office door, click, my eyes adjust to the light, my computer boots up, emails chime through. Soon, I hear the hot water hit my cup, I usually chat with a staff member or two as we paddle through the early morning. Soon, "good morning" streams in my ears while I stand outside greeting our students and staff. I'm conscious to remind my heart to hear the sound of courage and kindness. Sometimes a conversation follows, I might hear the sound of teenage girl chatter, or feel my heart smile for all the beautiful faces walking through our school gate.

Walking the halls between meetings, popping in on classes, emails and design projects I may hear the sound of another person's feet walking towards me. Perhaps we stop and chat, perhaps it's a quick 'hi'. Intermittently the school bell rings loudly at the end of each period. Sometimes in-between I may hear the sound of tears, the sound of another person's worries, the sound of a tissue whipping up from its box. There are sounds of joy, good news, exam results, laughter or confusion. No sound is better than another, it's impossible to compare. It's all gift really. And in pastoral care, the best I can do is to listen, remain present, letting everything go into the loving embrace of our provident God.

Listening informs all my design and marketing work at school. No marketing or design decision is made without listening and dialogue first. Design must be created with a purpose, with its ultimate goal being creation of relationship. Some questions that I hear may include; Why does the design need to be created? How will this connect our community? What will this social media post promote? This conversation is impossible without listening to those whom the design is for; relational design is always the most beautiful and powerful design. I must listen to my heart, and not be stuck to any pre-conceived

ideas. The spirit guides me best when I'm vulnerable. This is true for any [artwork](#) I create for ministry too. Artwork is not solitary, it is always relational and is always more than just from me, true artwork comes from community with its purpose to serve God.

At the end of the day I pull up to our house / convent, hearing the reverse beep as I park the car. I might hear the sound of the beautiful Sister I live with welcoming me home. We will normally share the melody of our day, perhaps we pray, hear the news, or hear the chimes of either of our cell phones alert us to someone seeking to connect. The sound of pages soon turn for spiritual reading, study, or my apple pencil gently touches my iPad as I begin a new [artwork](#) project to serve God. Eventually after my daily examen prayer and scripture reading I hear how my heart was affected today, how were others affected? where did I miss the mark? where did I remain with Christ? What am I thankful for?

My head soon hits the pillow, whoosh, I breath, hearing my sheets pull up as I move into sleep with gratitude. Hearing my heart thank God, thanking Jesus, acknowledging the Spirit of relationship while trusting that our God will gift me/us grace for tomorrow's melody...

Take, Lord,
and receive all my liberty,
my memory,
my understanding,
my entire will,
and all that I have and call my own.

You have given it all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours:
do with it what you will.

Give me only your love
and your grace,
that is enough for me.

~ St Ignatius of Loyola