



Archbishop of Sydney

18 March 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

One week ago the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 a global pandemic. Since then the situation has changed on a daily basis. Last Friday our Prime Minister issued a directive that there be no public gatherings of more than 500 people. The Government also encouraged 'social distancing' as a means of preventing the spread of the virus. Today, an additional directive has been issued by the Prime Minister that there be no indoor gatherings of more than 100 people. This number could easily be reduced over time.

As we seek to share the love of Jesus with all people, we face the same dangers as the rest of the community and we share in the griefs and trials of this world.

Our Christian duty is to love our neighbours and seek the welfare of the city where God has placed us to be.

On advice from our COVID-19 Task Force, I have made some decisions which will have consequences for our life together over the coming months.

Shortly, I will issue this public statement –

In light of the Prime Minister's announcement this morning, banning enclosed gatherings in excess of 100 people, I have decided that the Anglican Church in Sydney should suspend all public church gatherings until further notice.

We are encouraging all our churches to consider providing their services online or by other communication methods. We shall make every effort to care for our church communities and the wider public, especially those who are isolated and vulnerable. Anglicare Sydney will continue its vital work of showing Christ's love in ministering to all people, especially older Australians. Anglican Schools will also continue to play a significant role in caring for students and families.

I call on all Christians to pray for health workers and those seeking to develop a vaccine, and to pray that the spread of this disease may slow.

God's love for all people has not diminished, nor his sovereignty over his world. Therefore, I urge all Christians to continue to trust in God's goodness and mercy in this crisis, and to show Christ's love to those affected.

I realise how inconvenient this measure will be to implement, and many may protest that where their church gatherings are less than 100, surely they could still legally meet. However,

I am asking all churches to consider the greater good. Our leadership and example in protecting the safety and welfare of our people, as well as those who visit, ought to be paramount. Erring on the side of caution is a good principle to follow in such extreme times – and the presence of this virus in our world is nothing short of a global catastrophe.

For our churches, the challenge now becomes how to encourage, love and care for one another without regular gatherings. How to minimise danger to ourselves and others, while seeking the welfare of all in our community.

We are producing a list of resources which will be available on a designated page of the SydneyAnglicans.net website. I aim to keep you informed of any further developments as they arise.

Attached to this letter, however, are some frequently asked questions which should assist you in the pastoral care of your people. They have been produced by the COVID-19 Task Force. If you have other questions, please feel free to contact your Regional Bishop/Archdeacon or his Executive Assistant.

I am also releasing a video on Thursday afternoon addressed to Sydney Anglicans, which you are free to use as an encouragement to keep calm, but proactive in these difficult days.

May God grant us an extra measure of his grace to be faithful in this time of crisis, trusting in his sovereign and merciful hand (Psalm 91:1-4).

With every good wish

Grace and peace

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Glenn', with a large, stylized initial 'G' on the left.

Glenn N Davies

Archbishop of Sydney

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Frequently Asked Questions – Supplied by the COVID-19 Taskforce

1. What if my church is less than 100 people?

The ban from the Prime Minister includes all non-essential enclosed gatherings of more than 100 people. Although there will be congregations in our diocese who fall below this threshold it is important for us to model to our community the highest level of care for the vulnerable. The Archbishop has announced that all public gatherings will cease and it is his expectation that all parishes will comply. Therefore all public gatherings, including Sunday services, are to cease immediately, including this Sunday. You should plan for the possibility of this restriction lasting several months. The Prime Minister indicated this could be up to 6 months.

2. Can we meet outside as an alternative?

While it is technically legal for groups to gather outside we do not encourage you to pursue this option. It will be difficult to ensure appropriate social distancing.

3. What do we mean by ‘Social Distancing’?

NSW health defines social distancing as follows:

Social distancing is an effective measure to reduce the potential for transmission, but it is recognised that it cannot be practised in all situations. While practising social distancing, people can travel to work, including on public transport. For non-essential activities outside the workplace or attendance at schools, universities and childcare – social distancing includes:

- avoiding crowds and mass gatherings where it is difficult to keep the appropriate distance away from others.
- attempting to keep a distance of 1.5 metres between ourselves and other people where possible, for example when you are out and about in public place.
- avoiding small gatherings in enclosed spaces, for example family celebrations.
- avoiding shaking hands, hugging, or kissing other people avoiding visiting vulnerable people, such as those in aged care facilities or hospitals, infants, or people with compromised immune systems due to illness or medical treatment.

4. What about Home Groups / Youth Groups / Children’s Ministry / other mid-week meetings?

If you can ensure that non-public groups meeting in homes are able to operate with appropriate social distancing (e.g., in a large space maintaining a 1.5 metre distance between people) then it may be possible to continue to meet in this way. We consider youth groups, children’s ministries and other mid-week meetings, including ESL, to be public gatherings and therefore they ought to cease. Given the definition of social distancing by NSW Health (above) we encourage Rectors to exercise discretion in deciding which small groups continue to meet.

5. What about weddings?

Weddings in churches & chapels are included in the ban of more than 100 people. While highly disruptive and understandably distressing for all involved, weddings may only proceed with the bridal party and their families and the minister officiating.

6. What about Funerals?

Unfortunately funerals held in crematoriums, chapels or church buildings can only include immediate family members. This is the most practical way to ensure that funerals do not exceed the limit of 100 people in enclosed gatherings. You may want to suggest to the family to hold a more public thanksgiving at a later time, when it is possible to gather. If funerals are

conducted at a graveside it is possible to include more people, as long as they maintain appropriate social distancing.

7. What about AGMs?

There is no mechanism under our ordinances to have a “virtual” AGM. If your church is not able to hold an AGM then elected office holders remain in office until such time as it is possible to elect their successors. Practically speaking this means that the current parish councillors, wardens, nominators continue in office. Synod representatives for the Special session to be held in August have already been elected. It will be necessary at some stage in the coming months to elect Synod representatives for the 52nd session of synod.

8. What about Church camps / Houseparties?

For all the reasons we are cancelling church gatherings it is also necessary to postpone or reschedule Church weekends away and houseparties. Given there is the possibility of rescheduling, it is not appropriate at this time to take large groups of people into environments where we cannot guarantee appropriate social distancing. If you have a booking with Youthworks they encourage you to reschedule for a date later in the year.

9. How do we care for congregational members while we aren't meeting?

Each church will need to develop its own plans to help congregation members stay in touch with one another. This may involve measures such as home groups, WhatsApp groups, email discussions etc. We strongly encourage church leaders to pay particular attention to the most vulnerable and isolated within our church communities. This could be an opportunity to revive the old telephone prayer chain method of pastoral care.

10. Are their guidelines for visiting those diagnosed with COVID-19?

The *Book of Common Prayer* services for Visitation of the Sick and Communion for the Sick provide a helpful guide for caring for housebound parishioners. Your attention is drawn to the final rubrics of the Communion for the Sick, which reminds us that we can truly feed on Christ without having to consume the bread and wine. This expresses the principle of Jesus' teaching in John 6. Further resources on health precautions will be provided shortly.

11. What about giving?

The closure of our weekly gatherings will have significant financial implications for many of our churches. We encourage Rectors and wardens to communicate with their parishioners to urge them to commence online giving, if they are not doing so already. For congregational members who are unable or unwilling to give electronically, we encourage you to suggest means by which these parishioners can continue to provide ongoing support for the ministry of their church. Wardens may need to consider whether there are expenses or projects which can be postponed, to ensure that it is possible to continue paying clergy and staff.

12. Where will I find ongoing information and updates?

The situation continues to change on a daily, if not hourly, basis. We encourage you to check the following page maintained by NSW Health:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/coronavirus.aspx>

If you have further questions, please contact our Parish HR Partner Vikki Napier, who has been designated as a point of contact for parishes for any queries related to the impact of COVID-19 on parishes and parish ministry. Vikki's email is vikki.napier@sydney.anglican.asn.au.