



Ad Clerum

19 March 2020

Dear sisters and brothers

Next Steps in Responding to Covid-19 - Anglican Church Southern Queensland

The situation arising from the Covid-19 virus continues to change rapidly.

Today I have consulted closely with the regional bishops, General Manager and other diocesan leaders and have been apprised of developments in other dioceses and other churches around the country.

In the light of all this **The Anglican Church Southern Queensland will put public worship on hold from Monday 23 March 2020 until further notice.** We will continue to monitor the situation and review our practices.

Parishes that wish to suspend public worship including on this Sunday, 22 March 2020, and feel they can adequately prepare and communicate with their congregations for this change are free to do so.

This decision has not been taken lightly. While the Government has only restricted gatherings over 100, we recognise that a large proportion of our faithful regular church attenders are in the groups identified as high-risk. It is vital that we care for and stand in solidarity with them. Encouraging them to attend public worship by holding services may put many at serious risk and would represent a failure in our vocation of care and compassion.

We are aware that this restriction will be difficult for families who are planning liturgies such as funerals, weddings and baptisms. At this time, so long as appropriate precautions are put in place such as social distancing, it may be possible for these services to proceed with a limited congregation in line with government advice. Postponing these liturgies may also be an option that is offered to families.

Organising and running public worship in a safe way has become a very complex task for clergy and their communities in this current environment. Many churches are already beginning the work of shifting their ministry to non-gathered approaches. This shift alone is challenging enough. Coupled with the increased complexity of public worship in the current climate increases the stress and burden for clergy in what is already a difficult situation. It's important to care for you while you also tend to your parishes.

Having put public worship on hold we must now focus fully on how we continue to stay connected with, care for and minister to our church members and the wider community. This will mean being creative and using whatever technology and approaches are available to us. You will already be aware that we are offering grants to support parishes with the cost of equipment/subscriptions/licences that will enable you to communicate in the absence of face to face gatherings. Please also think carefully about how your parish can continue to provide spiritual and pastoral care, such as by leaving churches open as much as possible for private prayer.

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Leadership team meetings, parish council meetings, small group and home group meetings in face-to-face format may continue at your discretion in the short term with stringent hygiene and social distancing practices. However, I encourage you to move to different forms of meeting together. Government and public health advice should be monitored constantly and followed. Please continue to regularly check our advice page as we seek to support and resource you in every way possible - <https://anglicanchurchsq.org.au/covid/> This site has more detailed information regarding a range of issues related to church life.

I am very aware that the Covid-19 pandemic is causing a high degree of stress and anxiety for clergy, parish staff and volunteers. I want to encourage all of you to care for one another and for yourselves. Stay in touch with your regional Bishop and your colleagues so that we can care for one another. Please make sure you use our Employee Assistance Program – Flourish - if you need to. Free access is available to all clergy and staff (and members of their household) and it is completely confidential. More information can be found here <https://www.faithfulandeffective.com/wellbeing/>

We are very conscious that every parish will be working through the financial implications of the changing circumstances. We are looking at ways we can continue to support parishes through the financial decision-making process and further information will follow in coming weeks. If you are concerned that you need to access overdraft facilities or need to make adjustments to your loan repayments in the short term, please contact Anfin as a matter of priority by emailing askus@anfin.com.au . Please also advise your regional bishop.

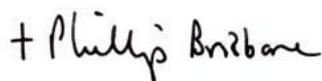
Please be confident that you and your whole community are in my prayers each day along with those of the regional bishops. It is important that we continue to pray for and support one another in all that we do. As the Lenten season moves towards Easter our faith holds fast to the truth that even during dark and chaotic times the hope and light of resurrection shines through. Be strong in that faith and hope.

You might find this prayer helpful -

***God of the present moment,
God who in Jesus stills the storm
and soothes the frantic heart;
bring hope and courage to all
who wait or work in uncertainty.
Bring hope that you will make them the equal
of whatever lies ahead.
Bring them courage to endure what cannot be avoided,
for your will is health and wholeness;
you are God, and we need you.***
-Adapted by Bishop Jeremy Greaves from New Zealand Prayer Book

Be reassured of my prayers for you and for your community.

Yours in Christ



The Most Reverend Dr Phillip Aspinall
Archbishop of Brisbane