

To all Clergy and Parishes
Tuesday 24 March

The following statement comes from Archbishop Philip, Bishops Brad, Genieve, John, Kate and Paul:

Following the Archbishop-in-Council advice on Saturday March 21st which led to the Ad Clerum from the Archbishop that day, and following further announcements by the Prime Minister and Victorian Premier, numerous questions have been asked of the bishops and Archbishop. Not every detail is yet clear from the government, and we recognise the situation remains fluid and pressured. As you will have noticed, much of the information about restrictions has been announced at a high level by the Prime Minister or the Premier. It has taken time for the detail of these announcements to be released by government authorities. The FAQs listed below are written on the basis of the best information we have been able to access

As you read the FAQs below, you will notice some differences between what the government regards as "essential services" and what our Church believes. For instance, the government regards weddings and funerals to be essential services, but not Easter services. We acknowledge much grief felt around this, but are obliged to comply with current government regulations.

FAQs

In answer to questions received, we offer the following. Please recognise the situations might change, or further clarification will be given, and we will do our best to convey that as accurately and quickly as we can.

1. CHURCH SERVICES

Church Services Indoors

All indoor church services are suspended, effective Monday, March 23, of any nature, though see below on weddings and funerals.

Churches Open for Prayer

Churches cannot be open to the public or parishioners for general prayer. Unless you hear otherwise this will include for Good Friday and Easter.

Church Services Outdoors

No outdoor services are permitted on church property or at any other venue. This is the decision of the Diocese and consistent with the urging of the government not to gather.

This includes Easter Day, Anzac Day or any other occasion, whether at a beach or in a park. For weddings and funerals, see further below.

Creating Livestreaming

We expect significant further restrictions on gathering and workplaces soon to the point where people may not be able to gather with anyone else at all. So we urge you even now to plan for that eventuality. You may be able to produce something yourself by email or social media. We encourage collaboration with other clergy and parishes and sharing resources.

For the time being, we set a limit of 10 at any one time in one place, appropriately socially distant, to produce a livestream or video for church services, including for youth and/or children. Only those directly involved in this can be in attendance. This is by invitation only, for people who are in effect voluntary church workers for the purpose of making the product.

Please note that a normal CCLI licence does not include livestreaming so you will need to investigate purchasing that from CCLI.

Please also send links for livestreaming or videos to your bishop.

Advice about spiritual communion will come soon.

Weddings and Funerals

The Victorian Government has made it clear that weddings and funerals indoors are excluded from the prohibition on non-essential gatherings but must conform to the current social distancing requirements of 4sqm per person. This will limit attendance. Open invitations to weddings and funerals cannot be allowed.

If a wedding or funeral is not on our property or is outdoors, government regulations for social distancing and hygiene must apply.

Clergy who decline weddings or funerals for personal safety reasons are urged to speak with their Area Dean to see if another minister can conduct the service.

Commissioning Services

Some parishes have new Vicars due for being commissioned in the weeks ahead. These services cannot now happen. The Bishop will receive the oath and declarations of the incoming Vicar privately and pray a commissioning prayer. The new Vicar will still start work on the day already advertised.

2. CHURCH MINISTRY ACTIVITIES

Small Groups, Meetings, Gatherings

All church meetings, groups and gatherings for any purpose are suspended whether on church property or off church property. This includes Bible study groups, prayer meetings, Parish Council meetings, women's or men's groups, concerts, youth or children's events. The Ad Clerum was not as clear as it could have been on this, for which we apologise.

We encourage the use of social media platforms for meetings or small groups. There are various introductions to these being run online by Christian groups. We plan to offer tutorials for using zoom and will advertise this. We intend to consolidate some resource links on the diocesan website before long.

3. PASTORAL CARE MATTERS

Pastoral Care by the Clergy

Personal pastoral ministry will be challenging in a lockdown and restricted access situation. It is certain that this ministry will be requested and clergy need to work through the hygiene and personal spatial separation issues that a pastoral visit or a home communion raise. Social

isolation will increase the risk to mental health and general wellbeing. If there is a large increase in rates of infection we need to expect that we will be confronted by circumstances that we have not encountered before in our pastoral ministries.

We expect clergy will maintain regular contact with parishioners by phone, skype or other digital means at the least.

Clergy in Risk Categories

Some clergy are in at risk categories because of health, family members' health or age. Please advise your Bishop and Area Dean if you consider yourself to be in this category.

Baptism, Confirmation or Other Pastoral Services

If a baptism or one of the pastoral services is deemed necessary, which may include ministry to the near dying, please provide that ministry to take place privately with minimal attendance and complying with any regulations of a hospital or aged care institution and of course be very aware of hygiene, social distancing and so on.

If a confirmation or reaffirmation of faith is urgent because a person is near dying, please discuss with your bishop.

Confirmations, Receptions for Purposes of a Ministry Position

If a confirmation or reception is urgent for the purpose of a ministry position, then please discuss with your bishop and a private reception or confirmation can be arranged with the candidate.

Home Communion and visitation

Clergy may still need to visit people, including offering home communion, in one kind. In such cases, the recipient cannot be in compulsory isolation and the recipient must be agreeable to the visit. This should only be for the people living in that home and not for a gathered group. The utmost hygiene of clean hands and distance must be maintained, not only for the safety of the person at home but for the clergy also. We advise not sharing food or drink.

4. FINANCES

Financial Matters

We are concerned for the financial well-being of clergy and church staff. We have no doubt this pandemic will significantly affect most of our parishes financially. These are serious matters. We are working on this with senior management and Archbishop in Council and will communicate more when possible.

If parishes are facing a real threat of not being able to pay clergy, please communicate this to your Bishop.

Some clergy are considering cutting their work days. Please speak with your bishop if you are considering this.

If clergy are facing financial hardship please speak with your bishop if you have not already done so.

Please do not simply assume that diocesan assessment will be waived.

5. OTHER ACTIVITIES

Op Shops

All Op Shops must close immediately if not already closed. This includes any outdoor trading.

Community Meals & Emergency Relief

Some churches provide meals for needy and homeless people, whether via an Op Shop or in the church facility. This ministry can only continue as a take-away or delivery facility. No gathering can continue. Proper hygiene and social distancing must be maintained by those providing the food and those collecting it. Please monitor collection of food so there is not a crowd gathered at any one time.

We are taking advice from Anglicare and the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Please indicate to your bishop if you have such a ministry so further advice can be directed to you.

If your parish has an emergency relief programme, there will need to be a demonstrated risk plan provided to the appropriate organisation (Diocese, Anglicare Victoria, Brotherhood of St Laurence).

We realise that your usual volunteers may well belong to at risk groups (e.g. over 70 or with chronic health conditions), yet this may also be an opportunity for others from your parish or surrounding parishes who are not normally in a position to volunteer but are now available to help.

Café

Occasionally a church may run what is more or less a commercial café. If licensed as such it can continue to provide take away and delivery but no sit down food or beverage and no congregating of people in the café.

Outdoor fetes and Markets

We have no clear governmental direction on this but consider that markets providing food and drink only can continue with appropriate hygiene, handling cash and social distancing. No sit down eating can be allowed; only take-away. The government has said that the provision of food and drink is regarded as essential. Markets selling books, clothes, gifts or other goods ought to be closed. If we hear further advice on this we will inform you.

Church Rental Groups

All rental groups using church property must comply with governmental gathering rules. That is their responsibility. This has probably already ruled out many groups such as dancing, martial arts or educational groups. You may want to check that the tenant is clear that they must maintain government rules.

Church rentals, especially housing, may be affected by National Cabinet decisions to give protections to tenants and leasees.

6. OTHER MATTERS

Other Matters and ideas

If your church does not have a video or livestream capacity, we encourage you to tag on to another parish's one or use the Anglican Media YouTube link for a weekly service uploaded there: <https://www.youtube.com/AnglicanMediaMelb>

If your church does provide livestreaming or video, please send the link to your bishop. We aim to send out a fuller list than before, maybe next week.

Prayer. Do encourage parishioners to pray. Several churches have provided Morning and Evening Prayer or prayerbooks to parishioners at home. Others have written prayers for their particular parish.

Some may want to ring church bells each day or at least on Sunday. If you do, we suggest 7pm, as many days as you can and we invite all our parishioners to pray the diocesan prayer for this pandemic at 7pm. You may also choose to light a candle for a period of time and display this in your home window (as has been encouraged by the church in the UK).

Keep in contact. Isolation is going to affect many people's mental and social health. Please work hard at pastoral systems that keep people connected to each other by phone.

The bishops were booked for various parish visits in the months ahead. The bishops want to continue, where possible, the connection with the parish whether for livestreaming or a video. Do contact your bishop in advance to arrange this.

Good Stories

We are so encouraged at the creativity already being seen in providing services, children's and youth activities and caring for vulnerable people in parishes. Clergy ought to regard this time as a treasure and opportunity. A treasure, because we will have some extra discretionary time with fewer services, to devote to pastoral care, people and our own well-being.

Opportunity because in bleak times as this, only the light of the gospel of Jesus is solid hope, and only Christians have that hope to share with others.

We'd love you to share your good stories with your bishop so we can encourage everyone. Please do not be shy and we can keep confidentiality in not naming people or parishes if you prefer. We need good news at this time.

We are also interested in thoughts on how as a diocese we can celebrate the ending of the virus. A BIG celebration?

Be assured of our regular prayers for you in these trying and stressful times.

Archbishop Philip, Bishops Genieve, Brad, Kate and Paul.