



# COVID-19 virus

Information and advice from  
Port Phillip East Presbytery  
Uniting Church in Australia

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# COVID-19 virus – Business as usual?

At times like this, we cannot always carry on business as usual. Here are some considerations that you and your organisation may need to give thought to. Below is information for Uniting Church staff, ministers, chaplains, and congregations to provide guidance around the outbreak of COVID-19 virus. It provides ways we can help manage the life of our Church and our communities during this pandemic.

**Caring for People**

**Travel Advisory**

**Church Activities, including communion**

**Financial Implications**

**Presbytery, Synod and Assembly**

We are called to be a people of prayer.

The Port Phillip East Presbytery wishes to express solidarity and to offer the assurance of our prayers on behalf of all those who have been infected with the deadly coronavirus (COVID-19) and with the families that have lost loved ones. We also pray for healthcare personnel and other caregivers who are offering essential services and care for those infected, even at the risk of their own lives.

COVID-19 is rapidly developing into a global health crisis. The landscape and its impact here in Australia and across the globe is changing daily.

We encourage everyone to remain compliant with health and safety procedures, avoid unnecessary exposure and act responsibly to reduce the risk of spreading.

We recommend we all follow advice given by the Department of Health and Human Services (see <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19#what-you-need-to-do>). Should instructions be issued by the Ministry of Health concerning public gatherings, congregations and Uniting Church entities will be expected to all follow these. If this circumstance arises, Synod will communicate the guidelines to congregations and advise any other relevant information at that time.

Congregations are encouraged to be prepared for the implications of measures we see being put in place in other countries and be guided by recommendations from the Australian Government concerning any changes to travel and contact with other people in your community.

We encourage the offering of pastoral care to each other and others in the communities we are a part of. We also encourage understanding and compassion for those affected and their families. No one has deliberately caused harm to another, and rather than act with fear and isolationist behaviours, we should act like the good Samaritan, taking time to care for others as we would wish to be cared for.

In times like these, we are reminded that “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear...” (Ps. 46: 1-2).

Andrew Boyle, Presbytery Chair

Duncan Macleod, Presbytery Minister: Team Leader

# Caring for People

## Visiting others

- We recommend that you consider telephoning before visiting a person to confirm they are well (and you are well) and that a visit would be welcome at this time.
- Be particularly careful if considering visiting the elderly in your community, new-born babies, those in hospital, those in retirement villages and those with chronic illnesses.
- Visiting places and people that are in close communities (hospital, retirement villages and rest homes) can place extra demands on staff at times like this, and additional stress on residents. Consider telephoning rather than visiting.
- Check on vulnerable members of your community to ensure that they have support (by telephone).
- If you have not already allocated an elder or support person to each member of your faith community, we recommend that you do so now, including their name, phone numbers and email. This is to ensure that no one is missed out.
- Some people may be anxious, that is normal. Be understanding and offer assurances and support as you are able.

## Access to medical support

- Unless you are a professional, please do not offer medical advice to those who are or may be unwell. You would best serve by assisting them to access the right advice and support set up for this purpose.
- Offer to call the helpline for them or make sure they have the number: **1800 675 398**
- If you or someone you know is concerned about symptoms of COVID-19 please do not visit your local GP, medical centre or hospital without calling first to seek advice. They will give instructions on how to access assistance.
  - Austin Hospital – (03) 9496 5000
  - Box Hill Hospital – 1300 342 255
  - The Alfred Hospital – (03) 9076 2000
  - The Royal Melbourne Hospital – (03) 9342 7000
  - Monash Clayton – (03) 9594 6666
  - Frankston Hospital – (03) 9784 7777
  - Rosebud Hospital – (03) 5986 0666

## Practical support – food and other supplies

- Check that you and those you support in your community have sufficient supplies including basic food, and essential medicine.
- If someone is in self-isolation at home, check that they have access to food, medicine and supplies, including the ability to order these for delivery on the internet.
- Don't hoard or buy more than is required for your household.
- If you have any excess of food or supplies consider donating to a local food bank . Call beforehand to confirm your donation is welcome at this time, and how you can drop it off.

## Church activities

- We recommend we all follow advice given by the Department of Health and Human Services. Should they issue instructions concerning public gatherings, Uniting church congregations and entities are expected to follow these guidelines.
- Remind members to not panic, to stay informed and to take all reasonable steps to keep themselves and others safe by following good personal hygiene practices (especially washing hands regularly, not sneezing or coughing in public and into a tissue or crook of arm if you are in public, and staying home if unwell).

## Cancel or Postpone?

- Advice could be received that Church services and other activities may need to be postponed, changed or delivered differently in your area. Consider if other events in your church buildings or offices should be postponed or cancelled. This includes events being organised and run by others on your property.
- You may encourage members who are staying at home to view the Glen Waverley Uniting Church live stream each Sunday, 9.15 and 11 am, online at <https://gwuc.org.au/live>

## Hygiene

- Regularly wipe down surfaces at church with a cleaning solution that kills viruses, the coronavirus can live for up to 9 days on surfaces.
- Ensure hand washing facilities have plenty of soap and paper towels available.
- Encourage members to stay home if they are sick.
- Stand at least one metre apart from anyone with cold or flu symptoms, and advise anyone sick to go home.

## Communion

- People preparing and serving communion should wash their hands thoroughly beforehand with hot water and soap.
- For communion distribution we recommend using only individual glasses. These should be passed to communicants by servers who have used hand sanitizer and preferably using disposable gloves. If the bread is from a loaf then those distributing this should also use hand sanitizer and disposable gloves.
- It is suggested that used glasses be placed in a suitable container rather than be returned to the tray. Our advice is that as the virus is unstable, the temperature of the hot water used to wash the glasses will kill the virus. And rather than drying the glasses, leave them to drain.

## Passing of the Peace and Greeting

- While there are currently no recommendations to avoid shaking hands or hugging, please respect those who do not wish to at this time.
- You could encourage other ways of greeting one another that do not require hands touching hands. Sharing the peace can simply be a nod, a hand on the shoulder or a greeting of hands folded together in front of the chest with the head slightly bowed.
- You may choose not to have people shake hands at the door after the service.

## Church financial implications

- Some members of your church community may suffer financial hardship if their employment status is impacted, if their business is affected or if their other sources of income have reduced. Consider what practical support you can offer.
- Church councils should consider what financial implications could arise in your situation. If members are in the practice of weekly giving during services, reduced attendance could affect weekly budgets. You may consider encouragement of direct giving through direct debit or regular online transfer.
- Consider prioritising your financial commitments, and contact your bank, Australian Tax Office and utility providers, local council etc if you believe that you will be unable to meet your core financial obligations
- Make sure your church has at least three people able to authorise bank transactions, in the event one or more authorised persons become sick and are unable to attend to these matters.

## Travel advisory

We recommend we all follow travel advisories issued (see [smartraveller.gov.au](https://smartraveller.gov.au)). These may be updated daily.

### Existing travel arrangements

- We recommend all take advice and follow all travel advisories. We note these can change regularly and may impact travel and also require isolation – either on route and/or when re-entering Australia. The current Australian Government advice is to not travel to China and Iran, to reconsider your need to travel to South Korea, and exercise a high degree of caution if travelling to Japan, Italy and Mongolia. These restrictions will be reviewed by 14 March 2020.
- Contact your insurance company and/or travel agent for advice on refunds, credits and cancellation policies.
- Make sure your family or close friends know where you are and how to get hold of you.

## Presbytery, Synod and Assembly

- Presbytery meetings and gatherings may need to be postponed or carried out remotely. Please check your local Presbytery's website, or contact your local Presbytery for more information.
- Be aware that staff may be working from home or remotely, and therefore emailing is often the better method of contact.
- At time of writing it is assumed that Synod 2020 will continue to be held in November. However, if the meeting is to be postponed you will be advised.

We may update and or amend this communication in the light of advice and/or direction. We repeat the words of the Psalmist: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear..." (Ps. 46: 1-2).