



COVID-19 Update for Congregations & Ministry Agents

Port Phillip East Presbytery
Uniting Church in Australia

Issue date: Thursday 26 March 2020

Greetings

What a week we've experienced! On Sunday night, the Prime Minister made it clear that **places of worship are to be closed**. Soon after it was clarified that exemptions would be made for funerals, with a maximum of 10 people, and weddings, with a maximum of 5 people (celebrant, couple, 2 witnesses). Communication from Synod has clarified for us that we are not to transfer our face-to-face worship gatherings into other venues or outside. Baptisms will need to be held at a later date when restrictions are lifted.

The Premier of Victoria has made it clear that we are to **stay home** wherever possible, and to avoid social gatherings. With this in mind, we should not be holding face-to-face meetings, in our church buildings, outside or in homes. This includes church council meetings and prayer meetings.

Presbytery staff are working from home. The Presbytery's committee meetings are continuing their work, meeting online through Zoom Meetings and through email. We are happy to support church councils and prayer meetings in trialling the use of Zoom Meetings, which allows for access using computers, tablets, mobile phones and landline phones.

The Centre for Ministry in Parkville is closed, and classes at Pilgrim are continuing online. People can call and leave a message with eLM staff or contact them directly as they will be working from home. *Uniting* has closed its Op Shops although staff are seeking to find other ways to support vulnerable people.

We have a number of congregations who are broadcasting worship services and reflections using Facebook, YouTube, Vimeo and Churchonline.com. If filming in the church building, we encourage congregations to limit involvement to a handful of people (up to 5) and ensure that 1.5 metre physical distancing is maintained. At some point, it is likely that we will need to run everything from our homes. Keep in mind the principles of sustainability and simplicity. Please

let presbytery know if you are offering services or resources online so we can add the details to our website.

The Presbytery Minister team are regularly adding pages to the Presbytery website: <https://www.ucappep.org/stay-connected> with ideas relating to worship, funerals and weddings, pastoral care, online meetings, faith practices at home, mission, finance, health, technology, public relations and more. It will be updated weekly with additional resources to help you. If you are putting services or resources online, please send us a link.

Every Tuesday and Friday morning, 10 – 11 am, you can join the Presbytery's online video meeting (Zoom) to talk about how you're going and connect with others. Questions to bring or send to us for each meeting: "How did the last week go?" "What are you learning?" and "What questions and concerns do you have?" and "What support do you need?" If you can't make it online, we're happy to receive emails or phone calls.

To join the Tuesday or Friday Zoom Meeting

Online: <https://zoom.us/j/772050752>

By phone: +61 3 7018 2005 Australia

Meeting ID: 772 050 752

Pastoral care and practical tips

Now more than ever, your fellow church members may be in need of pastoral care, even if that happens in the form of a phone call, text message or other social media outreach methods.

Please take care of one another, look out for your ministers or pastors, take care of yourself, be gentle with one another and remember it is only for a season.

It will be important that church grounds are maintained and the buildings checked regularly. Consider adding something to your church sign to indicate that the church is not gathering but can still be contacted.

Please arrange for offerings to be given via direct debit, online banking or arrange a safe process of collecting envelopes and other cash offerings in ways that adhere to the physical distancing rules. We've put a page on finances on the Port Phillip East Presbytery page, including the U Ethical direct debit offering application form.

The financial impact of this pandemic is being felt across our community and we are aware of the impact on our congregations and communities and the flow-on effects to all parts of the church's life.

See the page below for a summary of the recommendations for church life during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Remember: You are not alone, we are in this together, we can all work on continuing to be the body of Christ in a different way as we negotiate the challenges of this time. Please keep yourself safe and others safe through making sensible and responsible choices.

Stay home.

A prayer while washing your hands

God of healing and well-being,
As I wash my hands I ask you
To cleanse me of other invisible viruses
Of the soul:
Fear, hate, pride, greed, lust, hostility,
Supremacy, superiority, selfish interest,
And all constriction of the heart.
As I join billions of others in this practice,
Help me feel how deeply we are all connected
And equally, infinitely loved by you.
Brian D McLaren

God's strength and peace be with you.

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Port Phillip East Presbytery
Staying Safe during COVID-19 Pandemic
A summary 26 March 2020

1. All worship services in church buildings were suspended from Monday 23 March.
2. It is no longer possible to meet together in our church buildings and we encourage congregations to continue to meet online and in small groups of people living in the same home.
3. All face-to-face gatherings, including council and committee meetings, Bible study groups, craft groups and non-associated groups need to be suspended. Consider online gathering arrangements, video conferencing or phone calls.
4. No outdoor church of any size activities including worship should be conducted as the priority at this time is the safety of the community and playing a part in reducing transmission rates of COVID-19.
5. There is a maximum of five essential personnel allowed to gather for the preparation of worship resources, and preferably less. Appropriate physical distancing must be adhered to (4 square metres per person and 1.5 metres apart), with strict hygiene practices.
6. If churches are producing printed resources, you can deliver them to members but with strict safety measures to comply with government regulations.
7. No more than 10 people may be present at funerals. We recognise that this is a most difficult restriction for our congregations and we encourage congregational leaders to, with permission, explore ways of enabling the community to grieve and the possibility of recording such events in preparation for memorial services in the future or find alternative ways of shaping a memorial or thanksgiving service online (see our webpage <https://www.ucappep.org/funerals-and-weddings>).
8. Weddings are permitted with only the couple, celebrant and witnesses (5 people maximum). The physical distancing rules apply.
9. All baptisms should be postponed until further notice.
10. It is now time for congregations who employ staff to move to skeleton staff only in your buildings – no more than two people working in the office at any one time. Please encourage staff to work from home as much as possible.
11. If anyone is in the high-risk category for COVID-19, they must not be present.
12. Please continue to be in touch with your presbytery to share resources, ideas and ways of pastorally caring for each other at this time.

For more advice and support, visit the Port Phillip East Presbytery COVID-19 page.

<https://www.ucappep.org/stay-connected>