



24 March 2020

Dear friends,

We are both incredibly proud of our church at the moment. The resilience and innovation that is being demonstrated and the commitment of our ministers and leaders to ensure that their congregations are supported shows that even in the darkest of times, there is faith, hope and love light. As you are undoubtedly aware, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic situation is extremely serious and continues to change rapidly. We encourage you to consistently seek information from the [Australian Government](#) and [Queensland Health](#) for up-to-date information and abide by all such recommendations.

### Your health

Your health as leaders and members of the Uniting Church is critical as you work to serve others. Please follow State and Federal Government advice and guidelines on personal hygiene and social distancing practices. Mental and spiritual well-being is vitally important alongside our physical health. Take the time to reflect on the personal practices that can sustain you. What can you read? How are you praying? Can you take a daily walk for fresh air and a time of disconnection? Do you have someone with whom you are checking-in? We are praying for you and with you as we work together.

### Gathering and operation of congregational facilities

Up until yesterday, our advice to congregations was that the practice of keeping the doors open for private reflection was allowable at the discretion of the presbyteries. However, a directive from the [Queensland Chief Health Officer](#) meant that as of midday, 23 March 2020, places of worship are only to be open for funerals. In response to particular questions asked of us, our current understanding is:

- In the case of any activity, social distancing, sanitisation and maximum number for floor space are essential. The current capacity rules are one person per four square metres, i.ee if the floor space of your room is 50 sq m then maximum capacity is 12. If these conditions cannot be met, the activity cannot continue.
- Your church building cannot be open for personal prayer and reflection. Encourage people to use space at home for this purpose.
- Your church building can be used for meetings of church councils, as an administrative function if you have no other option, and only if social distancing measures are adhered to. We recommend you move to alternate means of meeting.
- Your church building can be used for funerals for a small group of people only, where the gathering does not exceed one person per four square metres and social distancing, including keeping 1.5 metres between people, can be accommodated.
- We believe you can access your church building for the purpose of filming services for streaming provided that:
  - o the number of people in the building should be limited to those who are only essential for that purpose
  - o equipment must be sanitised and not shared, social distancing practiced
  - o building should be locked to prevent any unnecessary access during filming
  - o be aware that even with these limitations, gathering a worship team for this purpose may very quickly become unacceptable. Begin your planning now for alternate ways of

producing worship resources (for example, filming short segments in people's homes and editing together into a whole service)

- You may operate services such as emergency relief for food and clothing.
- You may continue the operations of your office, however, should look where possible for arrangements outside of the office.
- If you have a café or restaurant, you may only serve takeaway or delivered drinks and meals.
- Op-shops may continue on the basis of your church council determination, with particular care around older volunteers and any handling of cash. We recommend that you make arrangements for any older volunteers to work away from the public, and to reduce any cash handling to an absolute minimum (and then only with proper hygiene practices).
- Prepare now for the complete closure of church property. Plan for securing the premises, a regular visit to the site to check security or unauthorised access and use, securing rubbish bins and so on.

We are conscious that Government policy and health guidelines continue to evolve rapidly, and the acceptability of any of this activity may change very quickly. Where you are making decisions, we encourage you to remain on the side of caution.

#### Hall hire

Last week, we wrote to you regarding hall hires. We are still following the advice provided by the Australian Government and it remains up to each individual church council as to whether hall hires are continued **except where hall hire is for activities that are now prohibited by government under its most recent policy changes**. You must conduct a risk assessment prior to allowing groups to hire your halls, ensuring that they are able to meet community standards with respect to sanitisation and social distancing, as well as allowing a maximum of one person per four square metres per room. For example, if your facility is 100 square metres, that means you can allow a maximum of 25 people in that space.

#### Cashflow

The Synod office is currently developing a specific package that will be offered to congregations and Presbyteries to assist with cash flow management. The package is currently being refined and will be subject to feedback before being issued broadly.

#### Government stimulus

We understand that many of you are interested in the Prime Minister's announcement yesterday regarding financial assistance to small businesses and not-for-profits. As noted above we are looking at the implications of this announcement and will provide advice as soon as it is available.

We anticipate providing our next update on Friday, 27 March 2020, unless there is a need to provide an extraordinary update.

Our prayers are with you during this unprecedented time.

Every blessing,



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