



THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF GRAFTON

The Right Reverend Dr. Murray Harvey
Bishop of Grafton

PO Box 4
GRAFTON NSW 2460

Phone: 02 66424122
Email: bishop@graftondiocese.org.au

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Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Many people from around the diocese have asked for further guidance regarding our response in the face of the COVID-19 Virus. As a Diocese we want to cooperate with NSW Health and the wider community in taking immediate and targeted action to contain the virus through early identification of cases, the implementation of social distancing and exclusion strategies as well as the ceasing of non-essential gatherings. For this reason, and in line with the rest of the Province of NSW, **we will be ceasing public worship in the Diocese of Grafton from Monday 23 March. While this is for an indefinite period, the situation will be reviewed every fortnight.**

Please use a variety of methods such as email, Social Media, SMS and phone calls to communicate this message.

Please note that this does **not** include Anglican Schools and only applies to public worship in churches.

The closure has been timed so that ministry units can inform their parishioners at worship this coming Sunday (22 March) of the forthcoming closure and provide details of any arrangements for the ongoing provision of ministry including pastoral care.

Once public worship has ceased, I encourage you to keep at least one church in your ministry unit open for part of each day (or at the very least on Sunday mornings) for those who want to come in for private prayer.

In addition, your ministry unit should give thought to how you can continue to provide spiritual and pastoral care to members of your congregations and to the wider community. People will need advice about how to access Christian services and resources digitally and how to be included in any 'virtual' Pastoral Visiting that may be available. Another mailout in the next couple of days will suggest online resources that will help you in this task.

For those churches that are able to be left open for private prayer, and for other aspects of church life other than public worship, I have attempted to offer some guidance below based on advice from NSW Health and the Commonwealth Department of Health. So that you do not have to disinfect the whole church, consider roping off one section that visitors can use.



As an immediate priority, NSW Health recommends that we implement good hygiene practice and asks anyone who has cold or flu-like symptoms to seek medical attention and self-isolate (anyone arriving from overseas needs to self-quarantine for 14 days, as does anyone who has come into close contact with someone who already has COVID-19). COVID-19 Advice from NSW Health is updated on a regular basis and with so much advice available it is recommended to have a single source for NSW residents regarding the symptoms and health advice. Please find the link for your information:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/coronavirus.aspx>

Public Worship on Sunday 22 March

If you decide to go ahead and offer services this Sunday only, you may wish to offer Services of the Word only. If offering Holy Communion, please offer the Sacrament in one kind only (i.e., the Bread). Only the President would consume the wine present at the consecration. *Please do not now use individual Communion Cups.*

Social Distancing

In addition, social distancing measures suggest that we keep people from getting too close to each other (no closer than 1.5 metres). Social distancing and enhanced hygiene implemented before local COVID-19 transmission can decrease the number and severity of cases. See here for Government Health advice about Social Distancing in a variety of contexts:

<https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/03/coronavirus-covid-19-information-on-social-distancing.pdf>

Collections

Encourage people to sign up for electronic giving or use a giving App. Please consider other ways that you may be able to receive donations, such as people bringing their cash or cheque donations into the office, leaving them in a secure place in the church, or dropping them into a designated receptacle in the Op Shop. *Because the cessation of public worship is for an indefinite period, you will need to give serious thought to how the parish is going to provide for people's giving in order to continue to meet the costs of ministry.*

Other Church Events and Gatherings

The risk of spreading the virus through non-essential gatherings should be evaluated and minimised. It's not possible to advise about every kind of gathering that a Ministry Unit might offer. However, if proceeding, the general principles below should be adhered to (these comments also apply to Op Shops):

Physical contact with people should be avoided. As advised above, hand shaking should be avoided. People should be encouraged to wash their hands often. Hand sanitisers should be made available at strategic locations, particularly at entrances of church buildings. Everyone should be encouraged to use hand sanitiser before entering church buildings/gatherings on church property. Ensure very regular cleaning of surfaces that are touched frequently by multiple people.

Catering should be suspended. If it is to continue, stringent hygiene practices should be carried out by those making and distributing food. Food should be served with tongs by servers using gloves. Consideration might be given to using food that is pre-packaged and can be opened by the individual.



Baptisms, weddings and funerals

I understand that Weddings that have already been booked will need to go ahead. Also, we need to be able to offer funeral liturgies. The advice I offer here is directly reproduced from the General Synod Office's *Guidelines for application by dioceses of the Anglican Church of Australia in response to COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic*. If conducting a Pastoral Office of this nature, all government directives concerning public gatherings and the precautionary measures outlined concerning church services should be applied. Churches can insist that the number of persons attending a special service meets directives in relation to public gatherings and may need to pastorally support those who will be required to adjust guest lists to small numbers of family and friends.

However, Baptism is a special case. Because the General Synod guidelines assume that churches will not be closed to public worship, the guidelines offer advice on how to conduct a baptism during the pandemic. However, I would ask that you discuss the situation with the family concerned and advise against conducting a baptism during our closure period (apart from emergency baptisms of course). Please speak to me about any Baptisms where, after discussion with the family, they are still very keen for it to go ahead.

Op Shops

The Government has not suggested the closure of retail outlets, so the decision of whether your Op Shop can remain open is one you need to make locally. Ministry Units that run Op Shops have a duty to provide and maintain a safe workplace for employees and volunteers. One particular factor to consider is ensuring employees have access to adequate facilities for washing hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub. The Australian Retailers Association has offered helpful resources here: <https://www.australian-retailers-association.com/updates-for-retailers-coronavirus>

Hall Hire

The hiring of halls and other parish spaces should be minimised. Please consult with hirers and ensure that their gathering involves no more than 100 people and that they are communicating the safety measures mentioned above to all participants including: not attending if they are feeling ill, even mildly so; stringent handwashing and hand sanitisation practices, hand sanitiser to be used by each person upon entrance and exit; the cleaning of all surfaces and equipment before and after each activity / event.

Pastoral Visiting

When visiting people at home, clergy (and other pastoral care workers) should wash and/or sanitise their hands before giving the sacrament (bread only). There should be no pastoral visits to people who are self-isolating, until their isolation period has ended. Phone support should be offered in these instances. It is strongly recommended that clergy (and other pastoral care workers) use appropriate personal protection for all visiting.

Many aged care facilities and hospitals have suspended non-essential visiting by families and others. If the visit is essential and if you are permitted to visit, clergy and other pastoral care workers should carefully follow advice from staff on infection control. It is strongly recommended that clergy (and other pastoral care workers) use appropriate personal protection.



Clergy (and other pastoral care workers) who are in high risk categories themselves or who are intending to visit those in high risk categories (such as the elderly, people with weakened immune systems and long-term conditions such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease) should not undertake the visit.

Please think about how to care for and support those in your community who are ill or self-isolating, for example, by picking up/delivering essential supplies and medication to them. Current advice for those who are self-isolating is to try to avoid having visitors to your home (it is okay for friends, family or delivery drivers to drop off food or supplies). Also consider other methods of communicating with those who are ill or self-isolating, such as phone or email.

The Registry

At this stage we are implementing the advice we have received for Employers from the Department of Health and keeping the Registry open. However, we have converted all meetings involving people from outside the Registry to Zoom meetings. The Registrar will communicate with members of boards and committees and others who are due to attend scheduled meetings. **Advice for Employers** is here: <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/03/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-employers.pdf>

In Conclusion

Some of the above advice has been sourced from the Diocese of Brisbane and I thank Archbishop Aspinall for allowing me to reproduce it here. I have also included some of the advice from the Anglican Church of Australia's General Synod Office.

I have just spoken to Bishop Greg Homeming, the Catholic Bishop of Lismore, who has ceased public worship in his diocese effective Sunday 22 March.

There are likely to be many other questions that my comments above don't answer. Please contact your Regional Archdeacon, the Registry staff or myself because we may be able to help. Further thought and work is underway on how we will respond to this Pandemic and I'm sure there will be many lessons to be learnt for the future.

At a time like this the church can play an important leadership role in the community by acting responsibly and following expert advice on the best ways to combat the virus, while not getting caught up in panic and importantly caring for those around us who need it most, such as health care workers, the elderly and those who are unwell. I believe that by temporarily pausing public services of worship we are further demonstrating our responsibility to the wider community.

I encourage all clergy to continue their pattern of the Daily Offices and call on all Christians to pray for those affected, for health workers and those seeking to develop a vaccine and that the spread of this disease may slow.

Finally, the Church of England Diocese of St Albans has published four 'Golden Rules' to help us at this time, which I offer for your reflection and possible action:

Rule One: Think about how you can protect and support your neighbours and stop spreading fear about the other. Don't demonise anyone or any group.

Rule Two: Think about who may be suffering more than you. Let each church undertake an audit of all the vulnerable people you know and share out the responsibility to phone them each day – a friendly voice offers solace when someone is worried.



Rule Three: Don't give in to panic and start hoarding food. Ask your neighbours what they need and do your best to help them get it.

Rule Four: Live today to the full. None of us ever know what the future holds so do not be afraid. Every time we are tempted to give in to fear we need to make a conscious choice to respond in trust: as the psalmist said:

'Whenever I am afraid, I will put my trust in you; in God whose word I praise. In God I trust and will not be afraid, what can mortals do to me.' (Ps.56.3f)

In Christ,



Dr Murray Harvey
Bishop of Grafton

A Prayer

Loving God,
source of healing and comfort,
at this time of fear, fill us with your grace
that the sick may be made whole,
this virus contained and a cure found.
Strengthen those who care for the sick,
calm the anxious
and protect the most vulnerable
in the power of the Spirit and
in the faith of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

