
Thursday, 16 December 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers

COVID-19 Update for the Period Commencing 15 December 2021

As expected, the NSW Public Health Order effective 15 December has lifted a broad range of restrictions across the State.

Below I have attempted to summarise the main points from the PHO that apply to us. I have added other material not covered by the PHO but that was communicated in a briefing attended by Archdeacon Tiffany Sparks. The Public Health Order is here:

[https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/file/Public%20Health%20\(COVID-19%20General\)%20Order%20\(No%202\)%202021.pdf](https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/file/Public%20Health%20(COVID-19%20General)%20Order%20(No%202)%202021.pdf)

- People entering a Religious Place of Worship must still check in using the QR Code
- Density and capacity limits no longer apply
- Masks are not required for the vaccinated or unvaccinated for any purpose, including singing
- Op Shops can welcome everyone and a QR check in is no longer required
- People do not need to check into the Parish Office or Church Hall using a QR Code (provided the Church Hall is not being used for Public Worship)
- COVID Safe Plans. While these are no longer required by NSW Health, as Bishop I ask that you maintain and update your current plans until further notice. The plans are a way in which you can continue to monitor your own COVID Safe practices
- Greeting of Peace – a physical passing of the Peace is now allowed but people are encouraged not to participate if they are feeling unwell
- Physical Distancing – due to the removal of density limits this restriction has been removed as well. However, it is strongly recommended that 1.5m social distancing be practised where possible as it will help reduce the spread of the virus
- Use of materials such as Hymn Books, Prayer books, Pew Sheets etc and passing of the Collection Plate – these are now allowed but please try to minimise their use in order to reduce the spread of the virus
- Cleaning – regular cleaning of all surfaces is not mandatory but regular cleaning will help to reduce the spread
- Hand Sanitiser – please continue to provide this and encourage its use
- The administration of Holy Communion remains unchanged from our current practice. That is, the Common Cup is still suspended. The Primate has formed a Working Group to look into the risks associated with administration of the Common Cup. I will know more about this after the Bishops' Meeting in Adelaide 18-22 March.
- It is strongly recommended that we remind anyone who is feeling unwell to leave the premises and get tested.

I suggest that the Incumbent and Churchwardens, or the Parish Council, thoroughly discuss the above changes and decide how you intend to offer a COVID Safe environment in Public Worship in the light of these reduced restrictions, and update your COVID Safe Plan accordingly.

The lifting of restrictions has only been possible due to high vaccination rates and will be welcome by many. However, these freedoms come at a time when the incidence of COVID-19 in NSW is increasing dramatically, with significant and increasing local transmission on the North Coast.

Therefore, while we cannot *require* the wearing of masks on our sites, personally I strongly recommend the wearing of masks in indoor settings such as Public Worship. There are also other practices above which, though no longer required by PHO, can significantly reduce the likelihood of transmission during worship and hence keep people safe. For these reasons mask wearing and other measures are being reintroduced in many countries, such as the UK, because of a resurgence of COVID-19 despite good vaccination rates.

Please note that the changes introduced in the Public Health Order do not change the Diocese's vaccination policy that was communicated on 18 October 2021.

Please be assured of my prayers as we navigate this new territory and, at the same time, prepare to welcome people over the Christmas period.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Murray". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross-like symbol at the beginning.

Dr Murray Harvey
Bishop of Grafton

