



Tasmanian Office

This letter is to all ministry agents and local leaders in congregations and faith communities in Tasmania, including Lay Preachers and retired ministers.

16th March, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

You may be aware that on Friday last week the Synod office circulated some guidelines for church activities in the light of the escalating coronavirus situation. This afternoon, Presbytery leaders met via Zoom to assess the current situation in the light of the local Tasmanian context.

One of the key aims of the Church (both Presbytery and Synod) is to help congregations and faith communities to thrive, and in times such as these, we are seeking to assist in the duty of care we all have to each other, by providing advice and resources to help us protect those we are responsible for, especially those who are most vulnerable.

Taking into consideration the responses from the Tasmanian and Australian Governments, advice from experts within the medical systems in Tasmania, and some local churches, we are seeking to provide advice to local congregational leaders to support you in exercising effective leadership in these difficult times.

The Uniting Church is keen to ensure effective communication channels exist both within local church congregations, and between the Presbytery and individual congregations and faith communities.

1. Please ensure that congregation leaders have a comprehensive contact list for all of your members, including phone, mobile, home address and email (where relevant), to ensure you can maintain pastoral contact, especially with those who might be older and less mobile.
2. The Uniting Church office in Launceston will be the main point of contact for any questions or concerns about how the COVID-19 (coronavirus) situation may affect church activities, and how best to keep your people safe. Please contact the office via phone (6331 9784) or email: tas.office@victas.uca.org.au. This situation is changing frequently, and some matters are not yet clear, but the office staff will do their best to respond to your queries.

In observing the international experience of COVID-19, at some point the Government Health Department may direct us to stop gathering for worship and other activities of the church. Some local congregations have already chosen to do this. The Presbytery is compiling a range of resources for alternative worship activities that can be implemented to maintain a sense of community and mutual care during a time of physical distance and separation.

The Presbytery will distribute these resources from Wednesday afternoon this week via email (or in printed form where this is required & requested). Links to these resources will also be available on the Presbytery website (<https://ucatas.org.au/>) and Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/ucatas/>).

In the meantime, we strongly encourage the following measures in any church gatherings held:

- people should stay home if they are sick
- avoid shaking hands, hugging or kissing when greeting people, including at the beginning and end of services. Maintain 'mutual distancing' (at least 1.5m apart) to care for others
- continue the practice of frequent and careful handwashing
- do not hold services of Holy Communion
- do not have shared food or meals (including morning tea)

We also encourage local leaders to contact community groups who may use your buildings or facilities, and encourage them to heed the advice of local health authorities, including thoroughly cleaning / disinfecting hard surfaces before and after use.

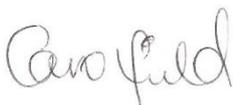
In due course, it is likely that all community activities may cease for a time, and then will resume again when it is safe to do so. Already many community groups are cancelling and postponing activities, but this will not last forever.

We are aware things are changing rapidly, but this is not a 'storm in a tea cup': we are taking advice from medical experts based on international experience, we are caring for each other and our neighbours, we are living out of faith. We need to take this situation seriously, and there is some urgency, but we don't need to panic – we can take careful and care-full steps, measured responsible steps, helping people to see the importance of 'flattening the curve' so that the health systems can cope with the increased demand.

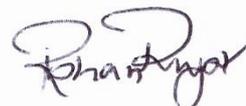
At some point we expect to be required by health authorities to cease gathering, for a time. When that happens, we will be prepared to be connected in separated space, with alternative activities which will sustain our communities and our faith.

Until that time, please practise these personal separation measures which are imperative for the health of the most vulnerable in our communities.

Grace and peace,



Rev Caro Field
Presbytery Chairperson



Rohan Pryor
Synod Liaison Minister