



Uniting Church in Australia  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

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*This letter has been sent to: All presbytery office bearers, people in placements and retired ministers and Church Council Secretaries*

## **COVID-19      Easing of restrictions and Love of Neighbour**

Dear friends,

Love of neighbour lies at the heart of Christian faith. Even more than this, love of God and love of neighbour are intimately bound together. As governments ease restrictions on gathering, and we consider how we might respond as individuals, and communities of faith, it is Jesus' call to love our neighbour which may hold and guide our hearts and minds.

In the last few months, we have been asked by public health authorities to change our way of living, in order to protect our communities and save lives. Even now, as governments are moving towards easing of restrictions on gatherings, we are still being asked to consider prioritising staying at home.

The easing of restrictions may seem to allow the simple reopening of the doors of our worship spaces and community halls for small groups, or of visiting or gathering in peoples' homes. Yet in easing the restrictions, we are aware that, until a vaccine is found, this will bring a rise in the number of new infections. It is for this reason that, along with any easing of restrictions, there are many new requirements to ensure the safety of those who gather.

The Synod e-news update being sent out later today, includes updated FAQs and information about the easing of restrictions and the remaining requirements for use of church facilities, including a checklist of what you will need to consider in response to these. Next week, further information will follow in regard to use of church facilities by other community groups. Please be sure to read these before welcoming people back into your church.

Each Church Council needs to carefully consider and plan how it will manage the additional safety requirements for any use of church facilities. This includes finding ways of meeting the safety requirements that don't involve or obligate those most at risk of severe illness, e.g. those over 70 or with health conditions, including Ministers or other congregation leaders, to do the tasks to achieve these requirements.

Church Councils are strongly urged to take the time that this careful planning requires – for love of neighbour.

Limited physical gatherings of people won't replace the need for the alternative ways of worshipping and serving that communities have been using over the last weeks, so these still need to continue.

Some congregations may well decide to delay physically gathering until circumstances change more substantially. If Church Councils do decide to open to small gatherings for worship, prayer, or Bible study, a challenging task is how to decide who may take part without the risk of some feeling excluded.

Similar questions arise in relation to the easing of restrictions on visiting each other's homes for pastoral visiting or gathering for prayer or bible study. For the same reasons as above, these are activities that also require Church Council to consider carefully.

As Christians, these considerations are not just about helping to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but are part of showing our love and protection of neighbour, especially for those of our community who are most vulnerable.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore.

Grace and peace,



**Rev Denise Liersch**  
**Moderator**



**Rev Dr Mark Lawrence**  
**General Secretary**