



Archbishop of Sydney

5 March 2020

To Rectors and Wardens

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

In recent days, a number of people have enquired about diocesan recommendations regarding procedures for ministry in the light of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). Given the circumstances, where the worldwide impact of the virus changes daily, we offer the following advice. However, you may need to take further precautions as the circumstances change.

The Commonwealth Department of Health provides advice regarding the Coronavirus and what precautions are appropriate for our community at this time. We strongly recommend monitoring this site regularly to keep up to date with developments.

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert#current-status>.

This will be a testing time for many of our congregations as we seek to balance our fellowship gatherings with sensible safeguards. Given our commitment to providing a safe environment for those attending our churches, the following recommendations are applicable until further notice.

1. Holy Communion.

We recognise this has been of particular concern for some. Statistically, those over 70 are the most vulnerable to serious illness or death from this virus. People in this age group are often members of early morning services where the Lord's Supper is regularly administered.

We advise that where you hold services that include Communion, it is best for the bread and wine to be served from the front only, rather than passed around on trays or in baskets in the pews. While many churches distribute bread and individual cups of wine in this way, the problem is not merely people touching the bread, but people also touching the trays. We recommend the bread be served to each individual by a designated person (or persons) who has washed their hands with soap and water and used hand sanitizer just prior to distributing the bread. We also recommend that churches do not use the common cup, because the same risks exist from multiple handling by communicants. Instead, individual cups of wine (or juice) should be provided.

2. Children's Ministries

While children are less vulnerable to the impact of the virus, it is important that great care be taken with hygiene in these ministries. Please examine all aspects of your children's ministry program to ensure good practice. Put in place protocols for children who present with colds or coughs. Require stringent hand washing with soap and water, especially if there is any food service or preparation involved in the ministry. Wipe down toys and equipment with antiseptic wipes before and after sessions. Review and, if necessary, suspend communal morning teas where children are likely to touch food, or serve each child individually with tongs. Please

consider how to minimise touching shared surfaces. This will include small things like not using a common pen for parents to sign children into the program, but allowing a leader to 'check-in' children instead. This advice also extends to mid-week ministries such as playgroups.

3. Food service

Morning teas/suppers/dinners can be key times of fellowship in the life of our church. Once again we encourage wise execution of serving food. This may include replacing open packets of biscuits with individually wrapped biscuits, suspending communal dinners, not allowing food on open trays or plates. In essence, it is not wise to allow opportunity for people to touch or breathe on food that will then be consumed by others. Please note this advice also extends to mid-week groups, such as Bible studies and ESL groups that might gather on church premises.

4. General Advice

As per the Health Department Guidelines, we encourage you to refrain from handshakes and other contact like kissing on the cheek. Overall, we encourage people to exercise common sense and general good hygiene as they gather together, while being cautious with any contact.

At this stage, the Government is not recommending limitations on public gatherings that would prevent congregations from meeting. We are continuing to monitor this situation closely, and will provide further advice as appropriate.

The Regional Bishops are available for further advice on these issues, should you have any questions.

We recognise that this advice may seem too prescriptive, and some members of your congregation will baulk against these recommendations. Yet we believe that as Christians we have a duty of care to everyone in our midst, especially the household of faith. The manner in which you convey this information will hopefully assuage any negativity that might arise from members of your church.

We should also be in fervent prayer that the effects of this virus might be restrained. Please continue to pray about this situation publicly. Pray for those who are ill, wisdom for government and health authorities, that God would be gracious to us and limit the number who fall ill.

May God be merciful to our world that the virus may be contained and a vaccine quickly developed.

Grace and peace

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