



# Communications Pack regarding COVID-19

18 Mar 2020

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To keep updated with the latest news regarding COVID-19 and Synod of SA's responses, [find out more here](#)



# From the **Moderator**

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## **COVID-19: Communications to all - 18 March 20**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ*

As our congregations and other organisations reflect on the impact of COVID-19 in their situations, I urge us all to continue to embody God's love, care and compassion for the communities in which we serve.

I encourage us all to be mindful of actions that need to be taken to mitigate the spread of this virus; in particular the need to observe social distancing and avoiding large gatherings.

This is not a short term arrangement, we need to put in place practices that are sustainable for six months or more.

In all that we do as congregations, actions that minimize the opportunity for the virus to spread rapidly are beneficial for the health system, our members and the wider community.

We lament the consequences of the restrictions imposed, the plans and opportunities that must be postponed and the disruption to the normal order of things.

I encourage congregations to be creative and adaptable as we all discover new and exciting ways to do ministry.

**[Click here for the Letter from the General Secretary which includes :](#)**

- Government's advice
- What is 'essential'?
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- Update about Synod Office at Pirie Street and Brooklyn Park Campus

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To keep updated with the latest news regarding COVID-19 and Synod of SA's responses, **[find out more here](#)**

I close with a prayer, adapted from a prayer by the Uniting Church President Dr Deidre Palmer. You may like to pray as part of your own devotions or it may be read where people are gathered.

**A PRAYER FOR COMPASSION, WISDOM AND STRENGTH**

Loving and compassionate God,

You call us to love our neighbours and to be bearers of your hope and grace in our world.

Expand our hearts and vision to respond with compassion to those around us, who are struggling in this time of uncertainty, anxiety, grief and suffering.

Give wisdom and strength to our church leaders, health workers and government officials, as they provide leadership in bringing us through this time of uncertainty.

We bring before you and into our hearts and minds:

- Those whose work and income are uncertain.
- Those who are isolated.
- Those who are fearful of an unknown future.
- Those who live in situations of domestic violence, and whose isolation increases the control of their violent partners.
- Those who are homeless, and all those who offer them support and care.
- Those who are involved in aged care, our agency leaders and staff, the residents and their loved ones, and those who visit.
- Businesses whose futures are uncertain – their leaders and staff.
- School staff and students.
- Those with health conditions that put them at greater risk.

Give wisdom and care-filled discernment to all our Church leaders – our Councils, and local congregations, as we seek to creatively live out our worship, witness and service in ways that offer Christ's life-giving love and presence.

Strengthen and sustain us to be your people – shaped by your abundant grace, bearers of your generosity and overflowing love.

Through Christ our Light and Hope, we pray,  
Amen.

*Bronte Wilson*  
Moderator

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**Rev Felicity Amery  
General Secretary**

19 March 2020

**Communication to all Ministers, Pastors, Chaplains, Church Councils and Congregations**

Greetings in the name of Christ,

As you all know we are living in very different times. COVID-19 or the Coronavirus is strongly impacting on the life and witness of the church and on our work and family life. You will also know that the Prime Minister held a press conference this morning to outline the Government's latest advice to the nation. The Synod Office has also received a letter from the Government of South Australia addressed to all Religious Leaders. [\(We have attached this letter for your information\).](#)

**The Government's advice to us includes:**

- We are living in very different times but it is important not to be anxious, to continue to go about our lives in a modified way and to stay safe,
- They anticipate the changes to work and community practice will continue for at least six months,
- We should continue to be very vigilant around hygiene practices and social distancing,
- Indoor gatherings of over 100 people shall cease,
- Outdoor activities of over 500 people shall cease,
- All international travel, both in and out of the country will cease from Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March,
- All essential organisations, including schools, health facilities, disability and aged care services, shopping centres, correctional centres and work spaces will remain open and functioning,
- There are special circumstances for many of these organisations, details of which you can find on the government website.

**In response to this advice, we make the following requests.**

At a meeting of the senior leaders in the Synod office and in consultation with the Assembly and other Synods, we make the following requests of Ministers, Pastors, Chaplains, Congregations and other ministries in South Australia:

**What is essential?**

- For the Uniting Church in South Australia 'essential' means worship and pastoral care,
- We encourage congregations to think creatively and be innovative in order to continue their practice of worship when it is safe to do so – you might encourage 'home group' worship, outdoor worship, and for larger congregations multiple services in smaller groups and for a shorter period of time, you may be able to live stream your service or produce a printed order of service that can be distributed – in all these occasions hygiene and good social distancing must be practiced. If you are producing resources that can be used by the wider church, please contact Sue Page so they can be distributed.

- Giving in the form of a financial offering to the life and witness of the church is an important part of worship. We encourage members of the church to do direct debit and for congregations to provide ways for others to make their offering in a safe way.
- During the Easter season you will have many special services and activities planned. Recognising that you may also have a number of visitors during this time, we encourage you to think carefully about how you might offer these events in smaller groups, and in a variety of settings.
- We support and encourage the planning of small group gatherings, particularly outdoor gatherings in order to nurture and care for each other – this may include small kids club, yoga classes, Bible study groups, prayer meetings – our advice is that you would need a much bigger space if you are going to sing – and again you will need to ‘ramp up’ your hygiene and social distancing must be practiced. Such activities conducted outdoors are recommended.
- It is vital that we continue to care and support those in and part of our congregations and communities, and the Synod would strongly encourage careful mapping of your communities to ensure that everyone receives a phone call, a FaceTime or Skype call regularly. Social isolation and the associated stress and impact on human health, makes this an essential activity at this time. Carefully managed pastoral visiting is also encouraged.
- In line with Government requirements, each Aged Care facility will make its own visiting arrangements. We encourage you to make contact with the staff well in advance of a proposed visit in order to give priority to family members.

#### **What should we do about other activities?**

- Congregations can seek advice around the organisation of funerals from the Synod office when that situation arises. Please contact Sue or Philip.
- We recommend weddings and baptisms be managed on a case by case basis within the government guidelines.
- Congregations have already developed safe and creative ways to serve communion. If you are in doubt about whether your practice is safe enough, please call Sue or Philip.
- Church camps are certainly a non-essential event and we would ask you to cancel them if you are expecting more than 50 for an inside event and 250 for an outdoor event.
- A number of our congregations and small organisations are involved in the provision of community meals and emergency food parcels. However any program that involves serving an inside meal to a large group (50 people or more) with chairs around the room or in a sitting at tables format, needs to be cancelled. All enquires about such activities should be addressed to Rev Tim Hodgson – 08 8236 4276. We have a gospel imperative to stand with the poor and disadvantaged. The restrictions do not prevent us from responding to the needs of the disadvantaged in our communities. Under carefully managed conditions, meals can be prepared and distributed in take away containers and emergency relief parcels distributed. Please talk to Tim.
- Op Shops can also continue to stay open with very strict hygiene conditions – hand washing between each customer, sanitizer available for the public, hourly cleaning of benchtops, chairs and high traffic areas and careful monitoring of elderly and vulnerable volunteers by relieving them of the task of serving at this time. Further, all fitting rooms need to close. If you are in any doubt please be encouraged to close for a period of time.

- If there are other groups using your facilities (activities you are not responsible for but may receive income from) they may continue on a restricted basis. The facility will need to be cleaned between activities, numbers of people gathering monitored and regulations followed. If you need help with extra cleaning please contact us.

**The Synod Office at Pirie Street and the Brooklyn Park Campus.**

- As from Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March the Synod Office will, until further notice, commence a rotational working from home roster to reduce the number of people gathering in the office at any one time. All enquiries from congregations should be directed to Rev Sue Page on 08-8236 4217 [spage@sa.uca.org.au](mailto:spage@sa.uca.org.au) or Rev Philip Gardner on 08-8236 4268 [pgardner@sa.uca.org.au](mailto:pgardner@sa.uca.org.au). Sue and Philip will ensure that you are able to speak to the right person and any presenting issues addressed.
- The Synod is also preparing for the possibility that all organisations will need to cease all their activities and close for a period of time. We would encourage Church Councils and Leadership Teams to prepare for such a time, however we believe it is not yet the time to implement such strict conditions. Given there is likely to be a significant time of disruption (perhaps 6 months) we encourage you to creatively continue, within the guidelines, as many normal events as possible and with an emphasis on making people safe.
- While Presbytery Officers (Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer) will have access to their office space, no volunteers will be able to use the building. We apologise if this will be an inconvenience but we are needing to restrict the number of people working in close proximity at the office.
- The Brooklyn Park Campus will close until further notice. All staff will be working from home and lectures will be live-streamed or recorded.
- All work related travel, both international and interstate is discontinued.
- Synod meetings will be conducted using video conferencing where ever possible.

The Synod recognises that this situation and our response to it, may change quickly. We will continue to make information available on the website <https://sa.uca.org.au/uniting-church-media-releases/covid-19-update> , Facebook Live and through social media. The Moderator will continue to be in conversation with congregations who do not find access to electronic media easy. Please contact us if you have developed creative and innovative ways to be the church at this time because these are good news stories and should be shared.

Blessings to you all as you continue to respond to the gospel in very different times. May you continue to know the transforming love and grace of God as you continue to explore new ways of being community and caring for each other.

Rev Felicity Amery



General Secretary,  
and other senior leaders in the Synod office  
Synod of South Australia

18 March 2020

Chairperson and Congregation  
Congregations and  
UnitingCare Small Organisations  
Synod of South Australia

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

At this time of uncertainty, it is imperative that the Uniting Church stands in solidarity with members of the Australian community, as they struggle to adapt to the realities of COVID-19.

It is so important that Uniting Church members live out the Gospel message of loving one's neighbour and share Christ's truth of hope and love in this time of adversity.

The church has a call to serve those in need: the marginalised, the unemployed, families, single people, regardless of creed or culture – all are children of God.

Recognising the unique challenges our community will face in the coming (six) months, the Crisis Management Team (CMT) of the Synod of South Australia has reviewed all areas of mission regarding UnitingCare small organisations and Uniting Church congregations which provide existing support to the community. In seeking to balance the tension between Christian imperatives and the safety of our volunteers, staff and clients, the Synod makes a series of requests.

The CMT has decided that due to the potential high risk of exposure to novel coronavirus by volunteers and clients at indoor, church-run community meals, those activities must **cease immediately**. A number of UnitingCare small organisations and Uniting Church congregations have already ceased their community meals.

Instead, the CMT is strongly encouraging Uniting Church small organisations and Uniting Church congregations to focus on providing emergency relief services through a safe process to help Australians who seek food relief support, especially the marginalised and unemployed. Carefully managed, Church kitchens could be used for the provision of take-away food to people in need. An example is frozen or hot meals, which could be distributed with food parcels. Please contact me.

For further guidance and to discuss innovative and safe ways to engage in these activities, please contact Rev Tim Hodgson, Executive Officer, UnitingCare SA, at [thodgson@sa.uca.org.au](mailto:thodgson@sa.uca.org.au).

Yours in Christ's service



Bronte Wilson  
Moderator



Rev Felicity Amery  
General Secretary

**working together to educate, support and care for people in South Australia**



Ref: A1966579

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Religious Leaders

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[secretariat@sa.uca.org.au](mailto:secretariat@sa.uca.org.au)

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: COVID-19**

I write to you on behalf of SA Health about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our churches, mosques, synagogues and temples have an essential role in the lives of many South Australians.

This work extends beyond the spiritual life of members, to the personal and community support and assistance such organisations provide.

At this time, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC), have advised the Commonwealth and the States Government of measures that need to be taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infections.

These measures are constantly updated on the Commonwealth Department of Health website: [www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert](http://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert)

Your organisation can support SA Health by encouraging your attendees to practice good hygiene, including ensuring access to handwashing and alcohol based sanitisers.

You can also facilitate social distancing, for example, by ensuring that people stay at home if unwell, and enabling people to keep a distance of 1.5 metres from other people where possible. The current advice also recommends that physical contact is minimised, especially with people at higher risk such as older people and people with existing health conditions. Handshaking, and hugging are to be avoided.

I appreciate that taking these measures will effect religious services. For example, for religions that share a communion cup, these guidelines would require that a shared cup not be used.

I would note however that there are a number of steps that religious organisations can take to continue their vital work for their members and the community. This could include, based on the current recommendations, convening gatherings in such a way so that social distancing can occur, and for people who are self-isolating or under quarantine, making contact with people using video conferencing and other technology.

Thank you for your support in protecting our community's physical and mental health and wellbeing. Should you have any questions, please contact my office.

More information and resources are available on our website:

[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019)

Yours sincerely



**DR CHRISTOPHER MCGOWAN**  
Chief Executive

17 / 03 / 2020