



Rev Felicity Amery
General Secretary

23 March 2020

Dear Members of Staff in the Synod of South Australia. Greetings to you all.

As we begin another week in these very different times, some of you will be opening your computers at home and others will be at your office desk or work space. For all of us, the space will look different, it will feel different. I invite you all to begin with prayer. Give yourselves a moment to listen to the new sounds, the different view, to name family and friends, clients and work colleagues. I encourage you to name the differences and set a daily goal to ring or FaceTime someone who is isolated at home, to check out how they are going. Be gentle with yourself and with each other today. May God's sustaining and life giving love that we experience so richly through Jesus, be with you.

At our staff meeting on Wednesday 18 March, in my capacity as General Secretary, I determined that a Code Orange Crisis had been called as the Synod's response to COVID-19. This means the event is acute and serious but not immediate. It means the event is 'smouldering' and requires prompt action. The Crisis Management Team (CMT) members have been meeting regularly and each Ministry Team has been working hard to explore how our modified working life can be managed well.

Most importantly, I want to thank you all for the calm and professional way you are adapting to the changes that are necessary. You will be carrying significant loads, with changes to your personal routines, to family life, to your church life and the commitments you have made to other community groups and organisations.

This morning's letter is a bit of an update for you all, around how we are managing COVID-19 together. We acknowledge the government's communication released on Friday 20 March:

- all essential services remain open
- International borders are closed
- for indoor gathering less than 100 people, there would be 4 square meters provided per person in an enclosed space, in a room. That means no more than 25 people per 100 square meters indoors
- personal and communal hygiene remains the best defence – regular hand washing and regular cleaning of communal spaces
- practicing physical distancing or proximity management are also essential
- it is our civic duty to comply with the rising levels of restriction.

Our communication to congregations, small organisations and other ministries remains consistent;

- the Uniting Church remains open and it is important to continue to be the church in accordance to the Government's restrictions and criterias that have been put in place
- worship and pastoral care remain essential expressions of being the church
- encouraging members to maintain their levels of financial giving is important
- it is urgent that we continue to explore innovative and creative ways to continue to meet the needs of the vulnerable and disadvantaged.

We recognise that all these activities will also look and feel different and we have encouraged congregations and other ministries to have some fun in developing creative ways to worship, care for each other, give and stay well.

As you know the Synod Office and Brooklyn Park Campus have taken steps to increase our capacity to implement these different circumstances:

- we will continue to develop our rotational presence at the office to limit the number of people in the office at any one time. Please communicate with your managers regularly to ensure we have a coordinated approach
- please talk to your manager if you need support to ensure your work space at home is safe
- all meetings will be offered via video linking options using MS Teams (on Friday the CMT met with the Moderator at home, the General Secretary in her car on the phone and the remaining 5 people in a large meeting room at the office and it went very well). We continue to be thankful to the IT&T team for fast tracking and encouraging our use of MS Teams
- no visitors will be given access to the Synod office building until further notice. Special requests can be made to the Associate General Secretary, Rev Sue Page. We encourage outdoor gatherings including for meetings and your support for neighbouring cafes where they have made provision for physical distancing or appropriate proximity management practices are visible
- we recognise that Uniting Venues SA has taken a huge hit with organisations cancelling events. CMT are working creatively and quickly to identify alternative work place ideas for their staff and would be open to your ideas. Our Venues remain open to small groups of people who wish to use their facilities and would appreciate hearing from you
- the Brooklyn Park Campus has made the decision to close until further notice, however students can still access the library, courses and staff online. Mission Resourcing staffs are working to make resources available to congregations offsite. Please contact Mission Resourcing Team Leader, Mark Schultz (mschultz@sa.uca.org.au) for more information.
- most significantly, the CMT is concerned about the potential mental and emotional risks for staff as we implement physical isolation practices. We strongly recommend regular team meetings, the exploration of ways to care for each other in smaller groups and the implementation of practices that reduce mental and emotional anxiety. Some ideas are to walk with a friend, play in the park with your family or home group, make something. With permission, FaceTime each other often, pay particular attention to those who you know don't cope well with stress and anxiety. If you are well, offer your time to an emergency relief centre who are distributing food parcels and with careful management, distributing meals to the disadvantaged.

It is well documented in professional literature that people who work from home often experience guilt around not working hard enough, around taking regular breaks or responding to the needs of their children or their pets in work hours. When working at home we often discover that there are less interruptions, we are more efficient and the regular tasks take less time to complete. We are therefore encouraging you to discuss in your regular team meetings what might be realistic work goals for your day, particularly if you are working from home.

Please contact Rev Sue Page, Associate General Secretary, on 8236 4217 or email spage@sa.uca.org.au if you have any questions or concerns.

Along with the CMT, I want to thank you all for your willingness to explore innovative ways to ensure the Uniting Church can continue its vital life and witness in the world. We recognise that these are very different times. Our communities and indeed countries around the world are responding in a variety of ways. Our common goal is to reduce the impact of COVID-19. Together we are confident that this time will pass. Stay well and enjoy special times together.

In this Lenten season, as we journey towards Easter, may you be blessed.

Rev Felicity Amery

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Felicity Amery', with some scribbles at the beginning.

General Secretary. Synod of South Australia