



The Anglican Diocese of Gippsland

The Rt Revd Dr Richard Treloar
Bishop of Gippsland

Ad Clerum

22 March 2020

Temporary suspension of all services of public worship and other church-related gatherings

Dear colleagues,

Thank you for your patience with the 'changes and chances' of the last week, as health experts and government authorities have led us through a range of protocols designed to 'flatten the curve' of the coronavirus pandemic in Australia.

All of you have sought to respond appropriately to these measures in your ministry setting, and to apply diocesan and General Synod guidelines with sensitivity in your local context.

I am grateful to clergy and lay people who have been in touch in recent days to share thoughts and ideas, and to ask questions.

You will no doubt be aware that, in line with various state and federal rulings coming into force, the Victorian government has today moved to close down all non-essential services over the next 48 hours – a decision we fully understand and support.

As difficult as this is for all of us, I now ask that you suspend all public worship and other church-related gatherings – indoors or outdoors – as of Tuesday, 24 March, until further notice. This temporary cessation of operations applies to our Op Shops, The Abbey, Café 123 (to an extent), and chaplaincies. The Registry team will continue to provide essential financial services such as payroll, with staffing arranged in keeping with all of the requirements with which we're now familiar. The Office will therefore not be open except to staff.

With a number of Anglican dioceses and ecumenical partners, your Archdeacons, Dean, Regional Deans, Registrar and I had already come to the view over the course of this weekend that the constraints on our gathering were such that corporate worship is no longer practicable, and that the need to mitigate the risk of contamination outweighs all other obligations, significant though the commitment to meet together around word and sacrament undoubtedly is, and as important to our individual and collective wellbeing it remains.

What this means for us – separately and together – in the weeks ahead is largely unknown.

It will ask of us great resilience, such has been shown in the wake of the recent bushfires and other challenges we have faced as a diocesan family over the years.

It will demand creativity. Perhaps you accessed the link via the diocesan website to the service Dean Susanna and I recorded last week for use on Sunday. Many other online resources are emerging, and we will look to expand and diversify our offerings, mindful that not all our people have access to the internet.

It will test our faith, refocus our hope, and draw forth our love for one another and our communities.

There is real grief in this moment – not least in the sudden loss of a recognisable corporate liturgical life. The need for the Church's ministry, however, is as great as ever. We will get through it, together.

I will be back in touch during the week with further updates and resources, including with information as to whether church buildings can remain open for personal prayer. Please feel free to call me in the meantime.

Thank you again for your calming presence in these turbulent and uncharted waters. And praise God that Christ is with us in the boat, to still our fears, calling us to trust ever more deeply in him.

Grace and peace,

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