
Responding to COVID-19 in our Anglican Parishes

From the Administrator, the Ven Tom Henderson-Brooks, 13th March 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ across Central Queensland,

(an open letter)

In some ways this is a hard letter to write because I am going to insist on things that are very different to many of our long held and loved traditions. However, it is also an easy letter to write because I have a duty of care for you and everyone in our parishes in Central Queensland.

One of my favourite verses in the Bible is 1 Thessalonians 2:8,

We loved you so much that we shared with you not only the Gospel but our very lives.

Information Sources

Yesterday the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared that COVID-19 is a pandemic. We want all our people to be informed with reliable information. The following information is based on Queensland and Australian Government websites, and from my briefing yesterday from local health authorities in Central Queensland. This information will change as new information and research becomes available so please remember that these websites are being regularly updated.

<https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>

<http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/217/838/novel-coronavirus-covid-19>

Prayer and Ministry

The God whom we worship is Lord and sovereign over all. As we read in this week's Lenten Psalm, Psalm 121,

"Where does my help come from?

My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth!"

This is not a time to retreat from public ministry. It is a time to be bold and to love and serve our people and our local community. It is a time to point people to Jesus, for there is no other name given that we might be saved. It is a time to visit the isolated, the anxious and fearful. It is a time to lead our people in prayer and worship. It is a time to lead our people in loving care.

I have found no better prayer for this time of pandemic, than the one I first read in +Philip Freier's February Ad Clerum for the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne. Please use it in your public and private prayers.

Prayer in a Time of Epidemic Disease

Lord Jesus Christ, healer and friend, come and care for all of us through the danger and uncertainty of the coronavirus epidemic. To people who are sick, bring healing. To people who are displaced, isolated, or cut off from family, friends or work, bring comfort and companionship. Work with medical staff as they care for the sick, and protect them from harm. Give skill and fruitful research to scientists as they search for treatments, prevention and a cure. To public health authorities, give wisdom to decide the best ways to manage both this crisis and our anxieties. When communities are fearful, give a calm spirit, and kindness to neighbours and strangers. Through this testing time, and through all the risks we face together, teach us once again how we can love one another as you have loved us. Amen.

Some Facts About COVID-19

It's New

- The COVID-19 novel coronavirus is a new strain of coronavirus affecting humans.
 - Hence, there is no general immunity in our population.
 - As people become infected and recover, they develop resistance to the virus.
 - Therefore, the capacity for medical services to provide health care will be most stretched in the early seasons of COVID-19 when the community has little or no resistance.

It's Flu-Like

- COVID-19 can result in these flu-like symptoms including:
 - Fever
 - Coughing
 - Sore throat
 - Fatigue
 - Shortness of breath

It's Contagious

- A person can be contagious, spreading COVID-19 for 48 hours before they themselves begin to experience flu-like symptoms.
- COVID-19 is contagious and is easily transmitted from person to person by coughing or sneezing.
- It generally enters humans via the mucous membranes in our head, that is via our mouth, nose and eyes.
- COVID-19 can remain active outside the human body for 48 hours on surfaces.
- There is currently no vaccine or anti-viral medication to treat COVID-19.
- Like similar cold and flu viruses, COVID-19 will work its way through our population.

It's Here

- COVID-19 is present in Australia, in Queensland and today there is one confirmed case in Rockhampton.
- Current data about COVID-19 tells us that people of all ages are being affected.
- Most people will not be hospitalised.
- However, a small percentage of people will need hospital care and similar to every flu season, a small percentage of hospitalised people will not recover from COVID-19.
- The elderly and those people with a pre-existing medical condition (such as asthma, diabetes, heart or lung disease) are more vulnerable than the rest of the population, to becoming seriously ill.

It's Reducible

- Good hand hygiene, cough and cold etiquette will minimise infection.

Best Practice for Caring within our Parishes

Individuals – You want to do everything to assist your own recovery *without infecting others*.

1. **I have flu-like symptoms.**
 - **Isolate** yourself. Don't attend church, work, school, university, college, the gym, childcare, the shops or the club. Stay at home and ask others to drop off necessities at your door.
 - Contact your GP **by phone** for advice immediately.
 - Attend a testing clinic either run by your GP or the local hospital, as they start to be set up.
 - Follow their directions.
 - Continue your self-quarantine until you are diagnosed and cleared.
2. **I have had contact with someone with flu-like symptoms.**
 - Follow the steps in section 1 above, until their and your diagnosis is given.
3. **I have had contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19.**
 - Follow the steps in section 1 above.
 - Maintain your self-quarantine for 14 days.
 - Remember to contact your church so you are loved, prayed for and supported.
4. **I have been diagnosed with COVID-19.**
 - Follow all medical advice until you recover and are medically cleared.
 - Remember to contact your church so you are loved, prayed for and supported.

Good Personal Hygiene Practice – Following good hygiene practices will significantly slow the spread of COVID-19 and other serious viruses.

- Stay at home if you are unwell.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with warm, soapy water for 20 seconds.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Use a tissue (not handkerchief) and dispose of it immediately then wash your hands.
- Don't put your hands to your face without washing your hands thoroughly first.
- Avoid close contact with others. Do not kiss, hug, handshake or touch.

At Worship Services, Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals – It's OK to still congregate and meet but following these guidelines will make our churches safer places to worship. Our duty of care to each other and to our community is ALL of our responsibility.

1. **Before Entry**
 - Those who open up doors, windows, locks should wash their hands before and after.
 - Those on welcoming should wash their hands before greeting people.
 - Set up Bibles, hymn books and prayer books in the pews/chairs beforehand.
2. **Upon Entry**
 - The welcomer should give 1 squirt of hand sanitizer to every person entering.
 - Avoid any physical contact.
 - Minimise surface contact by not handing out books.
 - The welcomer should hand out any bulletins or service sheets without making physical contact.
 - Remove any holy water from the entry of the church used for dipping one's finger to anoint.
3. **Proximity**
 - If there is space, sit a metre and a half from the next person.

4. Greeting of the Peace

- Consider removing the greeting of peace or
- Nod and smile at each other for the greeting of peace with no physical contact, whilst saying the usual greeting of 'peace be with you'.

5. Offertory Collection

- To pass anything around the church only creates the opportunity to spread infection so the safest option is to simply have either a retiring offertory at the end of the service, or
- an opportunity for people to walk past a basket and drop their offertory in without making contact. This could be done during the greeting of peace depending on local custom.
- Remind people to use the facility to give electronically.

6. Communion

- The Priest and LAs must wash their hands with a hand sanitizer prior to distribution. Ceremonial hand washing is not sufficient.
- Priests and LAs are to cease using the practice of intincture (dipping a wafer into the wine) as there is risk of fingers touching the wine.
- Priests and LAs are to cease using the common cup for distribution. Of course, the common cup can still be used ceremonially.
- Since surface to surface infection is a very real risk, have people stand for communion instead of kneeling and placing their hands on the communion rail.
- To receive the bread, have people cup their hands and then drop the bread/wafer into their hands without any contact.
- Use only individual cups, preferably pre-filled on the Communion table on non-slip tray (ie with slots for each cup.)
- Have a basket for people to drop their disposable individual cups into. (If using the glass re-useable cups, then they need to be thoroughly washed and dried after the service.)

7. Morning Tea/Supper

- Whoever is on morning tea is also the designated food handler.
- They must thoroughly wash their hands prior to serving or use disposable gloves.
- They must use some tongs to serve food. It is no good to just have some serving tongs available for self-service, as infection can easily pass from hands to tongs to another's hands.

8. Children

- It is vital to include teaching our children about good hygiene, especially hand washing.
- Whilst children have a lower risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19, they will still be carriers and will easily infect older people, like grandparents, carers, teachers and other adults.

9. At Close

- Wash everything thoroughly and wash surfaces midweek.

At Other Activities like Playgroups, Meetings, Bible Study, Mainly Music etc

It's OK to still hold these activities as long as we follow similar best practice measures as above.

1. Stay at home if you or your child is unwell.
2. If people 'sign in' – have someone behind a table sign in for them, mark the roll etc. So don't pass a pen around.
3. Have people/children wash hands or use hand-sanitizer before they enter.
4. Minimise physical contact. If your Mainly Music group stamps each child's hand as they enter, stop doing this and replace it with a 'reward' for washing your hands upon entry.
5. Wipe down all toys and surfaces prior to and after use.
6. Follow the food service guidelines above and task a volunteer with serving food.
7. Avoid physical contact. This is almost impossible with little children, so keep washing hands, using hand sanitiser and do not touch your face.
8. As the pandemic becomes worse in our communities, there may come the time when holding activities where hygiene is difficult to keep, especially with children, it will be better to temporarily cease the activity.

Thank you for reading this to your people and putting all these measures and similar measures in our various activities, into place. This will help our churches be safe places for all. We are at the start of this pandemic. It will get far worse in the coming months. Our churches have many elderly people. And sadly, this year there will be many people who will die from COVID-19 just as there are thousands of Australians who die every flu season from one of these viruses.

In the love of Christ,

Tom Henderson-Brooks

Ven Tom Henderson-Brooks
Administrator + Bishop's Commissary