



27 March 2020

## Re: COVID-19 update

Dear friends in Christ,

There are many words that come to mind when reflecting upon the last few weeks: despair, anxiety, uncertainty, even anger.

But then, there is also hope and innovation. There is a hope that in these unprecedented times the Uniting Church has a part to play in the life of our communities; be that caring for those in our aged care facilities, talking to people through Lifeline, supporting the education of our children virtually or caring practically through congregational networks. There is also the novelty of new experiences; the Moderator was able to enjoy a worship service in Bundaberg last weekend from his living room for example. While the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has closed many doors, it has opened others. As a church, we have an opportunity to love God and love our neighbour like we've never loved before.

The moderator also recorded a video [musing](#) which we encourage you to share with your congregation. More of these will be shared in the coming weeks.

### Your health

Many of you are working long hours in order to make sure that the members of your congregation are supported during this time. We encourage you to take time to determine and apply the practices that will sustain your mental and spiritual well-being alongside your physical health. We are praying for you and with you as we work together.

If you feel like you need support, please contact our Employee Assistance Provider ChangeFutures on (07) 3857 0847.

### Keeping connected

Staying connected with one another is vital at this time. We encourage you to be actively involved in networks such as presbytery or Synod via social media and other digital channels, to make phone calls to one another, to revive the lost art of letter writing in order to maintain and build strong relational connections. With respect to the Synod, we will continue to collate all information and resources at the [coronavirus update page](#), and to send updates via email, Uniting News, and our social media channels. We welcome your contributions as we navigate these challenging times.

### Latest government advice

The Synod is following the advice provided the Federal Government and Queensland Health regarding COVID-19. [The latest advice](#), as of 1200 on 27 March 2020 is as follows, as outlined by the Prime Minister on 24 March 2020.

- We have previously encouraged people to gather outside, rather than inside. Gathering at all is now discouraged outside of immediate household members.

- With respect to weddings, the Prime Minister announced a maximum of five people in attendance **including** the celebrant/minister. Other guidelines such as hygiene, social distancing and four square metre per person ratio still apply. We encourage you to be actively liaising with the couple regarding any planned weddings in the next three months, and beginning early conversations with others planning weddings later in 2020.
- With respect to funerals, the Prime Minister has announced a maximum of ten people in attendance, including the minister/celebrant. Other guidelines such as hygiene, social distancing and four square metre per person ratio still apply. It has been noted that in hardship cases, States and Territories can provide exemptions in relation to attendance at funerals, but only at the margin. See [updated statement](#) on 26 March 2020.
- For the purpose of streaming a worship service, you may continue to utilise your church building, limiting the number of people in attendance to an absolute minimum and following social distancing and four square metre per person ratio guidelines. However, please start to think about how you might manage if stricter gathering protocols are introduced in the days ahead.
- With respect to home groups, prayer groups or other small groups gathering in private homes, the Prime Minister's announcement on Tuesday evening made clear that social gatherings in people's homes are actively discouraged, effective immediately. As difficult as that is to hear, we recommend you move any such groups to digital, telephone or other modes of meeting, and discontinue any further organised face-to-face group meetings. Where in particularly instances this is not possible, ensure hygiene, distancing and floor space requirements are met.

## **Financial**

### **Government stimulus**

We are fairly certain that congregations and presbyteries that directly pay staff and show this on their BAS will receive a stimulus payment after lodging their BAS in April. Congregations and presbyteries are encouraged to complete and lodge their end March BAS by the end of April deadline.

### **Synod office support package**

The Synod office will introduce a support package to help congregations over the coming months. The first stage will see congregations and presbyteries apply for a line of credit from the Uniting Church Investment Service. This will require the completion of a streamlined application form, the completion of a cash flow forecast and approval from the presbytery. The cash flow forecast document should indicate the extent of the line of credit required. Links to both the application form and the cash flow forecast template will be provided in the next update.

The second stage, in conjunction with the first stage will look at what congregations and presbyteries can do themselves. Some ideas might include:

- Request your congregation to give electronically.
- Identify opportunities for reduction/elimination of costs.
- Look at whether a different model of church can be used to reduce costs. Perhaps you might collaborate with other churches across your community.

## Ministry resources

We have been delighted to see so much creativity and generosity around the development and sharing of ministry resources across the church and encourage you to continue in that spirit. We will also continue to collect or develop and make available resources through the Synod's [coronavirus page](#). Resources you feel would be valuable if shared in this way can be sent to [Scott Guyatt](#). In particular today we draw your attention to the [dispersed non-contact non-digital resources](#) developed this week, and the existing [ministry agent resources](#) developed earlier in the month.

## Hall hire

, The latest advice indicates that gatherings in community facilities such as community halls, libraries and youth centres should remain open for the purpose of hosting essential voluntary or public services, such as food banks or homeless services. We recommend that , your hall should be closed unless it is being used for one of the above purposes as long as you are to maintain the cleaning and distancing regimes

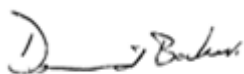
## Synod office

Please note that as of Monday 30 March all Synod office staff (excluding Raymont Residential College and Alexandra Park Conference Centre) will be working away from the office. Should you wish to contact a member of the team, use email or phone landline. All phones will be diverted to mobile phones.

We anticipate providing our next update on Tuesday 31 March 2020 unless there is a need to provide an extraordinary update.

Our prayers are with you during this unprecedented time.

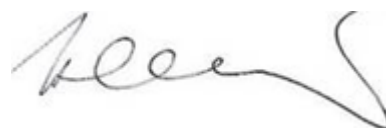
Every blessing,



Rev David Baker

Moderator

Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod



Rev Heather den Houting

General Secretary

Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod