

Anglican Church of Australia

Recommended Guidelines for application by dioceses of the Anglican Church of Australia in response to COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic

at WEDNESDAY 18 MARCH 2020

Development of these Guidelines

On 12 March 2020, the National Bishops' Meeting resolved to ask the General Secretary of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia to coordinate the preparation of national guidelines for dioceses to ensure a best practice response to the coronavirus pandemic.

At that stage a number of dioceses had already prepared comprehensive guidelines addressing activities in parishes and workplaces. The Bishops' Meeting considered there was value in having a central point of reference available to dioceses.

These guidelines recommend standards for operational activities and provide national benchmarks to be included in diocesan advice to parishes.

Authority of these Guidelines

The intent is to provide national level guidance on common measures to implement the advice of national and international authorities regarding the Coronavirus pandemic.

The advice is based on the currently available information, recommendations and directives of the Australian Department of Health. It will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

The focus of these recommendations is on parish based and workplace based activities. It is not intended to address diocesan schools, aged care and community service organisations and dioceses should refer to peak bodies in those sectors for advice.

Access to Health Information and Directives

The Australian Department of Health website www.health.gov.au is a key source of information for facts and latest advice on COVID-19 and should be frequently monitored.

News and alerts can be accessed at <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>.

Key information can be found on the health website which is updated regularly:

- [What you need to know about coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/what-you-need-to-know-about-coronavirus-covid-19) provides a description of COVID-19, common symptoms, how it is spread, who is most at risk, how to protect yourself and others and what to do if you think you have COVID-19
<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/what-you-need-to-know-about-coronavirus-covid-19>.

- Frequently asked questions about COVID-19:

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions>

Contacts for state or territory public health agencies are available at www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts.

National Coronavirus Help Line - 1800 020 080

The helpline operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Preventing the Spread of Infection

The key objective is preventing the spread of COVID-19.

The key health directive is that everyone must practice good hygiene and implement social distancing measures to protect against infection and prevent the virus spreading.

Resources such as posters to download for circulation in churches and workplaces can be accessed here <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-campaign-resources>

Good hygiene

Recommended actions for good hygiene currently include:

- covering your coughs and sneezes with your elbow or a tissue
- disposing of tissues properly
- washing your hands often with soap and water, including before and after eating and after going to the toilet
- using alcohol-based hand sanitisers
- cleaning and disinfecting surfaces
- if you are sick, avoiding contact with others
- cleaning and sanitising frequently used objects such as mobiles, keys and wallets

Social distancing

Recommended actions for social distancing currently include:

- staying at home when you are unwell
- avoiding large public gatherings if they're not essential (see advice on organised gatherings below)
- keeping a distance of 1.5 metres between you and other people whenever possible
- minimising physical contact, especially with people at higher risk such as older people and people with existing health conditions

Organised Gatherings

The current Health directive provides recommended limits on organised gatherings.

At 18 March 2020 these include limiting non-essential:

- indoor organised gatherings to fewer than 100 people and outdoor gatherings to fewer than 500 people
- meetings or conferences for critical workforce members, such as healthcare professionals and emergency services

These limits do not currently apply to workplaces, schools, universities, shops, supermarkets, public transport and airports.

Dioceses should regularly monitor this directive and amend operational activities accordingly.

State governments are to be given powers to impose more stringent directives in relation to limiting the size of public gatherings. At 18 March 2020 no State or Territory has announced any restriction outside the Commonwealth directives above.

Application within Dioceses – Recommended standards

These recommended standards to dioceses are intended to:

- assist dioceses to develop and communicate local arrangements
- enable dioceses to continue to provide spiritual and pastoral care
- support parish and chaplaincy teams maintain their presence as agents of spiritual and pastoral care in a way that both protects those engaged in ministry and protects those who need their support and help.

Worship Services

Church communities are places where people gather for worship and fellowship. The current directive (18 March 2020) on organised gatherings currently does not prevent organised gathering of less than 100 people indoors or 500 people outdoors.

Each diocese should monitor and comply the health directives in relation to public gatherings but may choose to put in place more stringent measures.

At 18 March 2020 the following dioceses have suspended all church services:

- Tasmania
- Sydney

Where there is a decision to continue to conduct worship services. the guidance is to:

- Provide hand sanitiser or hand washing facilities at the entrance to the church
- Display messaging reminding parishioners of key hygiene and social distancing practices
- Requesting that people who are unwell or have potential symptoms of COVID-19 to refrain from coming to church or leave church if they demonstrate symptoms
- Suspend handshaking or other direct physical contact before and after services and during the sharing of the Peace and throughout the service
- Design arrangements for people to receive communion which restrict proximity to each other and the need to touch surfaces (such as the altar rail)
- Ensure ministers of the Eucharist practice wash their hands/ use sanitiser before and after distributing communion
- Temporarily suspend the sharing of the Common cup
- Offer Communion in one kind only to all communicants i.e. the consecrated bread/wafer/host
- Wafers should not be placed in mouths unless this is the only way an individual can receive communion due to disability - then wash/sanitise hands immediately before and after
- Intinction is not recommended
- Suspend direct physical contact as part of a blessing or "laying on of hands". This includes the practice of foot washing on Maundy Thursday
- Suspend circulation of the offering plate, hymn books and other materials. Utilise projection of orders of service and hymns wherever possible

Advice from the Department of Health outlines a series of actions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at your gathering that should be considered prior to and during the conduct of any public events: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-organising-public-gatherings>.

Live streaming options

Dioceses should consider coordinating advice to churches on streaming or posting videos of services online.

Live streaming church services will provide access to those who are unable to attend church services due to illness or self-isolation and when publicly attended services are suspended.

See the link below on the Church of England site which provides practical advice on livestreaming.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/digital-labs/labs-learning-blog/beginners-guide-going-live-your-service-or>

Church Engagement and Outreach Activities

Church communities offer a range of ancillary activities and the operation of these should be reviewed in line with health directives on social distancing and public gatherings.

Youth groups and Sunday School

It is recommended that gatherings of young people be suspended. Children and young people are often dependent on parents for transport and supervision and this may be difficult when many are choosing to self isolate.

Social and outreach activities

Should services continue it is recommended that no refreshments be provided on conclusion.

It is recommended that all social and outreach activities (Alpha courses and similar) are suspended.

Opportunity Shops and Community Pantry

It is recommended that opportunity shops be closed and receipt of goods be suspended. Only a skeleton team of volunteers should be asked to sort existing goods.

Where parishes provide community pantry, offering free food and supplies to those in need, it would be an important community service to maintain if possible. Parishes may be encouraged to review their volunteer capacity to continue this service, subject to access to supplies.

Church Operations

Additional measures to ensure the practice of good hygiene and reduce the exposure of risk to parishioners and the clergy through church activities include:

- Ensure that there is a good supply of soap and water, hand gel and paper towels in cloakrooms, kitchens and any other appropriate areas
- Display messaging reminding parishioners of key hygiene and social distancing practices (as outlined in the Prevention section above) and requesting that people who are unwell or have potential symptoms of COVID-19 to refrain from coming to church
- Ensure good regular cleaning of the church, with a focus on surfaces people touch regularly, including such things as altar rails, chairs and pews, door handles, light switches etc
- Wash vestments and linens frequently

Dioceses may wish to consider access resources to ensure the ongoing viability of parishes.

See the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Parish Continuity Plan](#) template provided on the Church of England website:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches#na>

Pastoral care

Visits to people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or who are self-isolating as a precaution should be suspended, however other ways of providing support should be considered, such as by phone or email. Single people, the elderly and those who are isolated may need particular attention.

It is important that in offering practical support to individuals self-isolating, church members and clergy are aware of the need to protect themselves.

It is particularly important to be vigilant and follow government directives and the advice of facility staff when conducting visits to people in aged care homes or hospitals.

Baptisms, weddings and funerals

All government directives concerning public gatherings and the precautionary measures outlined concerning church services should be applied when conducting special services.

Churches can insist that the number of persons attending a special service meets directives in relation to public gatherings and may need to pastorally support those who will be required to adjust guest lists to small numbers of family and friends.

Self distancing procedures should be put in place and additional measures are advised in relation to baptism.

- The Priest must wash their hands before and after making the sign of the cross on the candidate's forehead
- Where possible, if the candidate is a baby or small child, they should be held by the parents/godparents rather than the priest taking them in their own arms
- It is preferable for water to be poured on the candidate's head using a baptismal shell
- If chrism/oil is to be used the priest should use a spoon or similar implement
- Baptism by Immersion should not take place as this represents a transmission risk

Diocesan Workplace

Each diocese will have or be developing measures to address the impact of COVID-19 in the workplace. It is recommended that policies are developed addressing:

- Distancing efforts in offices e.g. reviewing need for face to face meetings, working from home, rotating staff
- Hygiene in offices, bathrooms, kitchens, lunchrooms, high contact surfaces
- Working from home arrangements
- What to do if a staff member is diagnosed with COVID-19
- Sick leave, annual leave, leave without pay, flexible work policies
- Staff access to counselling
- Policies on staff travel. Note that the government has imposed a ban on all international travel (18 March 2020)

Liturgical and Prayer Resources

Dioceses should develop and communicate a range of liturgical and prayer resources to be available online or to be shared with parishioners through mail or other distribution. It is important to note that many of our congregations will not have access to online communications.

A prayer from the National Council of Churches

Gracious God,

We give thanks anew for your providence and presence.

We prayerfully seek your grace, amidst COVID-19 here and overseas.

We pray for those in need of healing.

We pray for your peace with those who are anxious or grieving.

We pray you will continue to strengthen and sustain all those who are serving in response.

We pray for your Holy Spirit's discernment amidst the many choices and decisions facing our national, community and medical leaders.

We pray we each might see quickly what more we can do to help those who are vulnerable.

This prayer for our nation in the family of nations, with all that is on our hearts, we gather now and pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.