



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

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20 March 2020

This letter has been sent to: Church Council Secretaries, Presbytery office bearers, Presbytery Ministers, people in placement and retired ministers

Dear Friends,

Re: Coronavirus response

Greetings in the name of Christ,

We are in unprecedented times and uncharted territory, as we are impacted by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Decisions about how to respond are being made in very short time-frames. The rapidly changing situation brings a wide range of challenges of a nature we have not faced before.

Over the last days and weeks, we have received frequent updates and are heeding advice from Government and recognised expert public health authorities, as to how to minimise the spread of the virus. Our focus is on the health and wellbeing of our communities. We have received valued guidance from Synod and Presbytery leaders as to how we can apply this trusted advice in our Church and congregational contexts, along with resources to assist us along the way. Please act on that practical advice.

I am writing to encourage us all to seek out the strange and different opportunities this time offers for strengthening our discipleship and our expression of Christian community. I have been privileged to hear myriad stories, of how communities of faith are finding new ways of worshipping and keeping connected. Strangely, some are finding a new sense emerging of what is really essential in caring for and upholding each other, and of renewed ways of being more truly in touch with each other as communities of faith. Many communities are embracing new ways of connecting into the wider community, especially amidst those most vulnerable to being isolated: the elderly and those living with mental illness, disability, financial stress, insecure housing, employment stress or family violence. I encourage everyone to commit to setting aside time not spent in gathered worship or meetings to connect with other members of the community, and to pray and nourish your faith.

The realities of the risks of social isolation, the impacts on mental health, and the stresses on finances, housing security and family relationships, are becoming clearer. In a time of high anxiety and concern for meeting our own needs, communities of faith have an opportunity to witness to an alternative way of living. We are called to be beacons of hope to what lies at the heart of life: love of God and love of neighbour as of ourselves. We are called to witness to a deeper source of life, supporting and upholding each other, and working together as one body toward a common goal 'for the sake of the world'. When individuals are focussed on the wellbeing of the wider community, and when communities hold together for the sake of the wider community, every member is upheld.

I urge you to uphold those amongst you with the responsibility of decision making, to uphold each other, and to find new ways of coming together and working together.

As we approach the end of Lent and recount the stories of Passion Week and the rising of Easter hope and renewal, may we remember and know:

God is with us;

God walks with us;

God is one with us, in all the realities of our lives;

in God we unexpectedly find hope into new life and new ways of being.

My prayers are with you constantly.

In the grace and hope we have in Christ, may we find our life together.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Denise Liersch". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned below the text "Grace and peace,".

Rev Denise Liersch

Moderator