

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

Dear members of St Hilda's church family,

I write to you with some important news affecting our life together as a family of believers. The Archbishop of Sydney today issued a public statement as follows:

In light of the Prime Minister's announcement this morning, banning enclosed gatherings in excess of 100 people, I have decided that the Anglican Church in Sydney should suspend all public church gatherings until further notice.

We are encouraging all our churches to consider providing their services online or by other communication methods. We shall make every effort to care for our church communities and the wider public, especially those who are isolated and vulnerable. Anglicare Sydney will continue its vital work of showing Christ's love in ministering to all people, especially older Australians. Anglican Schools will also continue to play a significant role in caring for students and families.

I call on all Christians to pray for health workers and those seeking to develop a vaccine, and to pray that the spread of this disease may slow.

God's love for all people has not diminished, nor his sovereignty over his world. Therefore, I urge all Christians to continue to trust in God's goodness and mercy in this crisis, and to show Christ's love to those affected.

In light of this, we will be suspending all of our public gatherings at St Hilda's until further notice. The safety and welfare of our people, as well as those who visit, are paramount.

Specifically this means, for the time being, the following ministries will not meet:

- All Sunday Services
- Our upcoming Annual Meeting and luncheon
- Market Morning
- Community Thursday
- KidzPlay
- Ka Pow
- Youth Group
- The planned food handling meeting this Sunday

Please note our mission call of the Lord Jesus is more important now than ever. We are living in a world of growing fear and anxiety, and Jesus is still our only hope and security. But the challenge now becomes how to encourage, love and care for one another on this mission without public gatherings. In God's purposes this eventuality may well open up many new opportunities for the gospel.

To that end, at this point we will be continuing the following ministries as best we are able;

- Preaching and 'virtual church' through webcasting. See the website for details of how to 'attend'.
- Pastoral care of congregation members through visits and calls.
- Open church, providing pastoral care for members of the public and any one who wants to make use of it.
- Counseling, Anglicare shop and Food & Financial assistance through Anglicare.
- Growth group ministry for groups who choose to continue to meet. (see below)
- Some SRE classes.
- Bells ministry.
- Lending library. (Why not settle down with a good book if you are stuck at home?)
- We are also exploring an innovative web presence to assist people in their devotional life. Watch the website for more details to come.
- Initiatives in children's ministry to replace KidzChurch and KaPow. Similarly our ministry to teens.
- Upgrading methods of communication including the website, distribution of the bulletin and development of Facebook and WhatsApp portals.
- There are other ministries we are doing like Anita Villa, that are yet to be resolved as we negotiate with the people involved. The situation is still only hours old as I write.

Our Pastoral staff will be meeting on Friday to explore creative ways of encouraging evangelism and discipleship in a locked down world. We live-streamed our Sunday morning service last week and we will endeavour to expand and improve these online services in the coming weeks.

I will also be working with the Wardens and Parish Council as we explore what further consequences this advice from the Archbishop may have. For the mean time, we will need to postpone our Annual Meeting and the appointment of new office bearers until such time as we are able to meet. Please pray for all our leaders that we may be guided in all our decisions and feel free to share constructive thoughts with us. These are unprecedented times for all of us and we will all need to be patient, gracious and kind with each other.

Part of our leadership discussions will also involve how we manage our our growth groups structure, which does not come under the definition of a public gathering. At this point, I will be encouraging each group to consider the wisdom of meeting, particularly if there are people over the age of 60 who attend. If groups do decide to

meet, I would encourage appropriate social distancing, food handling etc, until the first wave of this virus has peaked. To some, all of this will seem an overreaction but the government and diocese are seeking to be very cautious to try and limit the infection rate curve, in the hope of minimising the impact of the sickness. As we work out further protocols to safely meet together, we will be in touch with recommendations.

For all members we will be sending out regular updates on email, on our facebook page and through What'sApp. What's more, Pastoral staff will be in touch by phone with people who are not on email.

For parents, we will be working up ways you can communicate these issues helpfully with your children and be seeking to help you spiritually care for them in the uncertainty and fear they too will have.

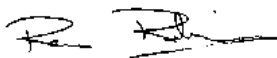
If you or someone you know becomes unwell, please let the Pastoral team know so we can pray for you. And if you know of anyone in our church family who is in need and you have plenty (even just for toilet paper), again let the ministry team know, but also offer to help them yourselves. This new season gives us an opportunity to really live out the "one another" commands of the gospel. I announced last Sunday my desire to set up a 'SWAT' team to care for people who self isolate, and a number of people volunteered, if you want to be on that team please let me know.

Let me also encourage you to keep financially supporting our church throughout these changes. If you are someone who normally gives in person on a Sunday, please consider moving your financial partnership to electronic giving. Our church bank details are available on request.

Let me finish with the closing words of the letter from our archbishop. "May God grant us an extra measure of his grace to be faithful in this time of crisis, trusting in his sovereign and merciful hand (Psalm 91:1-4)."

God is good and is still working his good purposes in us and for us, we do not need to worry. Let's keep trusting him and sharing the love of Jesus with those around us.

Every Blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ray Robinson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ray Robinson

Senior Minister

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