



SEACLIFF UNITING CHURCH
5-9 Wheatland Street,
Seacliff 5049

Pastoral Letter

15th March 2020

Dear Friends at Seacliff UC,

Over the last few weeks we have all been made abundantly aware of the coronavirus, Covid-19, the extent of its spread and the impact it is having. Whilst the level of infection in Australia is at this time quite small, we are all being encouraged to take steps which will help keep the spread of the illness to a minimum.

The Uniting Church (UCA), in line with many groups and organisations, and following the advice of health professionals, has issued advice and guidelines on how churches and other groups within the organisation can respond in order to help keep people safe and limit the spread of the illness. This advice has been given, and we are encouraged to follow it, as an expression of our care for one another. While the risk of contracting the illness is small and for most people the symptoms are mild, were it to spread, there are vulnerable people within our communities for whom it can be serious. The steps advised by the UCA are precautionary measures that will help prevent the spread of the illness and, therefore, protect those who are vulnerable.

The Church Council at Seacliff UC has discussed the advice received from the Synod and as a result you will see that some of our regular practices will change in response to that advice. In broad summary, the advice is to avoid direct personal contact or at least keep it to a minimum and to ensure that good hygiene practice is followed. You will already notice that hand sanitisers have been placed in various positions around the property and you are encouraged to use these frequently. Posters reminding us of the importance of proper hygiene have been put up in several locations.

In particular, we will be taking the following steps.

Passing the Peace and Greeting One Another

At this time we are advised to avoid direct personal contact and so any shaking or holding of hands or hugging is discouraged. When passing the peace or greeting one another, including when exiting after worship, consider an alternative gesture. For example, a simple bow of the head, placing your hands together as in prayer or over the heart will convey your greeting.

Offering

In order to minimise potential points of transmission between people we will not be passing the offering bags along the pews. A bowl will be placed at the back of the church and you are invited to place your offering in there as you enter or leave the service.

Holy Communion

We are advised that our current practice of having pre-cut bread and the juice in small individual glasses is sufficient at the moment. Those preparing communion have been asked to follow hygienic food handling procedures. If you still feel uncomfortable in taking communion you should feel free to refrain.

Pastoral Care

If anyone in the congregation is diagnosed with the illness or is required to self-isolate we are sorry to say that a personal visit will not be possible but phone contact will occur. If you contract the illness or need to self-isolate please let me or a member of Church Council know. The general advice to avoid direct personal contact is a way in which we offer our care to one another and endeavour to ensure each other's well-being.

Visiting hospitals or aged care facilities may not be possible at this time. Calling ahead is advisable.

Morning Tea and other activities where food is involved

We will continue to have morning tea as usual but would ask those involved in its preparation to ensure appropriate food handling practices are followed by using hand sanitisers and gloves. Prior to setting up and in cleaning up afterwards, wiping down of benchtops etc. with disinfectant wipes is required.

The UCA, in providing these guidelines, is following the best advice from our health departments. In implementing these practices we are seeking to minimise the risk of spreading the illness. However, if you still feel uncomfortable in gathering where other people are present we would like you to know that we understand your concerns and will respect your decision to not attend until the situation improves. If you are in this situation we would ask you please, out of care for you, to let us know. This way we can still maintain contact albeit in a different way.

As a community, both locally and world-wide, we are in a new and unique situation. As you will have gathered from the media the situation can change on a daily basis. If further advice is received that requires any alteration to the above we will act on it and let you know.

This can be a concerning time for many but, if we follow the advice given, any negative impact should be kept to a minimum. As I have mentioned several times but reiterate here, following these practices is a way of showing our care for one another and helping to ensure each other's well-being. If you have any concerns about the contents of this letter or concerns about the impact of the virus please do not hesitate to contact me.

Peace

Gary Stuckey (Rev)

On behalf of the Seacliff UC Church Council.