



Abundant
Grace
Liberating
Hope

Uniting Church in Australia
Assembly

President: Dr Deidre Palmer

General Secretary: Colleen Geyer

A PASTORAL RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

As the global pandemic of coronavirus COVID-19 continues to unfold, now, more than ever, as followers of Jesus, we are called to embody God's love and compassion in our world.

I know from the stories you are sharing, that many of you are creatively responding to your neighbours – offering connection, practical support and pastoral care.

Amid a rapidly changing situation, Synods and Presbyteries have shared public health authorities' advice with congregations about the ways to care for one another, to worship and serve the community, and institute safe practices that prevent the spread of the virus.

The Prime Minister, Scott Morrison has today announced stricter guidelines for non-essential gatherings like church services, which limit indoor attendances to less than 100 people. The limit for outdoor gatherings remains at less than 500.

The need to apply social distancing measures, in other words keeping a physical distance of 1.5 metres from each other, is again emphasised strongly. Access to aged care facilities is also being severely limited.

Please refer to the [federal Health Department website](#) or your state or territory health department site and apply this advice rigorously to your context in the weeks and months ahead.

We do not want our practices as Christian communities to contribute to the spread of the virus, rather we want our practices to contribute to the wellbeing and flourishing of all people, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

Many of you have wisely cancelled or postponed events, as responses to government and Synod or Presbytery advice.

The Moderators and I were planning to meet in Melbourne next week, to reflect on the life of our Church. We have postponed our face to face meeting, but will instead gather via video conference.

I invite you as members of the Uniting Church to send through to us, your requests for prayer, your stories of hope, the particular challenges you are facing in your regions, so that we can focus our time together and pastorally support you, as you

faithfully serve Christ through the life and witness of the Uniting Church across Australia.

I am very conscious that many of you continue to be deeply affected by drought, the aftermath of bushfires and flooding, as well as the impacts of the global pandemic.

The Uniting Church across the country, continues to walk alongside you as you face long-term recovery.

The ways we celebrate Easter will be significantly affected, and you will know the best ways for your local communities to observe Easter. The message of Easter speaks into all of our contexts. God's grace poured out into our world, through the Risen Christ brings hope and love into the deepest corners of despair and suffering, and brings transformation and new life, through the steadfast love of God for every one and the whole creation.

May God sustain you with love and strength, as you serve Christ in these rapidly changing and challenging times.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deidre Palmer".

Deidre Palmer
President
Uniting Church in Australia
Assembly

18 March 2020

Note: A selection of resources for Ministry during the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic is available on the [Assembly Home page](#). Many people are also sharing materials on the [Assembly's Transforming Worship Circle Facebook group](#). Synods are preparing guidance and resources as well, so please check your Synod website.

A PRAYER FOR COMPASSION, WISDOM AND STRENGTH

Loving and compassionate God,

You call us to love our neighbours and to be bearers of your hope and grace in our world.

Expand our hearts and vision to respond with compassion to those around us, who are struggling in this time of uncertainty, anxiety, grief and suffering.

Give wisdom and strength to our health workers, and government officials, as they provide leadership in bringing our country through this crisis.

We bring before you and into our hearts and minds:

- Those whose work and income are uncertain
- Those who are isolated
- Those who are fearful of an unknown future
- Those who live in situations of domestic violence, and whose isolation increases the control of their violent partners
- Those who are homeless, and all those who offer them support and care
- Those who are involved in aged care – our agency leaders, staff and residents and their loved ones
- Businesses whose futures are uncertain – their leaders and staff
- School staff and students
- Those with health conditions that put them at greater risk

Give wisdom and care-filled discernment to all our Church leaders – our Councils, and local congregations, as we seek to creatively live out our worship, witness and service in ways that offer Christ's life-giving love and presence.

Strengthen and sustain us to be your people – shaped by your abundant grace, bearers of your generosity and overflowing love.

Through Christ our Light and Hope, we pray,
Amen.

WORD OF MISSION

May God our Creator renew in us the creative Spirit that brings healing and life to all creation.

May Jesus the Christ, sustain us in boundless grace and love

May the Holy Spirit fill us with courage to be bearers of God's hope in the world,

Amen.