

## **WEB STATEMENT (Close to transcript of video)**

**19 March 2020**

### **COVID-19: A message to Clergy and community**

Hello everyone

Morning prayer for Thursday begins with a verse from 1 John in Chapter One. "This is a message we have heard from Christ; that God is light in whom there is no darkness at all."

In these last few weeks, as we have been responding to COVID-19, in Australia and around the world, we know that many people have been feeling an increasing terror of darkness overcoming them.

I want to talk to you about how we, as a Diocese, are able to respond and what decisions we might want to make about church services and gatherings in light of decisions being that have been made by the Australian Government and health authorities; how best can we keep the people who come to church safe and also have a deep sense of how it is they are able to keep Minister and serve Christ's will.

Today the Cathedral will be announcing that it will be suspending all Sunday services from this Sunday for an indefinite period. The Cathedral is a place where congregations of more than 100 gather and a place which attracts tourists to its Sunday services.

Yesterday Bishop Kate and Bishop Jeremy began the task of contacting every parish priest in the Diocese and we are also speaking to chaplains in hospitals prisons and schools. They have been finding out what it is that is going on on parishes and how people are responding; what resources and plans people are putting in place should we have to suspend services.

That would be for me, the last resort. I would so rather we didn't have to take that step but I recognise that in some places it may be the only possible step that clergy and lay leaders feel able to take.

It might be that you are one of those small parish churches in which 30 people cannot keep the social distance which is required. It might be that the resources needed for cleaning in between services can't be gathered together.

Today I've met with the Archdeacons and Bishops and the Dean of St George's as well as Area Deans. What I want to suggest is that this coming Sunday, when you gather for worship, that you and your lay leaders consider how it is that you are able to manage Sunday services and midweek services going forward.

It might be that you're able to live stream. Make sure that people know how it is that they can connect with you, if that is the case.

It might be that you're deciding to put extra services on on Sunday or on another day, so that fewer people will be in church at any one time.

It may be that you operate a roster system – a kind of week-on, week-off system – for people in your community.

And it might be that you and your leadership decide that, for the time being, you're unable to keep to the requirements put before us – social distancing, fewer than 100 people in any enclosed space.

If that's the case, I ask that you make contact with me, through the Episcopal Office, so that we know exactly what's going on.

The most important thing is that we act responsibly; that we are not panicking but trusting in God's love alongside us so that we can, in the most responsible way possible, respond to this crisis, this time of concern and high anxiety.

We want people to be able to continue to worship, to read the bible, to study the scripture, to pray, to know that they are not alone even if they are isolated, to know the church cares for them; that they are able to extend the love ministry of Christ in the local community.

I expect the demand and call for emergency relief will increase. I hope that you will be giving some thought to how best you might respond to that kind of ministry, the one that many of our parishes have in your place in the coming weeks.

One of the things that I've asked the Area Deans to do is to keep contact with the parish clergy in their areas, in their Deaneries, so you might continue to grow the resources we can share alongside each other. I understand there's a Facebook page that some clergy have connected with and there might be other social media channels that you can use – share resources, share ideas, pray together from a distance. I will keep updating by video and on the website, and certainly as we communicate via email with every parish.

As we come through these next few weeks as Lent goes into Passiontide and through Holy Week, we know that the story and the life that we live of death and resurrection; of fear and hope and love is very real. This year we're going to be living it in a new and different way. This year we're going to be knowing it in the age old way.

Do trust that Christ is with you. Do trust in the peace of God which passes all understanding. Do trust in God's presence for you and in your community.

For those of you who make contact with aged care, please be aware that Meath Care and Amana Living have issued guidelines which need to be adhered to. (Clergy), make contact with the Amana Living chaplains. If you have parishioners in hospital, make contact with hospital chaplains. They know exactly what rules apply in their place. If you are concerned about someone in prison, please make contact with prison chaplains.

Schools are meeting and deliberating day by day as that landscape changes and all school chaplains know what it is that is expected in their space.

Can I encourage you to know that God's love is for all of us, and continues to be for the whole world.

Thanks everybody. Bless you.