



# Archbishop of Sydney

27 May 2020

Dear brothers and sisters

Greetings in our Saviour's name.

Like the early disciples, we are currently living between Ascension Day and Pentecost. Yet our Whitsunday celebrations (to use the *BCP* terminology) in four days' time will not bring the end to our waiting. Next Sunday will see the same restrictions upon gathering that have been in place since the last Public Health Order of 14 May.

However, unlike those disciples we already have God's Spirit within us, our new covenant status is assured, so we are more able to confront the vicissitudes of life and the restrictions of COVID-19, because God is with us – both in the storm and in the desert.

This week I have been engaged in significant conversations with some Cabinet Ministers as well as officials from NSW Health. I am grateful for your prayers for these meetings and the work of the episcopal team more widely. I have been able both to ask questions and to provide answers on each occasion. I have also written to the Premier assuring her of our readiness to return to Sunday services where parishioners can be physically present, and seeking a loosening of restrictions so that churches are at least on a par with pubs and clubs, where 50 patrons are now allowed. As I write this letter, I am still waiting for a response from the Government. Although I am led to believe that we shall hear news on this matter later this week, it will not affect next Sunday. So we should all be prepared to continue, as we have successfully been doing for the past two months, with our online services.

However, in my letter to the Premier, I wanted to assure her of our preparedness for returning to Sunday church by outlining the measures that our churches will undertake when normal services resume. It is therefore important for the leadership of each parish to know what these measures are. I have provided a summary below, but I need to impress upon you all the need to follow these guidelines. Any breach of these COVIDsafe measures will be detrimental not only to the community's confidence in our ability to provide safe church spaces, but more significantly would be a danger to those who may become infected on our premises. Furthermore, in conversation with our church insurance broker, the Property Trust was recently informed that any breach of these guidelines could adversely affect our premiums and our ability to make a successful claim against the policy. There is no specific exclusion for Personal Injury caused by or arising from the coronavirus.

The following guidelines can be found in more detail on our dedicated COVID-19 page on [sydneyanglicans.net](http://sydneyanglicans.net). While we are not yet able to enter Step 2 of the National Roadmap for a COVIDsafe community, all parishes should be preparing now for that eventuality, with a detailed plan for reopening our church buildings, whether it be Step 2 or 3 for your parish, or even the undefined Step 4.

## Guidelines for COVIDsafe Opening our Churches

- Adequate capacity – you will need to measure the size of the room or nave of your church to ensure that the maximum number of people present is no more than one quarter of the measurement in square metres — and ensure that people are able to be physically distant with 4m<sup>2</sup> per person. See <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/what-you-can-and-cant-do-under-rules/four-square-metre-rule>
- Clear instructions for people with coronavirus symptoms, or those who have been in contact with persons diagnosed with COVID-19 in the last 14 days, to self-isolate
- Good hygiene signs encouraging physical distancing, handwashing and the provision of hand sanitiser at each entrance
- A plan for cleaning the church building after each service
- A plan for collecting and storing contact details (name and phone number) of attendees by a person dedicated to recording the information, not allowing common use of pens or clipboards, or distributing nametags
- Removal of items ordinarily handled by parishioners, such as Bibles, hymn books or bulletins
- Careful provision for the administration of the Lord's Supper, without use of the common cup, and where those distributing the elements (bread with tongs, individual cups) are regularly using hand sanitiser
- A pastoral care plan for the elderly and others who are highly vulnerable, who are not able or choose not to attend church
- Until there is clear medical evidence that it is safe to do so, no congregational singing should be allowed, as a precautionary measure.

Your time spent in preparation for following these guidelines will be well worth it when the Government relaxes the current restrictions.

## Annual General Meetings

Last Monday evening the Standing Committee passed an ordinance to allow temporarily three options for the conduct of an AGM. The first option allows the parish council to decide to conduct the business of the AGM (apart from electing the parish council). However, if ten or more parishioners object to this option, then the parish council can consider holding the AGM by zoom. The third option is to hold an AGM of physically present parishioners, subject to the restrictions of the relevant Public Health Order at the time.

Many parishes have already held their AGMs, and I have granted general relief for delaying AGMs until the end of June. I am willing to extend this time upon request for those parishes who are unable to hold their AGM even with these modified procedures. For those contemplating a zoom AGM, Bishop Stead has provided a helpful explanation of how one uses zoom for elections [here](#). Also available is a [template PowerPoint presentation](#) for a Zoom AGM.

Our Deputy Registrar, Mrs Catherine Rich, will be able to answer any questions you might have concerning these new options, as will your Regional Bishop.

## The 52<sup>nd</sup> Synod

As you know, we were to have had the Archbishop's Election Synod in August, and the first ordinary session of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Synod was due to be held in October. However, it has become increasingly obvious that we shall not be able to hold a Synod for 800 people in October this year. This has occupied the mind of our Diocesan Secretary and the CEO of SDS, as we have a statutory obligation to hold a Synod each year. It is uncertain what the penalty would be for a breach of the Archbishop's obligation to summon an annual Synod, but as always we do not want to proceed in an unlawful manner (I am personally not keen!). I have therefore approached the Attorney General to see if we were able to promote an amendment to our Constitution (contained in the schedule to our 1902 Act of Parliament) so as to allow (1) relief from the obligation to hold an annual Synod due to COVID-19 and (2) the opportunity to hold a

Synod electronically, when we cannot meet physically. Because these changes would affect the whole Province of NSW, I consulted each of the Diocesan Bishops of NSW and they all agreed that this would be a useful amendment to our Constitution. Standing Committee likewise agreed to pursuing this matter with the Attorney General, although some expressed the view that a Synod of the Diocese of Sydney held electronically would be suboptimal and it may be better to wait until the whole Synod can meet again – even if in larger venue to accommodate physical distancing.

At this stage, no decision has been made about our next Synod and when it will meet, and unless the Government agrees to amend our Act, we shall have no other option but to wait until the time when a Synod can lawfully be held.

So we continue to wait for many things. We wait and yearn for the day when we can meet in reasonable numbers to share the joy of our fellowship in the Holy Spirit – our Pentecostal joy (no denomination has a monopoly on the use of this word). We wait for Synod (well, perhaps not with the same enthusiasm). We wait for the return of our Lord Jesus in all his majesty. We wait and we pray.

May I remind you to pray your COVID-19 prayer at 1900hrs each day for our health workers, those afflicted by COVID-19 and for the discovery of a vaccine?

I leave you with the Collect for Whitsunday, which is a fitting prayer for the guidance of God's Spirit in these challenging times.

GOD, who as at this time didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people, by the sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit; Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

With every good wish

Grace and peace

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Glenn', with a large, stylized initial 'G'.

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Archbishop

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