



Archbishop of Sydney

19 May 2020

Dear brothers and sisters

Greetings in our Saviour's name.

Last week I wrote following the announcement of the Prime Minister's three step Roadmap for moving towards a COVIDsafe community. Last Thursday, the Health Minister of NSW signed a further Public Health Order (No. 2) regarding the loosening of restrictions on gathering and movement, to reflect the application of Step 1 for the citizens of NSW. If you have not read this Health Order, it can be found at

https://gazette.legislation.nsw.gov.au/so/download.w3p?id=Gazette_2020_2020-99.pdf.

Please note that the rules for wedding and funerals have changed. It is now permissible to have 10 guests at weddings and 20 guests indoors or 30 guests outdoors at funerals. These guests are in addition to those involved in the conduct of the service.

Yet, I am well aware that there are still some unanswered questions for applying these orders to parish life. This afternoon I raised a number questions with a Government official seeking clarification on certain matters, which I hope I can share with you next week.

I realise that some parishes have decided to commence small mid-week or Sunday services, but many of us are prevented from meeting face-to-face for Sunday gatherings, as we can allow only 10 persons (in addition to those necessary for the conduct of the service) to gather around God's word and the Lord's table. While small changes have taken place in lifting restrictions, we shall be reliant upon our online Sunday services for many months to come.

This will require an extra measure of patience for you and your congregation. Yet, as the apostle Paul reminds us, patience is a fruit of the Spirit. Along with love, joy and peace, 'patience' is the next virtue that Paul identifies as a mark of the disciple of Christ. Moreover, the last virtue characterising those who are filled with the Spirit is, interestingly, 'self-control'. The fruit of the Spirit is exactly that, God's working in our lives. It is not attained by our efforts or our activity, but is the result of the Spirit of the ascended Christ working in us to make us more like Jesus, transforming us into his likeness from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18).

So I encourage you not to lose heart. Be patient. The time will come when we can meet again as we did, but the time is not yet. We must wait for God's timing, as in all things, and seek to honour Christ in the present and the immediate future.

I have been much encouraged by the resourcefulness of so many churches in their online services. Adapting to the needs of the hour, creatively involving lay people, providing segments for children, and acclimatising to speaking into a camera lens, when you would prefer to address a live congregation before you. We have learned new skills and had opportunity to care for and understand our congregations and local community in ways not possible in less difficult times, especially the needs of those living alone. I give thanks to God

for you all as you have adjusted to the demands of ministry in these challenging times. The Lord has clearly blessed our online services, so much so, that I have had letters imploring me to encourage you to continue this practice after the coronavirus crisis has passed. Not every church will be able to do this, but I do hope that many will take up this challenge as the extent of viewers that we can draw near to God through online services can be and has been far reaching.

Our services may not be perfect, technical glitches will occur, but our labour is not in vain. For those who may still be struggling with this medium, I would draw your attention to some tips for pre-recording or live-streaming your services, available on the COVID-19 page at <https://sydneyanglicans.net/covid19>.

It would also be good, in our desire to keep our online services short for the sake of the concentration required of our congregations, to make sure we do not lose the genius of Cranmer in the planning of our services, remembering that Cranmer provided no time in his Prayer Book for notices, which so often consume more time than we spend in prayer. The classic elements, however, for an Anglican service ought not to be discarded. We should strive to include a prayer of confession with the accompanying words of assurance for those who truly believe the gospel; two (rather than just one) Bible readings; the use of Psalms; a creed or declaration of what we believe; petitions and thanksgivings, including the Lord's Prayer; and, of course, the sermon, which no Sydney clergy would forget! Yet all these elements are part of our rich liturgical heritage, and while the words may change, the form and content of our services should be recognisably Anglican as we seek to build up the saints for the work of ministry and encourage one another as we see the Day drawing near (Hebrews 10:25).

Of course, that great Day, of which the writer to the Hebrews speaks, may be closer than we think! It could arrive before a vaccine for COVID-19 is found. Hence, all the more reason to continue steadfastly in your leadership of God's people, preparing them for that Day, not just the day of lifting all restrictions, with our eyes firmly set upon that heavenly city, whose builder and maker is God.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Galatians 5:22-23

With every good wish

Grace and peace



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