

Thursday 19th March 2020

Suspension of public services and gatherings

To our South Wagga Anglican Church Family,

You will be aware, that yesterday, the Prime Minister announced restrictions to (indoor) public gatherings of more than 100 people, in order to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The Anglican Bishops of NSW/ACT have been in consultation with each other about the wisest way to reflect the care and compassion of Christ for all people in these challenging times. As a result, all public services and gatherings are being suspended across our entire (and many other) diocese. **Consequently, we will not be meeting for public worship this Sunday, and this will continue until further notice.**

I have so many things I want to write, but I will limit it, at this time, to only a few.

“There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear” writes the Apostle John (1 John 4:18). Our diocesan leadership have made this decision out of love, not fear. In particular, this decision, which may last many months, is made in order to protect those who are vulnerable to the virus, particularly the elderly. Because we are a community characterised by love, I am convinced that our love will overflow into new and creative opportunities to be the children of God who shine like stars in the world (Phil. 2:5). Although the government is implementing *social distance* policies, this ought not to lead to *social isolation*. I am envisioning a renewed level of personal contact through teams of people phoning, visiting, meeting in homes, prayer triplets and more. We will commission a pastoral care team who will work closely with me to care for our parish through this crisis.

“To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout...” is how the Apostle Peter begins his first letter (1 Pet. 1:1). I always like to refer to our cherished buildings of St Paul’s and St Alban’s as our ‘family homes’, but they are not our ultimate homes. Peter continues:

He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, uncorrupted, and unfading, kept in heaven for you... (1 Pet. 1:3-4)

We will, over the months to come, need to connect to our rich biblical identity of being God’s cherished people and yet scattered. We will need to drink deep from God’s word to have our souls nourished so we can be a prayerful non-anxious presence, scattered throughout our city. We will be seeking to equip, through multiple ways, our entire church community with the resources and encouragement to be the church, even when we cannot come to church.

“All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do” (Gal. 2:10). This was the Apostle Paul’s recollection of the first meeting that he had with the Jerusalem leadership of the early church, and his own personal and apostolic commitment to minister to those in need. I am concerned that there are many in our city who will suffer in the months ahead. Our supermarket shelves are emptying, emergency relief and food provision is ceasing in the name of social distancing, and the economic fall out will result

in unemployment. As a community of love, scattered throughout Wagga, I believe we are called to serve our city, and particularly the poor. In the weeks and months ahead, we will be organising ourselves, in this chaotic environment, to 'work for the good of all' (Gal. 6:10).

Which brings me to the very practical matter of how we will keep connecting and communicating as the South Wagga Anglican Church family. It is important that we stay connected online. If you are on Facebook, please ensure that you have liked our main parish FB page: www.facebook.com/southwaggaanglican/. We will also be emailing much more often and providing links to video content from myself and members of the parish, including a Sunday worship experience. Meeting in small groups will be more vital than ever, as will be the traditional phone call and personal visit. We will be aiming to keep connected with all ages and stages in our church family and we are very aware that we will need to use a mixed economy of methods in order to do so. Please, let us know, how we can best connect with you.

There is much work to be done, and lots more to tell you, but for now I wanted to write and give you at least this information. I have written all this with a heavy heart and am aware that many will be saddened and anxious. Please reach out and connect straight away with one of your church family. Christian friendship, expressed through gathering, is a deep privilege. I don't think I will easily take it for granted again. And yet, my heart is encouraged. I have always felt, in times of adversity, that the words in Esther 4:14 were for us. Faced with a great threat, Mordecai gave courage to Esther by outlining the faithfulness of God and calling her to action: "*Perhaps you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this.*" I am convinced, that God's promises are precious, that our journey together in the coming months will be adventurous and life-giving, and that God really has raised us up, as a church community, for a time such as this.

To summarise:

- Our Diocesan leadership has acted out of love, and love cannot be contained – it will find new expressions.
- I am meeting with our Parish leadership to restructure and resource us to be the scattered church.
- We will find ourselves serving our city, and particularly the poor.
- I will be in touch again soon – so stay online and reach out to others.

Shalom – God's profound peace and flourishing – from your Rector,



Rev Scott Goode