



# Archbishop of Sydney

31 March 2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

Greetings in the name of our risen Lord.

I am writing to you again with a weekly update on the impact of COVID-19 upon our church and community life. As I am sure many of you are aware, the National Cabinet has recommended more stringent restrictions upon our social life, so that now only a maximum of two people may congregate in public or in private. The only exemptions are immediate family members in the household for private gatherings, and employees in the work place, if the employees are unable to work remotely. The general advice is to stay at home, and if one is over 70, then the advice is closer to a demand. The NSW Government has now enacted these provisions by way of an enforceable Public Health Order.

These are indeed, severe restrictions upon our lives, and yet, I trust we shall abide by them for the sake of the health and safety of all Australians, and as a model of good citizenship, let alone our commitment to obey our ruling authorities. We have made enquiries to NSW Health about the viability of having more than two people present for a video recording or a live stream production in a church building, as is the current interpretation of the Public Health Order of 30 March 2020. The Department has not yet decided upon our recommendation of a maximum of five people for these events. Part of the reason for the lateness of this letter was the hope I could give you an answer today. I have now been told (at 6:45pm) the answer will come in the next 24 hours. So we shall keep you posted.

We have otherwise updated our FAQs on the COVID-19 website to explain how these new restrictions will apply. May I remind you to consult this website each day, as we do not want to bombard you with emails, as the situation can change two or three times in a week. We are aiming to have Tuesday as the day in which you will receive communications, so that you can expect something each week, for the foreseeable future.

This month, Southern Cross will not be produced in paper form. Instead, it will available digitally as a pdf download. I would be grateful if could encourage your parishioners to use the download link at <http://sydneyanglicans.net/southerncross> or you may wish to download the pdf file and attach it to your emails. Please encourage your parishioners to access it, as it too will be as source of encouragement to your congregation and help with their sense of connection, though physically separated from their local church and Bible study group.

There are two matters, which a number of you have asked about. The first question is why are weddings limited to five persons, when funerals are limited to ten? I have raised this question with the PM's Policy Advisor, the Minister for Health, the Hon. Brad Hazzard, and with our Premier. It is clearly an inconsistent, if not cruel decision, when no parent could attend, let alone a photographer, given the couple, the minister and two witnesses exhaust the maximum. I have been advised that you have the option of approaching the Minister for Health for a special exemption, which may be granted, as long as the number was no more than ten.

The second question relates to participation in the Lord's Supper. This is a significant matter, given our Lord's command to 'Do this in remembrance of me.' I have written a short theological rationale for permitting members of your congregation who wish to participate in the sacrament by eating the bread and drinking from the cup in their own home. I have shared my paper with the other Diocesan Bishops of the Province, so that I was not acting unilaterally. They have

each agreed that given these times of extremity, there was justification for issuing this invitation, even if they would not necessarily follow suit. Some Bishops, for example, will televise a service Holy Communion on Easter Day and invite viewers to 'feed on him in their heart by faith' without eating by mouth, in accordance with the rubrics of the Communion of the Sick in BCP. It is a sensitive area of doctrine and ecclesiology, as evidenced by the debates surrounding the Lord's Supper through the centuries. I do not wish to add fuel to this controversy. Some may wish to participate in their communion with Christ with bread and wine, while others may wish their communion with the Lord to be merely exercised by the faith that our Lord required was essential for eternal life (John 6:53-57). However, I stress that these are measures for the current crisis. The connection with the ordained minister administering the Communion, visually though remotely, is essential, and this is not a means of authorising lay administration. Rather it is a means of seeking to apply our Lord's command to his people that will nourish their souls during this extraordinary time.

If you have any questions about what you should do, please speak to your Regional Bishop, who is there as your resource for any questions regarding our church life in these days of COVID-19.

May I remind you that while the coronavirus may spread, the apostle Paul rejoices that the word of God spread throughout Macedonia and Achaia, when writing to encourage the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:8). God's word is not bound. One day this virus will be bound, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

May God so bless you as you remind your people of these truths.

With every good wish

Grace and peace



Glenn N Davies  
Archbishop