



Anglican Diocese
of the Northern Territory

May 7th, 2020

Bishop's letter to clergy and laypeople of the Diocese of the Northern Territory

Dear brothers and sisters,

I wrote to you as the coronavirus restrictions began and a lot of our church life suddenly changed. Nearly six weeks later I am writing to you again as we come out on the other side of the restrictions. We can thank God for his many mercies—greatest of all, his mercy of bringing us into eternal life through Jesus, but also mercies like preserving life in the Territory through the pandemic, and that we are now able to start returning to normal. I thank God that our Anglican churches in the Territory have been so creative and cheerful in coming to terms with the restrictions. Many people have learnt new skills, people from all over the place have tuned in to our live-streamed or pre-recorded services, and our congregations have experienced different angles of pastoral care and contact.

The NT Government's roadmap to post-pandemic life has been issued and many of you will have seen it. One of the key principles is that social distancing is to be maintained, at least until further notice, and good hygiene must be practised. For community organisations (including our churches) to get back to normal, a safety plan must be developed, showing how the principles of the roadmap are going to be put into practice. This must be submitted to the government. The form is at <https://forms.nt.gov.au/Produce/wizard/87234bf5-bed6-412e-8a3d-8b53e311b3d1/?prepared=true&logGuid=c1b3b397-fd94-4920-9f8e-81c5938c9b65>. People filling in the form for our churches will have to use their imagination and common sense—some of the questions are shaped for commercial businesses rather than churches.

Each church must submit its own safety plan form through the government website. If the form is submitted, churches can restart indoor services from May 17, as long as physical distancing is in place. That means at least 4 square metres per person, and 1.5 metres between people (unless they are from the same household). For many of our churches, that will be possible. For our larger congregations, it may not be. It would be helpful (and quite a bit of work) for churches with pews to mark 'sitting spots' on them, so that people feel comfortable that the guidelines are being implemented; and there will need to be a sign or instruction that tells people to sit on the spots. Churches with chairs could space the chairs out, remembering that people from the same household do not need to be spaced apart from each other, although you might also consider the effect on people who live alone of being separated (again) while others sit together.

Other church activities can also resume, as long as physical distancing is implemented. The government is asking for numbers to be kept small. But this means we can restart home visits, home groups, and other events like working bees, as long as (in all cases) physical distancing of 1.5m can be maintained.

I asked the government hotline about Holy Communion. Sharing from the same cup is certainly not permitted, and since it is difficult to give communion to someone who is more than 1.5m away, the hotline commended a more creative approach. The hotline staff member agreed that it would be very good if the bread and individual cups could be set out in a place (or places) that people could individually come and collect them from, rather than it being distributed

person-to-person. Practically, there would just need to be enough room between the pieces of bread and the cups for them to be picked up without the hand touching the other pieces as well. One of my former churches used this practice (years ago!)—we all took our bread and wine back to our places, and ate at the same time and drank at the same time as one another, as the words of distribution were said. That worked well. Of course it may take a little longer, but it could actually engender a stronger sense of the whole congregation participating together in the sacrament. There are also suppliers who provide a bread-plus-wine all-in-one package (eg <https://whole-in-one.com.au/product/prefilled-communion-cups-100-packs/#.XrEvVIMzY34>).

I know that some of our churches have already started thinking about whether to continue broadcasting services, even when physical church starts again. There are good arguments for and against. We want to encourage people to attend physically; we know that physical gathering is a significant part of promoting community; we want people not to be 'consumerist' and just find whatever church they want online, wherever it is in the world, without having to commit to really being involved. And to continue broadcasting means that little bit of extra effort each week relative to the pre-virus world. But there are many people who for various reasons have difficulty in going to church. My own feeling is that the advantages of continuing to broadcast outweigh the disadvantages, and if it is possible it would be helpful to continue. But each parish can make its own decision about what is best.

Finally, the government has asked as many people as to download the CovidSafe app. Annette and I have downloaded it, and I strongly encourage you to as well. I have been given some information that I could share with any who want to receive it. It may not seem very relevant in the Territory, but it is a way of expressing our solidarity with those who are struggling with the virus more than we have been.

I'm looking forward to seeing people in the diocese face-to-face again soon.

With every blessing,



Greg Anderson
Bishop