



**June 25, 2020**

## **Pastoral letter from the Moderator**

As we have been celebrating our Uniting Church birthday and remembering Jesus's prayer for his disciples ("that they may be one"), many of us have been longing for a return to gathering together physically as one community. We have been aching to return to gathering as one – in our own worship spaces – in worship, prayer and service to our communities.

While restrictions for Tasmania continue to ease, Victoria is seeing restrictions tighten. The recent increase in spread of the virus in Victoria alerts us to how precarious our situation is, and how quickly things can change when we relax our vigilance. This underlines the importance of taking things slowly, not becoming complacent, and having patience with the process and with each other.

We remember that the spike in COVID-19 cases in parts of Melbourne represents people. For each positive test comes a series of implications for families, friends and colleagues, as well as for casual contacts. such as the person at the supermarket checkout. There are the wider implications for others for whom the re-tightening of restrictions means a loss of the prospect of getting back to work and earning an income, an increase in the risk of businesses folding, and an extension of the time we need to spend separated from each other.

Our love for each other needs to be held dearer than our desire to resume normal life, normal gatherings and normal contact – as hard as that is. We pray for strength, endurance and Christ's peace.

Many across the life of the Church have expressed their gratefulness for the Synod COVID Crisis Management Team and Communications team, who have put in countless hours to provide clear and concise guidance throughout the pandemic. We are indeed grateful!

The e-news Updates and weekly FAQs have been designed and delivered to help us navigate our way through these times, to meet our obligations to each other and to our communities – for love of each other.

Please continue to access these weekly, to heed the advice contained therein and to share the advice widely amongst your communities.

For love of God and love of neighbour: with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Grace and peace,

Denise





To help identify items which are new, or have been updated since the last FAQ, simply look for:



This week's updates:

- **GATHERINGS** P1
- **COMMUNITY/CHURCH HALLS** P4
- **HOLY COMMUNION** P5

## How will we know about further updates?

We have established a Synod Crisis Management Team which monitors changes on a daily basis. Compliance and Pastoral advice will continue to be issued via emailed letters from the General Secretary and/or Moderator. All other relevant advice will continue to be sent via the special Coronavirus editions of Synod eNews, which will appear in your inbox from "Communications". eNews and emailed letters are sent to all Presbyteries, all ministers, all church councils.

Separate editions of these FAQs are now being produced for Victoria and Tasmania reflecting the different approaches of each state government in easing Covid-19 restrictions. Please ensure that you are reading the version relevant to your state.

*As of 14/05/2020*

## MULTI-LINGUAL RESOURCES

### Where can I find the current government guidelines in other languages?

Ethnolink have information available in 51 languages at: [www.ethnolink.com.au/covid-19-coronavirus-translated-resources/](http://www.ethnolink.com.au/covid-19-coronavirus-translated-resources/)  
The Department of Home Affairs has extensive multi-lingual resources available at: <https://covid19inlanguage.homeaffairs.gov.au/>

*As of 21/05/2020*



*As of 25/06/2020*

## GATHERINGS

### What face-to-face gatherings are permitted at church?

The recommencement of small gatherings for worship, prayer, or Bible study, or even home visits to some church members, presents a challenging task of how to decide who may take part without the risk of some feeling excluded. This includes finding ways of meeting the safety requirements that don't involve or obligate those most at risk of severe illness, e.g. those over 70 or with health conditions, including Ministers or other congregation leaders, to do the tasks to achieve these requirements. This will require careful consideration by each Church Council based on local needs and requirements.

Please keep your Presbytery informed about your plans for face-to-face gatherings including worship.

Before using any church owned buildings, or allowing any other group to use church-owned buildings, please complete the Recovery Checklist at: <https://victas.uca.org.au/download/668/faq/8852/recovery-acton-plan-checklist>

Religious gatherings and ceremonies are permitted with up to 20 people plus the minimum people required to conduct the gathering to be held indoors or outdoors, providing physical distancing can be maintained (1.5metres and a minimum floorspace of 4 sqm per person is available).

This number was scheduled to increase to 50 people on June 22, but the government now insists all religious gatherings and ceremonies be capped at 20 people (plus those involved in staging the worship)

- **Outdoor** religious gatherings and ceremonies are permitted providing physical distancing requirements can be maintained.

At least one hour should be allowed between services or ceremonies to reduce the risk of crowds at entrances and exits and to enable cleaning.

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Attendee names and contact details must be recorded in case contact tracing is required. As a minimum these must contain the first name and contact telephone number of every attendee. These records should be kept for 28 days.

Should you choose to hold worship services, there are a number of factors which will need to be considered, including:

- *How to limit attendance numbers to the maximum 20 people and whether to allow non-members to attend*
- *Whether attendance by people (including Ministers) in any of the vulnerable groups should be discouraged*
- *How to ensure that persons who are unwell do not attend*
- *How to ensure social distancing is maintained, including on entering and exiting the building*
- *What changes to worship will be required to ensure the safety of all attendees, including eliminating/minimising the touching of shared items (eg microphones, books, pulpits, collection plates)*
- *How to ensure personal hygiene and building cleanliness meet minimum standards. See new Safework Australia guide linked to Recovery Checklist at: <https://victas.uca.org.au/download/668/faq/8852/recovery-acton-plan-checklist>*
- *Ensuring that bathrooms are properly provisioned with soap, disposable handtowels and sanitiser*
- *What signage may be required to ensure the observance of all measures by attendees at all times*
- *How to maintain a record of all people who attend, including contact details, and*
- *How you will respond to unwell people attending, and attendees with suspected/confirmed Covid-19*

To assist in preparation for Worship Services and gatherings, see Recovery Checklist at: <https://victas.uca.org.au/download/668/faq/8852/recovery-acton-plan-checklist>

Weddings may be held with the maximum number of **20 guests present** plus the couple and the celebrant providing a minimum floorspace of 4 sqm per person is available and all other physical distancing requirements and hygiene practices can be met.

This number remains at 20 people, providing:

- **The current physical distancing requirements must be maintained for any religious gathering or ceremony regardless of whether they are held indoors or outdoors** (1.5metres between each person and a minimum space of 4 sqm per person is available)
- **Outdoor** Religious gatherings and ceremonies are permitted providing physical distancing requirements can be maintained.

At funerals up to **50 people** are allowed at an indoor or outdoor funeral, plus the minimum people required to conduct the funeral, providing a minimum floorspace of 4 sqm per person is available and all other physical distancing requirements and hygiene practices can be met.

### Is singing permitted at gatherings?

There is no restriction in Government Health advice on communal singing. Normal venue limits, density quotients (one person per four square metres) and gathering size limits apply. Please note the following:

The most important preventative measure is for singers and musicians to not attend worship, rehearsals or performances if they are unwell or have any symptoms.

When rehearsals and performances are conducted, performers should:

- Remain 1.5 metres apart wherever possible
- Strictly follow hand hygiene practices
- Avoid sharing microphones or instruments that are played with a mouthpiece.

These areas should also be cleaned with increased frequency.

As of 22/06/2020





## Morning/afternoon tea and meal sharing

Synod's Coronavirus Management Team are still seeking advice to be able to provide clear guidance on how these social gatherings can be conducted safely. Until this guidance can be provided, these activities should not occur.

Whilst the new Recovery Checklist document includes kitchens, this should be read only as preparatory information for when meal sharing can recommence.

*As of 25/06/2020*

## Physical distancing

PHYSICAL DISTANCING requirements may mean that you cannot have the maximum number of attendees at an indoor gathering. The rule of 4 sqm per person must be maintained.

To calculate the maximum capacity of any building, measure the floorspace (length x width) in metres, then divide by 4.

For example: if the inside of your church measures 10m x 6m = 60 sqm ÷ 4 = 15 people is its maximum capacity. Even if Covid regulations state that up to 20 people can attend, the maximum number of people, including those conducting the ceremony, who would be able to be in your church at any time would still be 15.

On the other hand, if the inside of your church measures 10m x 40m = 400 sqm ÷ 4 = 100 people is the maximum capacity. However, if Covid regulations state that up to 20 people can attend, then only 20 people can attend.

**Which figure do we use? Government maximum numbers or the 4 square metre rule?** In all cases, the smaller number is the one to use.

*As of 18/06/2020*

## Physical distancing signs

All church buildings must display signage showing the maximum number of people who can be accommodated in any space. Once you have calculated the maximum numbers for each space, you may take advantage of the templates created to make your signage. These are available at:

<https://victas.uca.org.au/all-you-need-to-know-answers-to-your-frequently-asked-questions/>

*As of 28/05/2020*

## Should face masks be worn at gatherings?

The current guidelines issued by Federal and State governments is that masks are not recommended for general use.

*As of 11/06/2020*

## What face-to-face gatherings are permitted away from church?

Gatherings of up to five people may be held in a private residence, plus the residents of the household providing a minimum floorspace of 4 sqm per person is available and all other physical distancing and hygiene requirements can be met.

Prior to visiting, you should always check the residents' willingness to receive visitors and their ability to observe social distancing requirements.

Church Council and congregation committee meetings should continue to only be held via teleconference and/or videoconference unless face-to-face meetings are absolutely necessary.

*As of 22/06/2020*





## What are the current recommendations for restarting Youth Groups?

As lockdown restrictions ease, churches will be able to consider how and when youth ministry programs that include in-person gatherings will resume. Youth ministry coordinator Bradon French has created a video that will be useful for anyone working in this space. It contains

- Advice to ensure the safety of those who attend, their families and community
- How to remain COVID safe and comply with government requirements
- Creative and fun ways to help with physical distancing
- Links to other resources.

Please note, this video was recorded at the end of May.

Watch Bradon's video at: <https://victas.uca.org.au/advice-for-re-starting-youth-ministry-gatherings-in-vic-tas/>

*As of 11/06/2020*

## LIVE-STREAMING WORSHIP

### How many people can be involved in live-streaming worship services?

Recording and live-streaming of worship services is permitted providing all of the following guidelines are met. The streaming of worship services is permitted only where the number of people at the premises is limited to twenty (including those providing technical support) plus those participating in the ceremony and providing the following social distancing requirements can be met:

- Each person must maintain a distance of at least 1.5m from another person
- At least 4sqm of floor area per person is required in the place where the ceremony/performance takes place. This means the immediate area/room around the participants where the ceremony is performed.

In addition, you must take measures to mitigate any risk of disease transmission by ensuring the following measures are in place:

- Exclude persons who are unwell from participating in the production of the live streaming
- Exclude persons in identified vulnerable groups from participating in the ceremony and the production of the live streaming, including:
  - Those who are immuno-compromised, etc.
  - over 70
  - over 65 with significant medical conditions
  - Aboriginal Tasmanians over 50 with significant medical conditions
- Ensure all people present practice good respiratory and hand hygiene and provide appropriate hand washing facilities and hand sanitisers
- Maintain environmental cleaning standards in line with those published by the Australian Government Department of Health.

*As of 11/06/2020*



*As of 25/06/2020*

## COMMUNITY/CHURCH HALLS

### Under what circumstances can Community/Church Halls be used?

Before using any church owned buildings, or allowing any other group to use church-owned buildings, please complete the checklist at: <https://victas.uca.org.au/download/668/fac/8669/checklist-for-congregations>

Community/Church Halls and similar such buildings may be used for some purposes, providing a minimum floorspace of 4 sqm per person is available and all other physical distancing and hygiene requirements can be met.

**ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES** - If halls or other facilities are intended to be used for Essential Public Services such as food banks, homeless services or education, they can remain open for the delivery of these services (applying all other health and safety measures). If you are in doubt about whether the service is an Essential Public Service, seek advice via your presbytery or contact [uca.legal@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:uca.legal@victas.uca.org.au).

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**SUPPORT GROUPS** - If hosting a support group, a maximum number of 10 people can be present plus the facilitator(s) providing a minimum floorspace of 4 sqm per person is available and all other physical distancing and hygiene requirements can be met.

**EXERCISE GROUPS** - Indoor exercise groups may now be conducted with a maximum of 20 people per space or group, providing a minimum floorspace of 4 sqm per person is available and all other physical distancing and hygiene requirements can be met.

**BUSINESSES** – If an organisation or individual rents space, the government guidelines for the conduct of that particular category of business would apply. These can be found at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorias-restriction-levels-covid-19>. If in doubt, seek advice from your presbytery or contact [uca.legal@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:uca.legal@victas.uca.org.au).

**RENTED & HIRED FACILITIES - Who is responsible for ensuring properties are COVID compliant?**

- If you rent hire or licence out property to more than one organisation or group on a casual or non-exclusive basis (eg support groups, community groups, classes) using our standard Hire Agreement (Victoria) whether one-off or recurring, the Responsibility for maintaining all COVID-19 compliance, including cleaning to standard before and after every use, remains with the congregation as the responsible body.

However, you may pass on the reasonable additional cost of cleaning or other necessary Covid-19 safety measures to the Hirer if you notify them in advance of the additional cost.

- If you rent out property to one organisation or group on an exclusive use basis (under a Lease or Licence), the responsibility for maintaining all COVID-19 compliance falls to the tenant.
- If in doubt, seek advice from your presbytery or contact [uca.legal@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:uca.legal@victas.uca.org.au)

*As of 25/06/2020*



*As of 25/06/2020*

## HOLY COMMUNION

### What changes to worship services are permissible?

Assembly Standing Committee has approved temporary pastoral measure guidelines for congregations and faith communities to enable the celebration of Holy Communion as part of online worship. These guidelines can be found at: <https://www.assembly.uca.org.au/news/item/3163-temporary-arrangements-for-holy-communion>

Further advice about matters to be considered if Holy Communion is to be celebrated in gathered communities will be available next week.

As face to face worship returns, congregations considering resuming celebrating Holy Communion together should be very cautious and consider their context, their people and the gospel imperatives to welcome the vulnerable. Given that many congregations include a large proportion of older people, it should not yet be presumed that because restrictions are relaxing, communion should immediately resume. Pay close attention to the implications of current health advice, the well being and inclusion of the congregation as a whole, and explore practises of sharing communion which reflect our theology and minimise the risk of infection. For further guidance please refer to 'Moving Forward with Holy Communion in a Time of COVID-19' <https://victas.uca.org.au/holy-communion-what-to-consider> provided by Stephen Burns and Fran Barber.

*As of 25/06/2020*





## MARKETS

### Can we hold garage sales and/or markets?

There is no specific mention of garage sales in any Covid guidelines, but it is logical to treat these as a market:

- Market stalls that predominately provide food and drink have continued to operate. Market stalls that sell non-food and drink products are also permitted to trade
- The market operator is responsible for ensuring the four square metre rule is applied to indoor spaces. Customers should keep 1.5 metres in between them and other people who are not part of their household.

Whilst it is not a requirement for markets generally, it is strongly recommended to

- maintain a contact tracing register (ie name and contact number) for anyone attending the Garage Sale or market and
- have a process for orderly flow of people (eg everyone goes in 1 direction, entrance and exit points and a total number limit) to ensure the social distancing requirements can still be safely met.

*As of 18/06/2020*

## SAFE (DIGITAL) MINISTRY

### What safety measures should be adopted for ministry within the digital space?

The Culture of Safety Unit has prepared some guidelines for local leaders and communities, offering commentary and interpretation of how our existing Child Safety resources and policies, and the Uniting Church Code of Ethics, continue to shape our digital ministry practices. To view the guidelines visit: [www.victas.uca.org.au/safe-digital-ministry](http://www.victas.uca.org.au/safe-digital-ministry)

*As of 21/05/2020*

## CORONAVIRUS FUNERALS

### Are there any special requirements for holding the funeral of someone who has died of Coronavirus?

The Victorian government has guidelines for cases of suspected or confirmed COVID-19. These mean that some cultural and ministry funeral practices need to change, especially how families interact with the body of a person who has (or may have) died with COVID-19. Ministers need to consider how their ministry practice may need to alter and should discuss with Church Councils ahead of time how families can be supported in this situation.

*As of 17/04/2020*

## MINISTERS IN HIGH RISK GROUPS

### What if a minister is part of a Coronavirus high risk group?

#### All people who are

- aged over 70,
- over 65 with chronic health conditions,
- immune-compromised, or
- Indigenous people over 50 with chronic health conditions

**are urged to stay at home.** This includes ministry agents in these at-risk groups, whether retired or in active placement, who might have otherwise led funerals, worship services or engaged in visiting church members.

Ministry agents in these risk groups are encouraged to talk with their Church Council and have clear arrangements in place in advance as to who may be called on to conduct such work, especially funerals where a person has died with confirmed or suspected COVID-19.

*As of 14/05/2020*

## RENT RELIEF REQUESTS

### What do we do if we are approached by tenants for Covid-19 rent relief?

Rent relief is not automatic. Our Property Services and Legal departments have compiled guidelines for handling rent relief requests, both commercial and residential. If you wish to support a rent relief

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application, there is a form which needs to be completed before any rent relief can be offered. Details available on the first info sheet at: [www.victas.uca.org.au/resources/property/forms-and-resources/](http://www.victas.uca.org.au/resources/property/forms-and-resources/)

*As of 16/04/2020*

## OP SHOPS

### Can we keep our Op Shop open?

Op-shops can continue to operate in Victoria unless directed otherwise by local authorities, and provided that social distancing measures are put in place for staff, volunteers and visitors. It should also be noted that some Op Shops may need to close for a short time while addressing the current requirements.

Op Shops run by Uniting VicTas should consult Uniting for current guidance. In all Op Shops, staff and volunteers aged 70+ or who fall into any of the other COVID high-risk groups should be asked to stay at home.

You may of course choose to adjust how you operate your shop, such as operating only on a case-by-case basis by request to support local needs and/or in partnership with local community services.

In line with social distancing requirements, the number of persons in an Op Shop at any one time should be limited, using a rule of one person per 4sqm, including staff and volunteers, and people should remain a distance of 1.5m apart wherever possible. It may be helpful to mark this distance on the floor near service counters as a reminder to visitors.

*As of 5/04/2020*

## KINDERGARTEN

### We have a kindergarten operating from a church-owned building. Do we need to close it?

Early Learning Centres, including kindergartens, are considered to be "education" and, as such, are not currently covered in the list of services to be closed. Social Distancing regulations should be encouraged wherever possible.

*As of 21/05/2020*

## WORSHIP RESOURCES

### Where can I access worship resources to help me keep connected?

Our worship resources page, which caters for all people across our Synod, is updated each week. Available at: <https://victas.uca.org.au/resources/covid-19-worship-resources/>

*As of 6/04/2020*

## PRE-RECORDING WORSHIP

### Are there any differences in the requirements for pre-recording worship vs live-streaming?

As the basic process is the same for both, the same practices should be applied.

*As of 6/04/2020*

## SYNOD

### What if we need to contact someone from Synod Ministries and Operations?

Whilst they may be working remotely, all Synod staff are still working.

Please contact any staff member as normal, but please be aware that they may not have all of the answers at their fingertips quite as readily as usual.

*As of 5/04/2020*

## CONGREGATION WEBSITE TRAINING

### Will training sessions for new congregation websites still go ahead?

These have been postponed indefinitely. Congregations and presbyteries that have booked training days will be contacted with alternative dates when this becomes possible.

*As of 27/03/2020*







## **JOBKEEPER PAYMENTS**

### **What is happening with the Jobkeeper payments?**

The first reimbursement of the JobKeeper Payments for the month of April has now been reimbursed to congregations. These reimbursements have been credited to the same account from which stipends/wages are charged.

JobKeeper payments apply from April to September 2020. Each month the Australian Taxation Office will pay the Synod and the Synod will then forward amounts to congregations in the 4th week of each month.

Congregations should record the JobKeeper payments in their accounts as a receipt – “Grants received Government”. **The amount should not be paid to ministers/staff as they have already been paid through the normal payroll processes.**

The Synod will manage all reporting to the ATO, including monthly declarations of revenue. This is based on the Synod operations and not on individual congregation results. There is no need to submit monthly revenue results.

Unfortunately efforts to qualify for the Cash Boost Payment have been unsuccessful at this stage.

Congregations are reminded that the JobKeeper Payment has been implemented by the Government to help employers keep staff and restart when the crisis is over.

### **Some questions:**

#### **Do casuals need to submit timesheets?**

Where a casual is normally paid by submitting timesheets, these need to continue to be submitted, even if it's for a small shift.

#### **Do staff need to continue to work?**

Yes. The JobKeeper payment processes allow an employer to reasonably alter an employee's duties, location and days of work. We would advise congregations to find all staff (including casuals)

some work tasks to do even if it's from home. You might need to be creative and/or ask the staff what they may be able to contribute. Some ideas shared in the zoom meeting – for Playgroup workers contacting parents, providing activity packs, zoom catch up with children, sing alongs etc. Admin staff may also be used to keep in contract with members, email/deliver newsletters, filing etc. The work may not be what they normally do.

#### **For Part-time/Casuals who receive a top up payment do Superannuation and Long Service Leave levies (portable LSL) apply on \$1500?**

Superannuation Guarantee is only paid on the normal hours. For those submitting timesheets this will be based on the hours work by their normal pay rate. As such it does not include super on the top up payment. The situation with the LSL levies is unclear. We have been in contact with the the Portable Long Service Authority and they have indicated “We are currently seeking further advice on our position relating to the Job Keeper payment.

Once the Authority has finalised its position we will make external communications to employers.” For further information, please contact [payroll@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:payroll@victas.uca.org.au)

*As of 05/06/2020*

## **COVID SAFE APP**

### **Should we encourage downloading the Federal Government's Covid-Safe tracing app?**

Synod Ministries and Operations would strongly recommend that all people in ministry download the Covid-Safe tracing app and also encourage all Uniting Church members to do so. As worship services recommence, this is a simple measure to help maintain the safety of our members as they start to gather again.

*As of 14/05/2020*





## ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING LICENCES

### What does it cost for a Zoom meeting licence?

If you plan on using Zoom frequently and/or require full functionality, Synod Ministries and Operations along with other Synods have negotiated with Zoom to purchase a bulk deal. As such we are able to provide Zoom licences for a cost of just \$7.93 per month.

If your presbytery or congregation is interested, please contact:

[Shweta.Paliwal@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:Shweta.Paliwal@victas.uca.org.au).

You will need to provide: Number of licences required and the details of the contact person (including their email address)

*As of 20/04/2020*

## FIRST AID PRECAUTIONS

### In the event of someone needing first aid treatment, are there any additional precautions required?

Anyone administering first aid should use general droplet and contact precautions, namely a face mask for the person they are treating which they should encourage the person to apply themselves, a face mask and gloves for the first aider, and goggles for the first aider (if available).

In the event that a first aider has a reason to suspect a person is infected with COVID-19, they should try to limit their contact with that person as much as they can, meaning they should avoid physical contact (e.g. checking pulses and performing physical assessments) unless absolutely necessary, such as performing CPR or putting people in a recovery position if they are unconscious and/or struggling to breathe.

*As of 11/06/2020*

## CROSSLIGHT

### Will *Crosslight* continue to be published?

Our Communications team will continue to produce *Crosslight*, however while the current lockdowns are in place, it will only be available online, as either a “**flip book**” (which can be read on screen) or as a printable PDF. The June “Flip book” edition is available at: [https://issuu.com/ucavictas/docs/2020cross\\_06june](https://issuu.com/ucavictas/docs/2020cross_06june)

We hope to resume publishing the printed version of *Crosslight* for the next edition in August.

News and feature stories are posted to *Crosslight*'s website on a regular basis available at: [www.crosslight.org.au](http://www.crosslight.org.au)

*As of 11/06/2020*

## UPDATED INFORMATION

### How will we know if the information on this page is still current?

This FAQ sheet will be updated WEEKLY and re-sent in every Coronavirus edition of eNews. Please check this page each week for anything which is of particular interest. If in doubt, check with Synod Ministries and Operations or with your presbytery.

*As of 6/04/2020*

## OTHER QUESTIONS

### What if we have questions that aren't on this FAQ sheet?

Ask the relevant person/department at Synod or your presbytery. This FAQ document will contain additional topics as they become known.

*As of 6/04/2020*

