

Linda Driver

From: Rev Felicity Amery <gensec@sa.uca.org.au>
Sent: Thursday, 26 March 2020 11:34 AM
To: Linda Driver
Subject: Letter from the General Secretary to SA Synod (25 March 20)

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The United Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia

From the **General Secretary**

25 March 20

As we continue to be the church, created in God's image, gifted and called, I bring greetings to Ministers, Pastors, Chaplains, Congregations and other ministries from the Synod. These are extraordinary times as God invites us into deep reflection and conversation around what it means to be the church.

Not being able to gather as we have for decades, being isolated from family and friends, exploring unfamiliar ways of giving and receiving – we are experiencing grief and loss.

With our rapidly changing routines, empty supermarket shelves and closed church buildings we lament feelings of loneliness and confusion.

As you reach out to each other in new and innovative ways, may you welcome and embrace the hope and joy that comes to us as we recognise Christ's light and life in our hearts.

It seems that each day there are news reports that further restrict our activity. As the government seeks to curb the rapid spread of COVID-19 we are further challenged around how we ensure the essential elements of being the church can be nurtured and grown.

Worship, pray, the study the scriptures, and our care for others, remain the essential activities of the church. As we attend to these practices there are some guiding principles that we need to adhere to. It is vitally important to ensure that;

- Reducing the transmission of COVID-19 is the primary objective - protecting the health of all Australians, but particular the vulnerable members of our community is paramount
- Large gatherings, whether indoor or outdoor, and organised events are to be avoided
- We adhere to Government advice to STAY HOME unless we need to shop for basics, for medical care, or to care for someone who is unwell
- Visits to homes or premises are kept to a minimum and should be brief

- Where ever possible, organisations and businesses should make provision for people to work from home

What does this mean for UCA congregations and other ministries in SA:

The Synod of SA recognises that both worship and pastoral care are essential.

Worship and church activities

- All worship services in church buildings were suspended from Monday 23 March.
- It is no longer possible to meet together in our church buildings and we encourage congregations to continue to meet online and in small family groups.
- There is a maximum of five essential personnel allowed to gather for the preparation of worship resources. Appropriate physical distancing must be adhered to (4m² per person and 1.5m apart), with strict hygiene practices.
- It is now time for congregations who employ staff to move to skeleton staff only in your buildings – no more than two people working in the office at any one time. Please encourage staff to work from home as much as possible.
- If anyone is in the high risk category for COVID-19, they must not be present.
- If churches are producing printed resources, you can deliver them to members but with strict safety measures to comply with government’s regulations.
- There is a full list of online and non-digital church resources available at the Synod Website: sa.uca.org.au/uniting-church-media-releases/free-online-church-resources-from-sa-uniting-church-congregations which will be updated regularly.
- No outdoor church of any size activities including worship should be conducted as the priority at this time is the safety of the community and playing a part in reducing transmission rates of COVID-19.

Pastoral care

- Now more than ever, your fellow church members may be in need of pastoral care, even if that happens in the form of a phone call, text message or other social media outreach methods.
- Please take care of one another, look out for your ministers or pastors, take care of yourself, be gentle with one another and remember it is only for a season. While church buildings are not being utilised, it will be important that the grounds are maintained and the buildings checked regularly

Small groups/ bible study groups

- All gatherings, including Bible study groups, craft groups and non- associated groups need to be suspended.
- Consider online gathering arrangements, video conferencing or phone calls

Weddings

- Weddings are permitted with only the couple, celebrant and witnesses (5 people maximum). The physical distancing rules apply.

Baptisms

- All baptisms should be postponed until further notice.

Funerals

- No more than 10 people may be present at funerals. We recognise that this is a most difficult restriction for our congregations and we encourage congregational leaders to, with permission, explore ways of enabling the community to grieve and the possibility of recording such events in preparation for memorial services in the future.
- **Please continue to be in touch with your presbytery to share resources, ideas and ways of pastorally caring for each other at this time.**

As congregations and other ministries start to get used to these new ways of being, members and office bearers recognise that there are both property and financial implications.

- While church buildings are not being utilised, it will be important that the grounds are maintained and the buildings checked regularly.
- Please arrange for offerings to be given via direct debit or arrange a safe process of collecting envelopes and other cash offerings in ways that adhere to the physical distancing rules.
- The financial impact of this pandemic is being felt across our community and we are aware of the impact on our congregations and communities and the flow on effects to all parts of the church's life.
- The Synod is working hard to prepare information which will be available in the days ahead around financial management during this time.
- As of Monday 30 March, the Synod office will move into remote mode, with staff working from home.
- We will still be working and are here for you to support your ministry
- Congregations involved with the distribution of emergency relief food parcels must contact Rev. Tim Hodgson (Executive Officer UnitingCare SA): thodgson@sa.uca.org.au or 8236 4276 before proceeding.

Most importantly at this very different time;

- Look out for each other, maintain connection and worship God in new and different ways
- Continue to pray for your church leaders, the decision makers and health professionals, as they all seek God's guidance and the best way forward
- As the situation changes daily, please keep a regular check on the Synod website (<https://sa.uca.org.au/uniting-church-media-releases/covid-19-update>), as well as Government advice through health.gov.au/news/health-alerts and sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019
- If you have any questions, please contact our Associate General Secretary, Rev Sue Page spage@sa.uca.org.au or 8236 4217 or Executive Officer Placements and Safe Church, Rev Philip Gardner pgardner@sa.uca.org.au or 8236 4268

Thank you for all you are seeking to do to nurture and encourage each other in faith and to build the body of Christ. As we give our hearts, minds and hands to the transforming love of God in the world, may we show courage in Jesus and comfort in your Holy Spirit.

Rev Felicity Amery



General Secretary, Synod of South Australia

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