

## COVID -19 Update 24 March 2020

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In the past two days there has been a flurry of pronouncements from those whom God has placed in authority over us. The Prime Minister issued a [press release](#) on Sunday 22 March, 2020 and the Victorian Premier has issued three press releases, two on Sunday 22 March ([1](#) and [2](#)) and one on [Monday 23 March](#) (up to 11.00 a.m.)

In terms of church gatherings, the salient points from the Prime Minister's announcements are:

Premiers and Chief Ministers agreed to implement, through state and territory laws, new Stage 1 restrictions on social gatherings, to be reviewed on a monthly basis. Australians should expect these measures to be in place for at least 6 months.

"Religious gatherings, places of worship or funerals (in enclosed spaces and other than very small groups and where the 1 person per 4 square metre rule applies) will be barred from opening or operating from midday local time on 23 March 2020. These measures also apply to outdoor spaces associated with the above venues."

By this statement, even physical gatherings in an outdoor setting for religious purposes (worship/youth group/Bible study/Board of Management/Session/Presbytery or Assembly) are no longer allowed and the various state and territory parliaments will put measures in place to ensure that these new restrictions are enforced.

In Victoria, the Premier has already announced the establishment of an enforcement regime: a police task force has been set up. Below is an extract from the Premier's press release of 23 March:

*"Victoria Police has established a coronavirus enforcement squad of five hundred officers to ensure containment measures that have been put in place to combat coronavirus are followed.*

*Coordinated through the Police Operations Centre, the officers will be out in the community doing spot checks on returning travellers who are in 14-day isolation, as well as enforcing the bans on indoor and outdoor gatherings."*

Therefore, any religious gathering where people physically meet together, whether indoors or outdoors, has now become unlawful and will remain unlawful possibly for up to six months.

It is important for us to recognise that this prohibition on meeting for worship (physically) is not an act of religious persecution but a determination made by the parliament for reasons that are within its proper province and which we are conscience-bound to observe.

**Virtual or on-line meetings are legal** and we encourage the widest use of technological aids to facilitate and enhance relationships amongst our congregations and within our communities.

Following contacting a Victorian state government officer directly on 1800 675 398, we can confirm that the ban does not prevent a small number of people working on the production of a live stream or a pre-recorded church service providing the spatial (4sqm) rules and other health and safety rules, are adhered to.

**Can external organisation use “church premises”?**

Our insurers have guided us to be prudent on this matter and recommend that we close our doors to other external parties using church property. They have suggested we should ask external users to temporarily cease their group activities and move to alternative means of meeting unless their activities are subject to government directions, such as early learning centres and pre-schools.

Whilst we recognise this is a decision for relevant charges to make you are reminded to manage your own risks and compliance with COVID-19 directives from government. Please note this situation is evolving rapidly and may change again in the next week. We pray that this pestilence will soon come to an end as we look to our Lord and Saviour to continue building His church which the gates of hell will not prevail against.

May God continue to bless you all!