

## **Implications to ministry with changes to regulations regarding COVID-19**

As we, as a society, have faced the threat of COVID-19, there have been many ways in which our freedoms as individuals and community groups have been limited. This has had a large impact on the life of our congregations but the effort, focus and imagination that our congregations have put into maintaining connections with each other, in providing for the worship needs and also seeking to serve our communities have been heartening for us all. We wish to thank you all for your faithful, diligent and creative service.

### **Changed Measures/Restrictions from April 26 2020**

There are also other positive signs, as the restrictions placed on our communities are changed. This note is based upon the changes to the directions for WA given on April 26, in which there were some significant freedoms returned, but we need to be aware that these directions change over time and it is important to consult with the WA [health website](#) or seek help in planning activities. It would be wonderful if we could find ways in which our ministry could be enhanced by using these freedoms in a way that also respects the safety concerns our communities still are facing.

### **No Change to Some Restrictions**

The first area we should comment on is one where there has been little change. The directions make it clear that our worship centres are closed by law with three exceptions:

- Weddings
- Funerals
- Use of the facility to prepare worship services by electronic recording or transmission.

In all of these cases, the appropriate social distancing of 1.5 m between people and good hygiene practices must be maintained.

We have recently received some requests about holding funerals on UCA sites, we wish to continue to recommend that congregations request their people to use the chapels provided for funeral directors as these are designed for easy cleaning and have professional cleaning arrangements. If you are to consider using your worship centre for any of the permitted purposes mentioned above, you need to be particularly mindful that these buildings will need to be thoroughly cleaned before and after usage and hygiene facilities provided to show the appropriate hospitality for a community that has heightened sensitivity to these matters.

### **Measures Providing More Freedom**

In better news, there are other arrangements in which there are more freedoms for us to gather. Before we race out and give each other the hugs that so many people are looking forward to, we need to remember that there are some important boundaries that these new freedoms rely upon. The first, and probably most important, principle is that people who are feeling any cold and flu symptoms should exercise restraint and withdraw from these gatherings and people who have particular risk factors to COVID -19 due to age and/or health factors will also need to abstain from such gatherings for their own safety. As we are a Church that places a high value on inclusion, when we choose to exercise these freedoms we will need to be mindful and respectful of those who cannot participate.

The first key freedom is that groups of ten are now allowed to gather either in private homes or in public areas provided that the physical distancing rules are observed. So for 10 people to gather in a room the room would need to be an undivided space of 40 square metres in size i.e. a little larger 6X6

metres. This is larger than most lounge rooms. It does however provide some particular opportunities for our life as a church and as individuals.

Ministry agents, lay leaders and church members are now able to visit each other. Until this point, visits on behalf of the Church have been restricted to those made by employees. While this restriction is no longer valid, many of the principles remain. We need to be mindful of the risks that such visitations pose both to the visitor and those being visited, and also need to be mindful of the sensitivity people may have about receiving visitors. For these reasons we suggest the following principles:

- That visits to people be prearranged, rather than just dropping in
- That visits not be made to or by people with the risk factors identified above
- That physical contact not occur, and the visitor only to enter homes in which social distancing (a minimum of 4 m<sup>2</sup> per person and a distance of 1.5 m between them) can be maintained and all parties are comfortable for that to happen.
- That good handwashing hygiene is practiced by all parties before and after meeting
- That we refrain from offering or receiving food and drinks from each other in visits

### **Meetings of 10 People in the Church Context**

These principles can also be applied in the context of gatherings of up to 10 people. Imagine the case of a small group that has gathered for many years at one of their member's residence. They have 10 members who usually gather around a table. Even if a couple of members withdraw due to protective measures, it would be hard to meet in a normal lounge. The group would have to either split into two smaller groups, or to find a suitable space (for example another person's backyard or veranda) where they could meet and maintain social distancing. They could include the members who missed out by making a video or audio call during their gathering or writing a letter or card from the group during the session. Of course, if food or drink is to be consumed it would be best practice for each person to bring their own.

### **Sporting/Recreational Activities**

There are similar opportunities for sport, as long as the sport is one that inherently maintains social distancing (such as tennis or golf) or that, rather than playing the sport in its whole, participation is restricted to training drills where social distancing can be maintained. Therefore, while golf, tennis and cricket can be played on a community, football and hockey players would need to practice their sport with reduced drills. One example could be a youth group that enjoys playing basketball. While they may not play the full sport at this time due to social distancing requirements, they could gather on a court and have a shooting competition. If they are imaginative enough, they could even make sure their member who has elderly parents at home could compete using their own net.

Perhaps this is time for us to dream, without pushing the boundaries. You could even have a hit or kick around for a small group in a park, watched by people on picnic blankets who share lunchtime out in the sun while maintaining appropriate distancing for the safety of all involved.

### **Shared Responsibility to Keep these Freedoms**

When doing this, we need to be mindful that these freedoms are dependent on *all of us* using them responsibly, and we as individuals and as groups need to be mindful that we act with respect towards the intention of these rules and, hopefully, we can demonstrate that we can do these things with appropriate respect for ourselves and each other so that these freedoms may be extended rather than restricted.