

## **Additional Safety Information, May 28, 2020**

These notes will be periodically prepared in order to circulate generally some queries that have been passed on to the Presbytery and Synod officers over the course of the week. The intent of these is to provide further information regarding particular risks at a moment in time and allow for particular activities to be considered within a Church Council's general COVID 19 safety planning. Please feel free to raise other issues with us to include in future communications.

Once again, it is important that we keep reminding our congregations of the important protections of maintaining physical distancing, good hygiene practices and the need to keep ourselves and others safe by withdrawing if we are unwell or in a vulnerable category.

### **Singing**

There has been some discussion between Ministers and others regarding the particular risks of singing. Music has been a significant part of the life of the Church over history, and has had particular emphasis within our own tradition where we believe that we sing our faith. That being said, there are some reasons why Ministers and Church Councils may need to consider whether this activity poses a significant risk for their congregations if and when they gather. Overseas, there have been some events where a concerning spread of the virus has been associated with the activity of singing, and a mechanism by which the disease is spread has been hypothesised. As of yet, we have not received any specific safety notices relating to this activity from health authorities and therefore cannot make any rulings, but we recommend that worship leaders and Church Councils consider if this activity may place any vulnerable people at risk. In the case where a Church Council or worship leader choose to refrain from this activity, it will be important that other means of incorporating music into their worship life be considered.

### **Play Groups**

We have received a request about the resumption of play groups in our properties. This activity provides a wonderful opportunity for congregations to connect with their community, for children to socialise as part of their development and also have an opportunity for parents to build community and support each other. It needs to be noted that, at this stage, the exemption of children from the social distance area calculations provided for schools and education facilities does not apply to worship centres – and thus our activities or those of community groups. We note that some community groups have moved their playgroups on to online platforms, and comment that this may be a way to both minimise risks and allow people to participate who may otherwise be unable to attend.

In terms of safety considerations it is important to consider the welfare of parents and children in particular.

Activities should be chosen with an eye to allowing children to interact while seeking to support parents in their training of their children to maintain social distancing (which will vary from family to family and group to group). This will also include a strong emphasis of hand washing and general hygiene as healthy habits. We should also be conscious of setting up spaces and activities that will be easy to clean up afterwards, and to make protective equipment available for those who request it.

One of the joys of the play group is the gathering of parents, and often the shared time with more experienced parents, apart from their children. Leaders and organisers of activities will need to be mindful of the maximum occupancies of spaces such as kitchens and may find it helpful to set up a hospitable space which maintains social distancing in an appropriate area.

David Ferguson, Presbytery Officer and Cindy Gorton, Executive Officer: Culture of Safety