

Dear members and friends of Bethlehem Lutheran Church Morley,

As you are aware, things have continued to move pretty quickly since our last update on Saturday. Many of our members and friends have been stood down from work due to the restrictions applied to 'non-essential' gatherings and 'non-essential' services. Please keep in touch with each other and our pastor about these matters, and keep each other in prayer... 'Give us today our daily bread' (Matthew 6:11). Many of us also saddened by the prospect of effectively being cut off from interstate and internationally residing relatives, including in some cases, fragile and at-risk parents, siblings and children... 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10b). Many of us are concerned about the health risks of this virus... '...deliver us from evil...' (Matthew 6:13b).

Bethlehem Lutheran Church Morley is not immune from the restrictions applied by the National Cabinet to indoor and outdoor religious gatherings. Council met on Sunday prior to the PMs announcement, but had already decided to extend the suspension of public worship at Bethlehem beyond 5 April given the way the restrictions were increasingly getting tighter. This morning the Lutheran Church of Australia College of Bishops released further advice in relation to the suspensions. We commend this to you. <https://www.lca.org.au/lca-covid-19-response/>

The first few paragraphs are copied here for convenience:

### **1. Stop gathering in church buildings**

Government directives are quite clear on this matter. We must close our physical church buildings and worship centres for the duration. Australia has a Christian, church-going Prime Minister, and he would not ask us to do this lightly. This means no Sunday morning, Lenten, or other church services, small group bible studies or prayer times in our buildings or in the church grounds.

And yes, sadly, this means no Holy Communion for the time being. The bishops ask you not to trial any experimental practices in your congregation. Communion is not magic. It is the community meal of the church, instituted by the Lord of the church, not a private spiritual act. Returning to the altar for the bread and the wine, once this is all over, will be a sweet and special moment, a special celebration of God's redeeming grace. While it is central to the regular life of the church, in times of duress our faith and salvation do not utterly depend on receiving Communion. God has many ways of feeding us with his word and the water of eternal life – let's explore them and make use of them.

### **2. Gather however you can, without physical proximity**

We will continue to hold Services of the Word in whatever way we can, using whatever means God has made available to us. When St Paul wrote to the churches from his Roman prison cell, he had the Spirit, a message, some parchment, ink, and a quill. Praise God, we still have the Spirit and that message, the gospel of salvation, and we also have the internet, phones, printed materials, and (still) a physical postage system for those not yet adapted to the digital era. If Paul could do it in the 1st century, we can do it in the 21st!

The dot points below summarise the decisions taken by our Bethlehem Council:

- Worship at Bethlehem Lutheran Church Morley will not be held until Australian and WA State governments lift the restrictions. This includes Sunday School. Elissa emailed families today about this.
- There will be no Wednesday night Lenten devotions and Bible studies.
- The church is closed for gatherings of groups. This includes for meetings of groups. Pastoral care and discussion in person with pastor will generally be undertaken remotely in anticipation of higher stages of social distancing. Please contact pastor to discuss your needs though.
- Pastor to focus on delivering ministry that doesn't double up on efforts undertaken by other congregations. To that end, at this stage we will not be producing a livestreamed service given the many other LCA options available for that. See <https://www.lca.org.au/worship/wpp/> for live streaming options.
- Instead our focus will be on resourcing you for a solid walk with Christ through this time. Expect plenty of prayer, worship and other resources along with some written and audio sermons. We will get a FB page going to supplement the Messenger list set up at the weekend. Expect what is offered will also evolve. It is also an equal focus to enhance our personal pastoral care and interaction with the help of our pastoral assistants. Pastor will update you shortly on some of the pastoral care initiatives (beyond some general info below).
- For the next couple of weeks Bethlehem will provide worship slides and a sermon for meditation at a link from our website for the next couple of Sundays. Last Sunday's slides and sermon can be accessed from here <https://blcmorleywa.org/pastors-page/> If you are having trouble accessing this please let Pastor Matt know at [matt.bishop@lca.org.au](mailto:matt.bishop@lca.org.au) Where we are aware that not all members and friends are online and will be endeavouring to provide paper copies.
- Resources for Easter will be provided, but exactly 'what' they are is still a work in progress. Please email Pastor Matt your favourite Easter Songs and reasons as it would be good to feature some of these in what is put together.
- We will, as the College of Bishop's have asked, focus on the Word and Water (of Baptism), looking forward to the time when we can come together again for the Lord's Supper. Pastor had hoped it might have been possible to still serve you in the Lord's Supper in some way. But just as Christ has sustained his church for 2000 years through the Lord's Supper, so too Word and water is central. It will be good to focus on these areas, just as we already do week in, week out.
- Chris Kuchel has been elected by the Bethlehem Council to the position of pastoral assistant under special emergency provision in the Bethlehem Lutheran Church Morley Constitution. Thank you Chris for agreeing to undertake this important task. Please pray for Chris that he may generously share the love and nurture of Christ, and himself be well equipped in all things over this period. Less formally, but nevertheless importantly, Yvonne Giersch is also helping the pastoral assistants at this time (prayers too please). Please let Pastor Matt know if you are interested in assisting with some of the 'remote' ministry and

pastoral care opportunities that will present, or if you have any suggestions you want to pass on.

- Council and Pastoral Assistants are keen to ensure Bethlehem's members and friends physical needs are met at this time. Please let Pastor Matt (0420 958 898) or John Zadow (9276 2231) know if you need some groceries delivered, help getting somewhere or the like. Thank you to several members that have offered to help out in these areas, including doing shopping for elderly members or those who are/become sick.
- Lastly, please email [matt.bishop@lca.org.au](mailto:matt.bishop@lca.org.au) if you do not want these emails or know of others who are not getting them and would like to receive them. The contact list is a work in progress.

We finish this update with a quote from C S Lewis (then one from St Peter!) It's from an essay Lewis wrote in 1948 called 'On Living in an Atomic Age'.

*This is the first point to be made: and the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things – praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts – not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.*

So... while in these days of social distancing we might have to enjoy a refreshment with each other remotely, the sentiment is wise, and the reference to the microbe seems almost prophetic! It can all be summed up in inspired advice of St Peter to one of his congregations: 'Lay your anxieties on him (Jesus), because he cares for you' (1 Peter 5:7). An eternally good recommendation!

Blessings in Christ

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