

Lobethal Lutheran Church

Know, Live and Share Jesus



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A Pastoral Response to the impact of Novel Coronavirus Covid-19

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1)

The many and varied entities of the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) have been taking various actions in response to government recommendations and mandates in order to try and stem the spread of Novel Coronavirus Covid-19. Travel bans are in place, some have experienced enforced quarantine or been directed to self-isolation, while at a local church level guidelines have been produced (and acted on) in relation to “social distancing” and general hygiene in worship.

While the leadership of Lobethal Lutheran Church does not want to add to what at times might seem a circus of media hype, we do think it is time to address you the people of Lobethal Lutheran Church directly.

As recently as the morning of Wednesday, 18 March 2020, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced a further raft of new measures to limit the spread of the Novel Coronavirus Covid-19. It has now become our responsibility as the body of Christ in this place to urge each and every member of our community to respond to these measures and act in a way that limits exposure for ourselves and for the well-being of our neighbours at church and in the wider community. This responsibility is motivated out of the duty of love we owe our neighbour according to the fifth commandment, which reminds us, “We are to fear and love God so that we do not hurt our neighbour in any way, but help him in all his physical needs” (The Small Catechism).

The situation regarding Novel Coronavirus Covid-19 is of course very fluid and rapidly changing. As you would therefore expect responses to it within our church have not been, nor will they be uniform across the whole of the LCA. As Luther noted in his document on the advent of the plague in Wittenberg, “...different people will make different decisions based upon circumstance and vocation”. Be that as it may, it is important that we trust the information being disseminated to us from the leadership of the LCA; information and guidelines which are based on the most up to date Australian Government sources. Be assured that on the basis of this information, we the leadership are taking appropriate action, as are the Pastoral Assistants (PA’s) and other lay leaders.

Regarding protecting yourself and others, firstly, and most importantly, please **STAY AT HOME IF YOU ARE FEELING UNWELL**, and ring your doctor.

Please remember to wash and sanitize your hands regularly, and cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue, and avoid touching your face. We will bring you in to a carefully cleaned area, and to ensure this each worship service will utilize one half of the church only, guaranteeing a cleaned environment for all.

Given the seriousness of this virus, its fluidity and potential for much greater spread of infection, we have decided on the following necessary actions:

1. Your offering envelope can be placed in the bowls provided on your arrival at church – the ushers will assist you to get used to this and other new processes.
2. You will be ushered to a seat to ensure safe distancing for yourself and others, and the use of the correct half of the church as previously mentioned.
3. In response to guidelines provided today (20 March 2020) by the College of Bishops, Holy Communion is to be suspended at this time. The College of Bishops have also advised that we are to plan what we will do, if and most likely when, we must temporarily stop gathering for public worship. There is a high probability of this becoming necessary, to care for and protect those most at risk from the virus, and our government is likely to mandate this shortly.
4. The pew cushions have been removed at this time to ensure safe cleaning practices can be guaranteed.
5. Use of the children's area at the rear of the church and the retreat room will be suspended at this time.
6. Morning tea following services will be suspended at this time.
7. Gathering in the narthex after service will be suspended at this time, with the parishioners in the rear seats leaving first and exiting to the outside. Once outside, please remember to keep an area of 4 square metres of free distance around you if you choose to converse, and please be very mindful of respecting others now expanded personal space.

Lastly, and **STILL** most importantly, please, please **STAY AT HOME IF YOU ARE FEELING UNWELL**, and ring your doctor – the importance of this cannot be stressed enough. If unwell, staying home from church is what we **MUST DO** out of Christian love and concern for each other.

Our overall response should be seen as a preventative approach aimed at harm minimization and risk management. At the same time, we seek to address people's fears pastorally and through the implementation of good hygiene practices. The actions outlined are also consistent with our Prime Minister's announcement as well as statements from our Bishop, John Henderson, (including our SA District Bishop, David Altus), and the guidelines developed by the LCA's Commission on Worship (COW). Having said all of this, we the leadership, recognise that the situation could change rapidly, and we may well be forced to have to reconsider our response to the impact of Novel Coronavirus Covid-19. You can therefore expect from us regular and timely updates as the situation changes.

In the meantime we urge you in love to be patient with one another as we strive together to be faithful in our calling as God's children and responsible in terms of our duty of care we have for one another and for our wider community.

We also encourage you, whether you choose to "self-isolate", attend church or not, to remember to be generous in the weeks ahead as attendances and offerings may be low. Remember that "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work" (1 Corinthians 9:8). If you are not already using Regular Electronic Giving, then I encourage you to avail yourself of this opportunity. We will provide information in the bulletin as to how you may go about this. Look out for it!

In Luke chapter twenty one, Jesus foretold all the kinds of things that would mark the time just before his second coming. He talks about wars and rumours of wars, of earthquakes, famine, persecution and much more. He even mentions pestilence. Most importantly, Jesus says at the end of his end time speech, "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28). Though we don't know when this time will take place, no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, these words of Jesus are a reassurance that we have nothing to fear.

Returning now to the quote at the introduction of this letter, you all know that these words from Psalm 46 are a part of Luther's famous Reformation hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God". But you may not know that Luther wrote this hymn during the plague in Wittenberg in 1527.

*"A mighty fortress is our God,
A trusty shield and weapon,
Our faithful helper in all need,
Our stay, whate'er may happen..."*

Your times and mine are in the Lord's hands, and nothing can snatch us out of his hands, or separate us from his love (John 10:28; Romans 8:39). As his beloved children each and every one of you can take hold today of his marvellous promise that "...in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

At this time, we ask for your patience and understanding as we all struggle with the implications of this pandemic. And be assured that as we struggle together, "not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another" (Hebrews 10:25), we will all be drawn closer to Jesus and so to each other.

We will update you soon. In the meantime,

*"The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look upon you with favour, and give you \dagger peace".
Amen. Amen. Amen".*

Pastor Joe Kummerow

Farrah Seidel
Chairperson