



20 July 2020

Dear Friends,

We are writing to update you on our Parish's response to the Coronavirus and on how our plans for services and activities at St Swithun's are changing and developing.

Those plans need to change. Our last letter, only a few weeks ago, was written as the virus seemed to be coming under control when we felt we could plan cautiously for the resumption of services. Given recent outbreaks in both Sydney and Melbourne, though, it is now becoming clear that such confidence was misplaced. It now seems that we must tolerate many more months of restrictions.

As before, our plans are driven by several core decisions and beliefs. First, we will comply with all legal requirements and not try to push the limits of these. Equally, we will comply with recommendations from both the Government and the Diocese, again without skirting the boundaries. Thirdly, we will comply with the recommendations of our own medical advisory panel, which comprises several expert members of the congregation.

Fourthly, we have taken a deliberately conservative approach to the risks of the virus spreading into or through the congregations. Recent outbreaks have shown that the virus does not just attack the elderly and the vulnerable, but the whole community. Recent studies also suggest that the long-term effects for those who contract the virus may be much more severe than those of a 'normal' flu. We realise that some other parishes have been more liberal and have opened up more swiftly but, motivated by our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ, we do not believe that this is a prudent approach and are planning accordingly.

To answer some of the questions we have been asked:

***When will the traditional morning services recommence?*** When it is safer to do so - given the current spread of the virus, probably not for several months to come, perhaps well into 2021.

***But the Family Church and Night Church services have recommenced – is that fair?*** Those services are still Zoom services with limited numbers of people attending in person, based on the risks as they appeared at the end of June. However, in the light of recent developments, any decision to recommence any live services on site has been put on hold at present.

***Will the online services continue?*** Not just continue but improve! Until now, we have looked at online delivery as a stop-gap, temporary solution until physical services resume. We are now faced with a longer period of online delivery than anticipated. The online services have largely been produced by a splendid band of volunteers who have given very generously of their time and their equipment, but we cannot expect that to continue indefinitely, and so we may need to acquire equipment and to recruit staff with the right level of technical skill.

***What are you doing to enhance online services?*** We hope to move to more 'live' rather than pre-recorded services, with a strictly limited number in the congregation as a 'studio audience'. To do this properly and regularly will require more equipment and more skills than we currently have, but we see this as an investment for the future. As online services continue, our website and social media will also need expansions and improvements.



**Are weddings and funerals conducted safely?** Yes, we have a detailed COVID-19 Safety Plan, registered with the NSW Government, and accessible on our website. We discuss this in depth with wedding parties and funeral directors and brief them on what is expected, as well as conducting temperature checks and registration of all attendees with contact details and specifying 'social distancing' requirements. In these events, where most attendees are invited and numbers are known in advance, it is easier to manage risks than in an 'open to the public' church service, though we still rely heavily on the cooperation of those attending.

**If we cannot come back to Church, how can we have fellowship?** Home groups are meeting again, many of them face-to-face. There are several new opportunities online for fellowship, including a prayer meeting on Tuesdays and a 'virtual morning tea' on Wednesdays – details are in the weekly SwizMail. We are planning to expand pastoral care initiatives as and when possible. As always, if you need any assistance or simply want to talk to someone, please call the Office.

**What about outreach?** Mainly Music may commence again shortly, under very carefully controlled conditions. Outreach activities into the local community will commence soon. The online services are also attracting a regular audience from many places beyond Pymble (including internationally) and enhancements to the online services will include encouragement for people to visit our website for further information and follow up, hence the need to expand the website.

Together with the Parish Council, and with much prayerful thought and discussion we are very actively planning and carrying out those plans so that we can better serve our congregations and meet our mission:

***"To engage with our community in such a way that, by sharing the transforming love of God, people become followers of Jesus"***

Please contact any of us if you have any questions or comments on any of this information. We are monitoring issues closely and meeting very frequently to discuss what more needs to be done or changed to preserve our safety and will communicate further whenever necessary as matters develop.

Blessings,

Roger and the Wardens (Ross Millar, Robin Hall and Bruce Kinghorn)