

9 November 2021

Dear Ministers, Parish Clerks, Sessions and Church Councils

Warm greetings from the Council of Assembly.

Transitioning to living with Covid-19 in our communities within the context of the New Zealand Covid-19 Protection Framework is not easy. With weighty decision in front of us, complex pastoral needs to address and the responsibility to nurture Christian love among people with different views, we can easily feel overwhelmed.

“But Christ, as the Son, is in charge of God’s entire house. And we are God’s house, if we keep our courage and remain confident in our hope in Christ.” (NLT Hebrew 3:6) And remember, “God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. (Heb 6:18-19a)

Being Jesus Christ’s church is in the first place about relationship – with God, each other and those in our community – and secondly about being part of God’s mission in each of our settings.

Following a meeting facilitated by the Moderator, Rt Rev Hamish Galloway, with Presbytery moderators and EO’s on 27 October and a special Council of Assembly (COA) meeting on 5 November the following work is being done:

- ⇒ The Book of Order Advisory Committee is considering a wide range of guidelines and advice that would be offered to the church.
- ⇒ The Church Property Trustees are considering possible implications of the Protection Framework for facility management and use.
- ⇒ The Doctrine Core Group has been requested to offer wisdom regarding the ‘Presbyterian way’ of working out the life of the local congregation and making decisions like those required under the Covid-19 Protection Plan, and help COA reflect on a possible theological process and underpinning values Sessions and Parish Councils can use as they work their way through choices put in front of them by the Covid-19 Protection Framework.
- ⇒ COA and the AES are in the process of setting up a one point of call with up-to-date information about current requirements/legislation and the implications for the church. We hope this will be available within the next two weeks.
- ⇒ COA and the AES is seeking employment and legal advice regarding a church’s Health and Safety obligations within the context of the Protection Plan. Early indications are that legislation in this regard is not in place yet and we should be cautious not to pre-empt anything.
- ⇒ COA and the AES is working on having as up to date as possible Covid-19 information available on the PCANZ website and Facebook page, bearing in mind that the government can change guidelines without much notice or publication and the government’s Covid-19 website (<https://covid19.govt.nz/>) is the primary and official source for information on guidelines and legislation.

COA encourage congregations to share the creative and innovative ways they do church in these times with each other and with Presbyteries so that we can learn from each other. See below how Bethlehem Community Church have been constructively dealing with the situation. Presbyteries are invited to find ways of facilitating the different parts of the Body within their care to share with each other and to care for each other.

As church we should “Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying.” (NLT Rom 12:12) “Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.” (NLT Colossians 4:2)

May you experience God’s clear guidance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jaco Reyneke', with a long, sweeping flourish extending upwards and to the right.

Rev Dr Jaco Reyneke
Convenor of Council of Assembly

The Covid pandemic and the NZ government response has created a situation that has been challenging for the Church. How do we respond? Should we recommend a particular position? Get the jab or don't get the jab? As a Church we are called to be united in Christ and not to discriminate or show partiality. At BCC we decided rather than leave the situation unaddressed it would be better to enable an opportunity for those who wanted it to gather after a morning service and say what they were feeling and what they thought if they wanted to. The main purpose was to show we were one body and that we loved each other and would pray for each other, regardless of 'vaccine status' – We said if it was to be a demonstration of anything, it was to be a demonstration of love.

We've now met twice. The first was a few weeks ago and the second time this morning after worship. Over 20 people stayed (a number had wanted to but were unable). What was most encouraging was the way those who spoke were listened to in a supportive way. Some chose to say if they were jabbed or not and what they felt. We all shared deep concern over the division that we are seeing in society and in families, praying that the Church can be undivided.

I would describe our times together as being emotional, faithful, and hopeful. We all left feeling better for being together and for understanding one another in love.

God bless,

Rev Ian Pittendreigh
Bethlehem Community Church