



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

COVID-19 virus

This draft template, for communication with PCANZ staff, ministers, chaplains, parishes, and presbyteries on the diagnosis of COVID-19 virus in New Zealand, is issued by the Council of Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. It is intended as helpful guidance on how at this difficult time we can manage the life of our Church, stop coronavirus from spreading, and help those in our communities who are most at risk. This template will be updated as information comes to hand.

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COVID-19 virus

Below is information for Presbyterian and Uniting Church staff, ministers, chaplains, parishes, and presbyteries to provide guidance around the outbreak of COVID-19 virus. It provides ways we can help manage the life of our Church and our communities during this pandemic.

We are called to be a people of prayer.

Council of Assembly wishes to express solidarity and to offer the assurance of our prayers on behalf of all those who have been infected with the deadly coronavirus (COVID-19) and with the families that have lost loved ones. We also pray for healthcare personnel and other caregivers who are offering essential services and care for those infected, even at the risk of their own lives.

COVID-19 is rapidly developing into a global health crisis. The landscape and its impact here in Aotearoa New Zealand and across the globe is changing daily.

We encourage everyone to remain compliant with health and safety procedures, avoid unnecessary exposure and act responsibly to reduce the risk of spreading.

We recommend we all follow advice given by the Ministry of Health (see <https://www.health.govt.nz/>). Should instructions be issued by the Ministry of Health concerning public gatherings, parishes and Presbyterian entities will be expected to all follow these. If this circumstance arises, Council of Assembly will communicate the MoH guidelines to parishes and advise any other relevant information at that time.

Parishes are encouraged to be prepared for the implications of measures we see being put in place in other countries and be guided by recommendations from the NZ Government concerning any changes to travel and contact with other people in your community.

We encourage the offering of pastoral care to each other and others in the communities we are a part of. We also encourage understanding and compassion for those affected and their families. No one has deliberately caused harm to another, and rather than act with fear and isolationist behaviours, we should act like the good Samaritan, taking time to care for others as we would wish to be cared for.

In times like these, we are reminded that “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear...” (Ps. 46: 1-2).

Business as usual?

At times like this, we cannot always carry on business as usual. Here are some considerations that you and your organisation may need to give thought to.

Caring for People

Visiting others

- We recommend that you consider telephoning before visiting a person to confirm they are well (and you are well) and that a visit would be welcome at this time.

- Be particularly careful if considering visiting the elderly in your community, new-born babies, those in hospital, those in retirement villages and those with chronic illnesses.
- Visiting places and people that are in close communities (hospital, retirement villages and rest homes) can place extra demands on staff at times like this, and additional stress on residents. Consider telephoning rather than visiting.
- Check on vulnerable members of your community to ensure that they have support (by telephone).
- If you have not already allocated an elder or support person to each member of your faith community, we recommend that you do so now, including their name, phone numbers and email. This is to ensure that no one is missed out.
- Some people may be anxious, that is normal. Be understanding and offer assurances and support as you are able.

Access to medical support

- Unless you are a professional, please do not offer medical advice to those who are or may be unwell. You would best serve by assisting them to access the right advice and support set up for this purpose.
- Offer to call the 0800 helpline for them or make sure they have the number.
- **Phone Healthline’s dedicated COVID-19 number 0800 358 5453 or contact a GP, including phoning ahead of your visit.**
- If you or someone you know is concerned about symptoms of COVID-19 **please do not visit your local GP, medical centre or hospital without calling first to seek advice**. They will give instructions on how to access assistance.

Practical support – food and other supplies

- Check that you and those you support in your community have sufficient supplies including basic food, and essential medicine.
- If someone is in self-isolation at home, check that they have access to food, medicine and supplies, including the ability to order these for delivery on the internet.
- Don’t hoard or buy more than is required for your household.
- If you have any excess of food or supplies consider donating to a local food bank . Call beforehand to confirm your donation is welcome at this time, and how you can drop it off.

Travel advisory

We recommend we all follow travel advisories issued (see www.safetravel.govt.nz). These may be updated daily.

Existing travel arrangements

- We recommend all take advice and follow all travel advisories. We note these can change regularly and may impact travel and also require isolation – either on route and/or when re-entering New Zealand.
- Register your travel plans with Safe Travel.
- Contact your insurance company and/or travel agent for advice on refunds, credits and cancellation policies.
- Make sure your family or close friends know where you are and how to get hold of you.

Booking future international travel

- No PCANZ staff or volunteers travelling in the name of the PCANZ can book overseas travel after 2 March 2020. We have been advised that our travel insurer will not accept claims for any travel – international or domestic – related to the COVID-19 virus as it is now classed as a known event from that date.
- Please contact the Assembly Executive Officer, Rev Wayne Matheson Wayne@presbyterian.org.nz if you have any questions on booking future international travel. As soon as insurance is reinstated we will update you further regarding international travel.

Church activities

We recommend we all follow advice given by the Ministry of Health (see <https://www.health.govt.nz/>). Should they issue instructions concerning public gatherings, Presbyterian parishes and entities are expected to follow these guidelines.

- Remind parishioners to not panic, to stay informed and to take all reasonable steps to keep themselves and others safe by following good personal hygiene practices (especially washing hands regularly, not sneezing or coughing in public and into a tissue or crook of arm if you are in public, and staying home if unwell). Regularly wipe down surfaces at church with a cleaning solution that kills viruses, the coronavirus can live for up to 9 days on surfaces.
- Advice could be received that Church services and other activities may need to be postponed, changed or delivered differently in your area.
- Consider if other events in your church buildings or offices should be postponed or cancelled. This includes events being organised and run by others on your property.
- Ensure hand washing facilities have plenty of soap and towels available.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Stand at least one metre apart from anyone with cold or flu symptoms, and advise anyone sick to go home.
- Communion & the common cup: due to the risk of passing on coronavirus via fingertips, it is not recommended that intinction be practiced with the common cup. Please use small cups for each person to dip bread into.
- Communion & Passing of the Peace: while there are currently no recommendations to avoid shaking hands or hugging, please respect those who do not wish to at this time.
- Some members of your church community may suffer financial hardship if their employment status is impacted, if their business is affected or if their other sources of income have reduced. Consider what practical support you can offer.
- If you are, or you are aware of others, facing financial hardship – assistance can be found on www.workandincome.govt.nz

Church financial implications

- Parish councils and sessions should consider what financial implications could arise in your situation.
- Consider prioritising your financial commitments, and contact your bank, Inland Revenue and utility providers, local council etc if you believe that you will be unable to meet your core financial obligations
- Make sure your church has at least three people able to authorise bank transactions, in the event one or more authorised persons become sick and are unable to attend to these matters.

Presbytery meetings and gatherings

- Presbytery meetings and Gatherings may need to be postponed or carried out remotely.
- Please check your local Presbyteries website, or contact your local Presbytery for more information.
- Be aware that staff may be working from home, and therefore emailing is often the better method of contact.

PCANZ Assembly Office

- Some staff or all staff may be working remotely at times, therefore emailing may be a better method of contact.
- Assembly staff travel may be reduced during this time. If any staff member is scheduled to visit you, your presbytery or parish please contact them directly by email to establish if this meeting needs to be rescheduled.

PCANZ Moderator

- The Moderator's domestic travel may be reduced at this time. If the Moderator is scheduled to visit you, your presbytery or parish please contact him directly by email to establish if this meeting needs to be rescheduled.

PCANZ General Assembly 2020

At time of writing it is assumed that General Assembly 2020 will continue to be held in Hastings late September and early October 2020.

However, if advice is received that we need to postpone the meeting you will be advised.

Council may update and or amend this communication in the light of advice and/or direction. We repeat the words of the Psalmist: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear..." (Ps. 46: 1-2).

Richard McLean
Convener
Council of Assembly
richard@ppp.org.nz
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