



**uniting
church**
in Australia,
Synod of NSW & ACT

GUIDANCE NOTE 2c UPDATE VERSION

COVID-19

GUIDANCE NOTE

25th March 2020

REVISED INFORMATION FOLLOWING LAST NIGHT'S GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCEMENTS

As we navigate this new and challenging time, we are seeking to address concerns as they arise. Many of our congregations have been asking about how weddings and funerals can happen during the coronavirus pandemic. In all situations, the Government restrictions must be followed. Currently, this has seen the closure of all non-essential services, which includes places of worship:

Therefore, if you are preparing to conduct a wedding or funeral, please consider the following guidelines:

Weddings

This is a very difficult matter pastorally as so much planning and so many hopes are invested in a wedding day. However:

- ▶ Couples may marry, as long as no more than five people are physically present: minister, bride, groom and two witnesses. This is not negotiable.
- ▶ It may be possible to live stream the ceremony for family and friends as long as one of the witnesses holds the camera.
- ▶ Physical distancing of 4 square metres per person needs to be maintained wherever sensible.
- ▶ Any larger ceremony involving family and friends must be postponed.
- ▶ Consider simplifying the liturgy and holding a blessing service or reaffirmation of vows at a later date.
- ▶ Anyone who is running a temperature or has a cough or is self-isolating due to contact with someone with symptoms or currently being tested for COVID- 19 must not attend.

PRESBYTERIES

CANBERRA REGION

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GEORGES RIVER

ILLAWARRA

KOREAN

MACQUARIE DARLING

MID NORTH COAST

NEW ENGLAND NORTH WEST

PARRAMATTA NEPEAN

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Funerals

The Government announced that from midnight 25th March 2020, no more than ten people may physically gather for a funeral (this includes funeral staff). Good hygiene practices, physical distancing and the avoidance of touch still apply.

This means anyone attending a funeral must be able to stay 2 metres from the next person. Singing should not be included as the aerosols create risk for everyone.

The opening of church buildings for funerals

While a church building may open for a funeral service, Government restrictions must be followed. Anyone in the 'at risk' category may not attend. Ministers should conduct pre-funeral visits by phone or video link.

There are several possibilities that may help:

- ▶ Live stream the funeral if technology permits. Relevant links can be advertised as the family decide.
- ▶ Record any service, by audio or video, and make it available to all afterwards. This can be done with a mobile phone if no other equipment is available.
- ▶ Pre-record all readings, prayers, eulogy and message and make available to those not present. This will enable them to 'share' in the service as it takes place. This can happen with live streaming or no technology at all.
- ▶ Produce an order of service that captures the entire service in text – hymns and songs (lyrics read not sung), prayers, eulogy, reading, sermon and all. This can be shared as per above.
- ▶ Hold a simpler and shorter funeral service that is shaped around the commendation and committal. A service of thanksgiving can be held for all to attend when restrictions are lifted. Please note: Government advice suggests that the current restrictions are likely to be in place for several months.

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Funerals at crematoria or cemetery chapels

- ▶ All of the above also apply to a funeral at a crematorium or cemetery chapel.
- ▶ Some [crematoria and cemetery chapels have the facility to live stream services](#). You should speak to the funeral director to check.

Ministers' well-being

Ministers who are approached to conduct any ceremony must refuse to conduct such a service if they are personally unwell (especially, exhibiting any of the signs of being infected by any virus, or COVID-19); or if they have one or more pre-disposing factors (age, or health conditions) which place them in a higher risk category.

In these incredibly painful instances, in addition to the above options, ministers and churches will have to think carefully about how to offer pastoral support.

Please give strong consideration to the following recommendations:

- ▶ Conducting funeral 'visits' by phone or video link;
- ▶ Ensuring the service is as complete as possible, even if there are no family members present whatsoever. This honours the deceased and those who mourn;
- ▶ Phone key family members both before and after the ceremony and offer prayer over the phone or other technology;
- ▶ Keep track of all funerals and family contact details so that you can visit as soon as this crisis passes.

Baptisms

As difficult and contrary to Jesus teaching as it feels, wherever possible please postpone baptisms until your church congregation is able to gather once again.

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If it is not a situation involving life and death, consider praying a prayer of blessing, affirming the person as beloved of God, without physically being together. The pre-baptismal preparation and planning may be done via phone or video in anticipation of the eventual baptism.

We appreciate it is far easier to write these guidelines than to follow them. May God bless you as you navigate these strange and uncertain times.

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