



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

GUIDANCE NOTE 10

COVID-19

GUIDANCE NOTE

19 May 2020

Factors to consider for use of church premises

With state and territory governments relaxing COVID-19 restrictions, the following guidance addresses the use of church property for services of worship, small groups (Bible Study, prayer gathering, meeting) and public hire.

Who does this guidance note apply to?

This note is provided for use by all church entities.

Safety and well-being of our community

With the safety and well-being of our community in mind, Presbytery and Synod leaders agreed on 11 May 2020 that Uniting Churches should not open for public worship or meet face to face in church buildings.

It is anticipated that the effects of COVID-19 will continue to impact our lives for the foreseeable future. In the coming months we will need to make difficult choices between conflicting priorities. We must avoid framing our situation in terms of a false choice between reviving the economy — or our churches — and saving lives. Our commitment to supporting the safety and well-being of people must remain our priority. If we don't continue our efforts to contain the virus, a new wave of infections and deaths could well cause further pain.

All that has been gained in this time of isolation could be quickly lost. Reopening our buildings gatherings prematurely, even with the practice of social distancing and careful hygiene, could unfairly force the choice between personal health and the desire to re-join the beloved congregation.

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CANBERRA REGION

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ILLAWARRA

KOREAN

MACQUARIE DARLING

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PARRAMATTA NEPEAN

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Presbytery and Synod resolved that:

- ▶ **Churches** should not yet be holding any services of worship in the buildings where Sunday worship regularly occurs. This is in accord with the latest Information Update provided strongly recommending no gatherings in person on church property.
- ▶ **Online worship** services and the distribution (by email or Australia Post) of worship resources should continue for the foreseeable future.
- ▶ Where **services of worship** are recorded, it is preferable to do the recording from the home, or outdoors, although it is possible to use the church building if all the required social distancing and disinfecting protocols are carefully followed and the numbers permitted on the church property are in accord with current safety protocols.
- ▶ **Bible studies, small groups, meetings, and other church-related groups, regardless of size, should continue to meet online and not face to face.**
- ▶ **Funerals and Weddings may continue to be held, with strict adherence to the current Government advice.**
- ▶ **Service ministries** (food banks, emergency services, and similar services) may continue to operate, providing that they are strictly adhering to safety protocols and only addressing essential needs of the clients who present.
- ▶ Minimal **on-site staffing** can be put into place in the church building, sufficient that is required for essential operations (collecting deposits, mail processing, etc.) General office functions should be kept as limited as possible.
- ▶ For the well-being of those who may be working in the **church office**, all hard surfaces, including the phone, computer keyboard, doorknobs and light switches, need to be regularly sanitised (cleaned, and also disinfected).
- ▶ **Church Councils and leadership teams** should continue to meet online.

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- ▶ **Hall hire** (such as music lessons, yoga classes etc) should be avoided, apart from serving vulnerable group or providing essential services.

Risk areas

We know that various factors increase the likelihood of in-air transmission. These have all shaped the stance taken:

- ▶ Singing together as a group, or Congregation is high risk as the aerosols carry infection.
- ▶ Multiple people touching an object can carry infection. The virus can quickly spread through people touching the same item and then touching their own mouth, nose, or a cut in their skin.
- ▶ Multiple people in same room regardless of proximity increases the risks.
- ▶ Close proximity to other people also increases the risk of transmission.
- ▶ Of particular significance is the fact that each person meeting face to face carries risk of infection from all contact made in the preceding two weeks.

Insurance considerations

If you use church premises to provide any service, you **must** contact the Synod Insurance team at insurance@nswact.uca.org.au so they can ensure insurers are aware of any potential risk.

Other considerations

If premises are used to provide a service to assist vulnerable members of the public, please:

- ▶ Minimise contact as much as is practicable.
- ▶ Consider whether your service can be limited or reduced to avoid community contact in the best interests of staff and attendees;
- ▶ Consider whether your activities can be adjusted to enable separation of attendees and to avoid queuing and close confines;

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- ▶ Restrict travel of attendees, staff and volunteers unless vital for care reasons;
- ▶ Consider the needs of older adults, persons with disabilities, and others with access and functional needs in your response.

We realise the pain of continued isolation and the deep loss involved in churches remaining closed. Again health and well-being must be our first priority. We ask your patience and support and eagerly look forward to the day we can gather together once again.

Supporting information

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19>

<https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/>

<https://www.health.gov.au/>

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces>

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the support of John Squires in the preparation of this guidance note.

Further assistance

If you require further assistance, please contact us at Covid19@nswact.uca.org.au or 02 8267 4300.

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