

19th March 2020

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR BLACKWOOD UNITING CHURCH COMMUNITY REGARDING OUR RESPONSE TO CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

The Blackwood Uniting Church Council met last night to discuss our response as a community to the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation. The discussion took into account a variety of inputs, including:- the current best advice from government and health authorities; church-specific guidelines and advice provided by the Uniting Church Synod; our observation of how various governments and organisations around the world are responding; inputs from many congregation members; and finally our own individual deliberations.

The decisions taken, and which we are announcing here, have not been made lightly, but with the wellbeing – physical, emotional, mental, spiritual - of our community, and that of our wider community, foremost in mind. The decisions have been made with the recognition that we are in an extremely dynamic, evolving situation, and that our response may need to change, as circumstances change. With this caveat in mind, we wish to advise you of a range of decisions which take effect as of now.

These decisions will have significant implications as to how we continue to engage as a community. As you read on, you will become aware that *all of us* will need to think creatively and resourcefully about how we can maintain connection and support, with and for, each other.

SUNDAY WORSHIP

As of now and, until further notice, in-person attendance at Sunday worship services for our three faith communities – 9.15am, 11.00am, and Messy Church – is suspended.

BUT...worship services WILL continue...only in a different way.

Each week we will be pre-recording a worship service which will be made available on the internet for viewing online or by download. It is anticipated that the recording made will be a video of most or all of the key elements of a worship service, including call to worship, prayers, Bible reading, message, and possibly songs/hymns. The details of this are still to be worked out, but it is anticipated that the worship service for this coming Sunday 22nd March will be available for online viewing by 9.15am Sunday morning. You will be advised of details in a separate communication.

For those members of our faith community who do not have the facility to view or download videos online, we will be making available each week the worship service on a DVD that can be played on one's home DVD player.

Since worship will be continuing during this time, albeit in a different way, we will still require the involvement from...preachers, worship leaders, Bible readers, as well as possible musicians and singers. We will be liaising separately with these groups regarding the preparation for and the pre-recording of worship.

COMMUNITY CLASSES

As previously advised, all Community Classes at Blackwood Uniting Church have been suspended as of the beginning of this week and until further notice.

EXTERNAL HIRERS OF THE FACILITY

All external hirers of the facility will be advised that, effective immediately, their hire of the facility is suspended.

JACQUI HARRISON'S POSITION

The obvious question arising from the suspension of Community Classes relates to Jacqui Harrison's position as Community Class Coordinator. Affirming Jacqui's outstanding contribution to the life of our community, the Church Council agreed unanimously to guarantee Jacqui's salary for a minimum of three months, after which it will be reviewed. During a period of discussion around this topic, enthusiasm was expressed at what creativity Jacqui might be freed up to express during this period of uncertainty. Things may be birthed out of this creative freedom that we can't presently imagine!

PROGRAMS

The following programs have been suspended, effective immediately. The program organisers will be notifying the participants of this news, as well as engaging, wherever possible, in creative ways to 'stay connected.'

- MAINLY MUSIC
- ROUNDABOUT PLAYGROUP
- RESTHAVEN SINGALONG

CLUSTER GROUP AND OTHER GROUP GATHERINGS (BIBLE STUDY GROUPS, PHILOSOPHERS' LUNCH, etc)

Cluster and other groups provide an opportunity for people to gather, get to know and support each other. In this process, people often become friends. It is the view of the Church Council that if friends choose to associate during this time, then, being adults, that is their call. This logic should apply to cluster groups. Church Council believe that if cluster groups choose to continue meeting during this time, they should only do so within the following guidelines:-

- If a cluster group chooses to suspend their gatherings, that choice is to be affirmed.
- If individual members of a cluster choose not to attend cluster gathers, that choice is to be affirmed.
- If a cluster does choose to meet, it will be important to observe social distancing, hygiene, and 'cross-contamination' issues relating to shared food. Some specific suggestions:-
 - To facilitate adequate social distancing (1.5 metre minimum), groups should ensure that they gather in a space that supports this. This might involve outdoor gatherings, or else gathering where there is enough space to maintain separation (e.g. a large room such as the BUC Coffee Lounge, with very large table)
 - To practice appropriate hygiene (e.g. wiping down surfaces, regular hand-washing and hand-sanitising, sneezing into elbow, etc)
 - People bringing and eating their own meal, rather than sharing food.

Regardless of whether they continue to meet – employing good health and safety guidelines as they do so - cluster and other groups continue to serve a critical function in our church, that of *connection*.

It is vitally important during this uncertain time that we continue, in new and creative ways where necessary, to connect with and support each other. We urge members of groups and clusters to check in with each other regularly, in order to make sure that everyone is okay. Church Council will be making contact with the various groups and clusters to help facilitate this critical pastoral care function.

If you are *not* in a cluster or other group, but wish to be part of one, please make contact with Michael, Chris, or Jacqui.

During this time, especially in the case of individuals who are choosing to self-isolate, we will need to make use of other means of communication, the phone primary amongst them.

Pick up the phone; keep in touch.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is possible that this memo has raised many questions for you, some of which we are simply unable to answer (e.g. What will this new situation be like? When will we be back to normal?). What questions we can answer, we will, and so we encourage you to speak with Michael, Chris, Jacqui, or members of the church council. We would ask that you be patient with us, as it will take time to establish things, both the technical and the personal elements of us staying in touch at this time.

If you have particular pastoral concerns, please make contact with Michael.

In conclusion, we must remember something in these uncertain times. Regardless of what we are presently experiencing, we all form part of a large and loving community, a community of precious, compassionate individuals with diverse gifts and abilities. We have the ability, collectively as a community of faith, to get through this period, and even to get through it *strengthened* by the experience. Let us undertake the journey *together*, with caring, light-heartedness and love. We leave you with the words from a magnificent and inspiring letter, some five hundred years old, by Giovanni Giocondo:-

No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in it today.

Take heaven!

No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present little instant.

Take peace!

May each of you find the peace of Christ which lies hidden in every moment.

Even this one.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Bray, Chairperson

Michael Dowling, Minister

Jacqui Harrison, Community Class & Office Coordinator