



PASTORAL LETTER

The Right Reverend John Stead
Bishop of Willochra

20th March 2020

COVID-19

To be read to congregations on Sunday 22nd March 2020

Brothers and Sisters,

We are living in difficult times. We have all experienced unnecessary panic buying in supermarkets. Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic, we will see the worst of behaviour but, be assured; we will also see the very best of behaviour: people acting compassionately towards others. We need to remember that the church is people, not buildings; that being church, the people of God, is about how we act every day of the week towards our neighbour – knowing that everyone is our neighbour.

This Sunday will be the last time you will gather in church for worship as I have made the decision, after much thought, prayer and consultation, to suspend worship in our buildings for the foreseeable future.

Many members of our congregations fall into the most vulnerable bracket within the population. To risk the spread of COVID-19 is unthinkable. This decision is distressing; it distresses me to make it.

From and including Sunday 29th March, worship is suspended in the Diocese of Willochra.

This doesn't mean that we cease being the church. It doesn't mean that there will not be opportunities to gather in worship in different and, for many of us, new ways. What it does mean is that we will use such means as a live-streamed service from the Cathedral or your local church; I know that some will not have access to the internet. I'm sure many of us have worshipped along to Songs of Praise on the ABC at 11:30 am on Sunday mornings.

It does mean that we are still being called to be pastoral toward each other and toward people in our community, particularly those who are fearful and need not only practical assistance but also social connection. Our connection with each other will require us to phone our 'neighbour', assist the individual who is self-isolating in our community or is scared to go out because they may be abused in the supermarket aisle.

Today, you will be handed a copy of the Pastoral Guidelines I have issued to clergy and Lay Ministers with a pastoral responsibility. I have asked that the contact details of those exercising a pastoral ministry be included to ensure that you can seek pastoral support and care at this time. Also, I ask you

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to ensure that your contact details are up to date so that pastoral contact by phone and email may be maintained.

I have directed that, wherever possible, church buildings should be open during the day time as a spiritual and pastoral response to people's anxiety as a consequence of COVID-19. The Archbishop of Adelaide and our Metropolitan has asked that people pray collectively at 8:00 am each Friday and that, where a church has a bell, the bell be rung in a clear signal to the community that the church is at prayer. These are acts of a worshipping community. The Archbishop has asked that "this pause can be for just a few minutes to pray for:

- an end to the pandemic
- healing for people suffering from the illness
- those researching a vaccine
- our political and community leaders as they try to provide wise leadership
- our health workers as they are at the front line"

Where possible I would encourage you, if you haven't already done so, to move your financial support of the ministry of the church to a direct credit. You will be supplied with the necessary bank details to do this. Your ongoing giving to God's work in the world will be of vital importance at this time.

As soon as I can lift the suspension of worship, I will do so. I will review this on at least a weekly, if not daily basis.

Be assured of my prayers as I hope that I can be assured of yours.

In Christ's Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Willochra". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'J'.

Bishop of Willochra

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