

14 January 2022

To all Clergy, Secretaries and Diocesan Councillors

COVID-19 Update 29

Dear Friends in Christ,

I hope and pray that the start of 2022 has been kind to you so far and finds you with relative good health and spirits, despite the complications that continued to be caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The situation is still changing quite dramatically as was evident by my last two updates, one to say that South Australia was moving to a new stage given our vaccination status, the other to say that things would remain the same. What has not remained the same is the continual rise in case numbers within our communities as a result of the Omicron variant.

In light of the high case numbers within our communities, and in the interest of being pastorally sensitive to all our brothers and sisters in Christ, it is felt that it would be best to once again suspend the use of the Common Cup during Communion. I had previously allowed it to be reinstated, provided there was Parish consultation and agreement. For the time being, Parishes should return to receiving Communion in one kind, or making use of the pre-intinction method which I outlined to Clergy in Ad Clerum 18 last year.

Some other Covid-19 requirements have been varied and so I outline some of the specifics below;

Density Rule

The density requirements will vary, depending on our activities type. Recent COVID-Safe Plans have been issued with calculations based on area for each of the four possible density requirements currently in place. For Ceremonies (church services) where there is a mixture of sitting and standing, the density requirement is 1 person per 2 square metres. If congregations are seated only, the density can be 3 people per 4 square metres. The same requirements apply for Weddings and Funerals, but if an ancillary event is associated with the service, consider the appropriate density requirement to the venue when planning.

People should still attempt to keep their physical distance from other members of the public (1.5m), however, this does not apply to people who live together, who are friends or family members, or who regularly associate with each other.

Masks

Wearing face masks (covering the mouth and nose) will remain required in all indoor public places, including our worship spaces. They will also remain required in high risk settings such as health care facilities, Residential Aged Care Facilities, allied health, and when providing personal care. It is also recommended to wear a mask when out in other public places where it isn't possible to keep your physical distance.



Singing

Singing remains allowed, but everyone must be wearing their masks while doing so.

COVID-Safe Plan

Religious Ceremonies, weddings and funerals are classed as “defined public activities” and so we must have a COVID-Safe Plan. Existing plans will be updated automatically and emailed out by the Government as changes come in to force. Remember, the current plan must be available on your premises otherwise fines may apply. If you do not yet have a COVID-Safe plan for an activity, the link to create one and more information is available on the Government’s website; <https://www.covid-19.sa.gov.au/recovery/create-a-covid-safe-plan>

COVID Marshals

Religious services are required to have a COVID Marshal on duty. People can complete the relevant online training as prescribed by SA Health, at no cost via this link; <https://marshal.clickontraining.com.au/>

COVID Safe Check-in and Contact Tracing

COVID Safe Check-in remains an obligation for all people who use our sites. A unique QR code is issued as part of your COVID-Safe Plan which needs to be printed and displayed prominently. When people arrive at a venue, they need to check in by scanning the QR code using their smart phone through the mySA Gov app. Remember that this applies for worship spaces, halls and/or op-shops. If people don’t have the app they can use their smart phone camera and a secure web form will open to check in.

If people don’t have a smart phone then paper recording can still be used as a back-up. Continue to note the date and time of the activity along with the person’s name and contact details. All paper Contract Tracing Records must still be kept in a secure location after the occasion that they have been obtained. They should then be destroyed after 30 days – not simply put in the bin. Remember that it is important to encourage all who attend our premises to check-in otherwise fines may be issued for not complying.

Weddings and Funerals

Attendance at a wedding or funeral is determined by the density requirements of the venue and whether people will be seated or standing. Masks should be worn if held in an indoor public place, with the exception of the bridal party during the ceremony.

Aged Care Facilities

Restrictions on visitors to Aged Care facilities may vary from site to site so please check with the facility before making any pastoral visits. Masks will be mandatory as noted above.

Op-shops and Soup Kitchens

Our Op-shops and soup kitchens are permitted to open. Please note that the 1 person per 2 square metres rule still applies within Op-shops (non-seated activity/retail). Soup Kitchens (hospitality) may have 1 person per 4 square metres if indoors or 1 person per 2 square metres if outdoors, providing that everyone is seated for the consumption of food and beverages. Everyone will need to check in and wear a mask as per the directions, unless they are eating as above.

Holy Communion

The sharing of utensils, i.e. the common cup, is NOT permitted to be shared by anyone at this time.

Passing of the Peace

There should be NO passing of the peace during the service. The phrase, “the Lord be with you” should simply be responded to with “and also with you.” Similarly, any greeters/welcomers should not be shaking hands when people arrive, and neither should the Priest at the conclusion of the service.

The Collection

Taking a collection during a service is fine but the plate should not be passed from person to person. If possible, the plate should be available for people to use on their way into or out of the service. People counting money should use gloves and ensure that they wash their hands. Continue to encourage people to give electronically where they are able.

Morning Tea

Morning tea may be held after services but will count as hospitality and so people must be seated to consume any food or beverages with the 1 person per 4 square metres applying indoors and 1 person per 2 square metres outdoors. All food and drink should be single served portions and not shared portions from communal containers. It is also important that people do not share utensils so this should be considered.

Cleaning after services and other gatherings

This should be continued as recommended by the authorities and outlined in your COVID-Safe plans.

Vaccination

Getting your vaccination or booster shot when you become eligible is one of the best ways to protect yourself, your loved ones and your community. To check your eligibility and make a booking, visit the Australian Government Department of Health website:

<https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/booking/>

As usual, please continue to follow the other Covid-safe principles as well – washing or sanitising your hands regularly and staying home and seeking testing if you are feeling unwell. By continuing to work together we will be more effective in keeping each other safe.

With continued prayers and blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a cross symbol followed by the name 'Keith' and a stylized flourish.

The Right Reverend Keith Dalby
Bishop of The Murray