

Shepparton Uniting Church
COVID 19 **Pastoral Letter**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

at a time like this we need to take seriously our responsibility to care for one another by not putting people at risk of the Corona virus. At the same time we need to make sure we care for one another in their spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical needs. Key to who we are as a church, as the people of God, is being connected to God and one another. Over the coming weeks and months we will need to continually review how we best do this. The other day I read an article titled “Five ways to be the Church when church is cancelled.” Below are some ways that we can keep “being the Church” even when you can’t be in the church building.

1. **Support your leaders** in the difficult decisions that are needing to be made.
2. **Send in your offering.** This can still be part of the worship we offer and the commitment to God’s on going working in our midst. We put aside an amount each week that can be given in later or contact Zane (58231947) about making deposits directly into the church account. There will be some who may need to reduce their level of giving as a result of changed financial circumstances. Perhaps those of us who still have a regular income can prayerfully consider contributing a little more.
3. **Check on your neighbors and respond to their needs.** In this way you are living out the values of our faith, embodying what the whole gospel is about, which takes church out of the building and brings it to life for others. This is what we go to church to learn how to do– it is ‘for such a time as this’ that you have spent all those other Sundays in worship.
4. **Pray for your church family.** And send notes. Make phone calls. Drop things into people’s letter boxes. We are one body, even when that body is not together in the flesh. There are plenty of ways to stay connected in spirit, and care for each others’ spiritual needs.
5. **Practice Sabbath. A time of rest and renewal by way of connecting with God and with others.** This down time when so many regular activities have been curtailed can be a gift– an imposed sabbath of time to sit still, to read and pray and reflect. Perhaps commune with God in the garden or through a creative activity. Share with others what you are learning and what God is saying to you. without the usual rush of places to be and things to accomplish.

It is so easy for us to focus on the negative during a time like this. Christin Sine recommends taking a good chunk of time to focus on the positive for the sake of soul care.

1. **Begin the day with gratitude.**– In the midst of this challenging time we all have much to be grateful for.
2. **Make time for contemplation and reflection.** Read a psalm or the words of a hymn. Choose a word or phrase to sit with and let it lead you into prayer which includes listening to God as much as sharing what is on your heart with God.
3. **Read the scriptures and/or a good devotional or meditative book and/or listen to your favorite hymns and songs, each morning.**
4. **Don’t allow yourself to obsess about the bad news.** Look for good news stories that give you hope and encouragement.

We conclude with a prayer by Dr. Diedre Palmer, President of the Assembly

Gracious and loving God,

Give wisdom and strength to all those in our community and around the world, who are responding to the coronavirus - health professionals, government officials, aged care providers, school leaders.

May those who mourn the loss of loved ones to the virus, be comforted.

May those in our community who are feeling anxious, find peace and reassurance.

May our congregations, and faith communities be places of compassion, attentive to those who are impacted by the coronavirus.

May we be communities of empathy, love and care, in all we face.

Through Christ, our Lord, Amen.

Grace and peace,

Rosalie and Loni