

**COVID-19 Contagion Communications Plan, Checklists and Templates**

* **LCAVD Congregations**

**16 June 2020**

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# **Introduction/scope**

This Contagion Communication Plan has been prepared ahead of the planned resumption of worship services in Victoria and Tasmania from June 2020.

The gap that this Communication Plan fills is to ensure that all Congregations/Parishes have a consistent approach to communication, including templates, prepared in case of an outbreak of COVID-19 in their Church community.

It is an addition to other background information and advice, plans and checklists already provided, including:

* Bishop’s message
* LCA eNews
* FAQs about returning to public worship. Go to <https://lca.box.com/shared/static/y8jt4dlhouts8tyc2jod328zdjg5ubkf.pdf>
* Lutheran Church of Australia FAQs
* Email from District Bishop Lester re ‘Can we celebrate Holy Communion?’
* LCA/NZ COVID-19 Response Bulletins and web page
* Individual Parish bulletins/newsletters
* Victorian DHHS website information and table entitled ‘Preparation and planning for Return to Worship and use of Church building’. See Template 6.

So this plan is like an insurance policy: everyone hopes it won’t be needed, but it is reassuring to know it is there in case of an emergency.

The Plan has two sections: A **Preparation Phase** for the current time and an **Action Phase** to enact should one of your Members test positive via a Church activity.

Finally, the approach taken in this plan is consistent with the **current** requirements of the Victorian and Tasmanian Governments and a more detailed *COVID-19 Communications Plan, Checklists and Templates* prepared for Eventide Lutheran Retirement Homes at Hamilton and Sunnyside LRV at Horsham. This *Contagion Communication Plan* includes some background information so you can see it in the context of the broader work.

However, Congregations vary and it is acknowledged there is room for some flexibility within these guidelines.

# **Preparation Phase: be familiar with the process and requirements**

LCA is building and maintaining good relationships with the Victorian and national media to minimise reputational risk should a COVID-19 incident occur within the any part of the Church community. As is detailed later in this Plan, if an incident does occur anywhere within this community, the only persons authorised to speak to the media are District Administrator Stephen Mildred and Media Consultant Stephen Marlow.

But the media, of course, is not the only group who will want to know what’s happening, and this Plan includes suggestions on who may be amongst your ‘communication audiences’.

During this Preparation Phase, positive communication is being used by LCA to demonstrate the Church’s care and professionalism and to provide reassurance to all members of the Church and the general community.

**Checklist: things to do now:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Agree, via your Church Council, on who are your particular ‘communication audiences’ who will need to be kept informed of an infection. A suggested starting list is included as Template 1.
 | [ ]  |
| * Decide who will be the main person responsible for coordinating communications if an infection occurs in your Parish and assign tasks to other responsible Parishioners to assist. Make sure everyone knows what is expected of them.
 | [ ]  |
| * Ensure you are aware of all the documentation related to COVID-19 provided by the Church and via the websites [LCA COVID 19 response page](https://www.lca.org.au/lca-covid-19-response/) and [LCA Victorian District website](https://www.vic.lca.org.au/) and how to implement the requirements (social distancing, hand sanitiser, sign-in sheet, signage, information that congregation members must not linger in groups after a Service, your own policies on matters such as hygiene requirements for Holy Communion etc.).
 | [ ]  |
| * Draw up a dot point list of what your particular Parish is doing to ensure the safety of your Members and circulate it/display it on notice board(s). This should include all actions/restrictions etc. which have been and/or are in place at your Church. These actions should align with the advice given by LCAVD and your State Government – see a source list in the Introduction of this plan. It would be helpful for you to email this to District Administrator Stephen Mildred (stephen.mildred@lca.org.au) for recording.
 | [ ]  |
| * Review the attached template for advising your Parish community face to face that one of your members has tested positive for COVID-19. This should include all actions/restrictions etc. which have been and/or are in place at your Church. See Template 2.
 | [ ]  |
| * Review the attached template for advising your Parish community by phone that one of your members has tested positive for COVID-19. This should include all actions/restrictions etc. which have been and/or are in place at your Church. See Template 4.
 | [ ]  |
| * Establish a process required for reporting an incident to:
	+ Stephen Mildred/District Administrator, 0411 865 275
	+ Stephen Marlow/Crisis Manager, 0409 600 557
	+ District Office (03) 9236 1200
 | [ ]  |
| * Familiarise yourself with the reporting mechanism required to cover all actions taken in the case of a COVID-19 incident; see Template 5.
 | [ ]  |
| * Optional suggestion - imagine the crisis scenario and write (you can workshop with Stephen Mildred and Stephen Marlow via phone/video link) how things would unfold; take the attitude of a worst case scenario throughout.
 | [ ]  |

# **Checklist: What to do if a Member tests positive to COVID-19 resulting from a Church activity (including Worship):**

No matter how thorough the planning in the preparation phase, an incident will not unfold according to plan.

Flexibility is therefore essential, yet at the same time it is crucial to stick as closely as possible to agreed procedures to ensure effective management and control.

Should a Member contract COVID-19 as a result of **ANY** Church-related activity you should **immediately**:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Notify Stephen Mildred/District Administrator, 0411 865 275.
 | [ ]  |
| * Notify Stephen Marlow/Crisis Manager, 0409 600 557.
 | [ ]  |
| * Notify your Parish community either via email or phone, using the templates included in this plan as modified for your particular Parish See Templates 3 and 4.
 | [ ]  |
| * Be prepared for any media contact, see ‘Responding to the media’ below.
 | [ ]  |
| * Keep a written record of all actions taken in response to the incident, including media queries/responses. See Template 5.
 | [ ]  |
| * Monitor and record any media coverage; press clippings, mentions on radio.
 | [ ]  |
| * Advise Stephen Marlow or Stephen Mildred immediately if you become aware of any media misinformation.
 | [ ]  |

## **Responding to the media**

This is a simple task for you: as is emphasised throughout this plan, the only persons authorised to make ANY comment to the media are Stephen Mildred District Administrator and Stephen Marlow Crisis Manager (see above).

If you are contacted by anyone from any media source, please refer them immediately to one or both of the Stephens; and notify Stephen(s) that they can expect the media call.

Both Stephens are experienced in handling media matters and are authorised to speak on behalf of the Church re COVID-19 issues.

**Do not** use social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.) as a means of communicating with Parishioners.

# **Checklist: What to do if a Member dies from COVID-19 as a result of a Church activity.**

In this event, media communication would already be being handled by the District Administrator and/or Crisis Manager and this will continue. You should not make any media comment at all.

Clearly you will want to share the sad news with your Congregation/Parish community and a template to guide you in this is included in this Plan (see Templates 3, 4). As with other templates, you may wish to modify it for the particular requirements of your Parish and its community.

# **Post-event**

If you have had an incident in your Congregation/Parish, when there is an all-clear you will be asked by LCAVD to provide input to a communications review to assist with future planning.

Therefore, it is important that you keep a record of all communications actions (media, Congregation etc.) and any feedback/responses as they happen and they are fresh in your mind. The template to assist you with this is Template 5.

# **Appendix: Generic Templates**

The following templates have been approved by LCAVD as guidance to assist you with the communications aspects of any COVID-19 incident within your Parish.

They may be amended to suit your individual Congregation/Parish needs so long as the key approach is not changed.

## **Template 1: Key communication audiences**

These are the people and organisations/groups you will need to inform if there is an infection via a Church activity.

We are using the term ‘audiences’ rather than ‘stakeholders’ which is more commonly used in communication plans – which is friendlier. At a Congregation level, these may include:

* LCA Victorian District
* Church Council members
* Elders/Pastors/chaplains
* Volunteers
* Possibly neighbours if physically very close
* Suppliers and contractors.

You will have your own individual people and groups who need to be informed. The need will be urgent; ensure you have a contact list handy with their name, organisation and current (mobile) phone and email details.

## **Template 2: Face to face advice to family that a Member has tested positive**

***Note this will usually be done by a doctor of other medical professional – not a Church Official.***

The conversation in a face to face meeting to advise a family/family member that a loved one has contracted COVID-19 will largely depend on the people and circumstances involved and cannot be tightly scripted but these notes cover points which should be made:

* We are deeply sorry to have to inform you of this news
* (name – only if you have permission to share/privacy laws apply) is being cared for/treated at (insert)
* (name – if consent to share has been given) contracted COVID despite the very highest standards of care being taken by the Church
* You are well aware how seriously we continue to take this pandemic, and have been all along
* We do not know how this infection occurred but we are working closely with all relevant authorities to find out, which will help us ensure it spreads no further
* It has been reported to State and Federal authorities and the Church will manage all media enquiries, including asking the media to respect your privacy
* I will give you my private mobile phone number; please feel free to contact me at any time
* Is there anything further I can help you with/explain to you?

## **Template 3: Written advice to the Congregation/Parish community**

This is adapted from an example contained within a broader LCA COVID-19 media and communications plan. More information, including the name of the person involved, can be included **ONLY** if permission has been granted in writing and is considered necessary. It is likely that Members will know who the person is anyway and it is best to be as transparent and open as possible.

This notice can be sent to Members via email if you have their email addresses and/or placed on notice board(s).

**Do not** use social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.) as a means of communicating with Parishioners re COVID-19 infections.

**Notice of COVID-19 infection**

I hope you are staying well and feeling safe with us during these challenging times.

Despite our very best efforts to keep free from the virus, I need to tell you that one of our Members has today tested positive to COVID-19.

He/she is receiving specialist medical attention and we will keep you updated regarding his/her condition. Of course we wish him/her a speedy recovery. His/her family members were immediately informed.

This is the only confirmed case of the virus within our Congregation/Parish community.

There is no evidence that anyone else has contracted it but if you had recent contact with (name – *only if you have permission to share*) we urge you to get tested and continue to take other precautions to ensure your safety and wellbeing.

Since the commencement of the COVID-19 outbreak, we have been and are continuing to follow all directives of Government Health authorities.

If you are frightened or worried, you might want to talk to [Pastor, Chaplain…..].

The peace of God be with you.

Name and title

Date

## **Template 4: Phone call script advice to the Congregation/Parish community**

These guidelines are intended to assist you with telling Parishioners who you cannot contact via email, or when it is more appropriate to phone rather than email. And again, do not use social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.) as a means of communicating with Members.

* Despite our very best efforts to keep free from the virus, I need to tell you that (name *only if you have permission to share*) has today tested positive to COVID-19
* He/she is receiving medical attention and we will keep you updated regarding his/her condition.
* Of course we wish him/her a speedy recovery and return to us. His/her family members were immediately informed.
* This is the only confirmed case of the virus we have.
* There is no evidence that anyone else has contracted it but if you have had recent contact with (name) you should be tested and take other precautions to ensure your safety and wellbeing.
* We will be keeping you informed via email or phone calls as we get new information.
* If you are frightened or worried, you might want to talk to [Pastor, Chaplain…..].
* Is there anything else you would like to know at this stage – bearing in mind the case of infection is very new and we do not have a lot of information other than what I have just told you?

## **Template 5: Incident record keeping**

It is important to record all communication-related activities from the time of first infection through to the final all-clear. To ensure it is done, it is recommended that one individual be entrusted with the task (though others may assist him/her with input).

The record should be emailed to District Administrator/Stephen Mildred (stephen.mildred@lca.org.au) and Crisis Manager/Stephen Marlow when it is completed as part of the post-event review mentioned above.

An Excel spreadsheet is the simplest format to keep this record, formatted like this:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Time** | **Type (e.g., incoming phone call, email, personal visit, written material sent out by us)** | **Brief description** | **How managed** | **Response** | **Notes / comments** |
| June 22nd | 9.30 | Inward phone call | Local paper asking for update | Call taken by Pastor | Advised caller to phone Stephen Mildred; advise Stephen Mildred that call will be coming. | Contact from this reporter will be ongoing |
| 23 June | 0800 | Media story | Story in local paper updating situation | n/a | Clipping kept and filed | Reasonably accurate; no further action required. |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

## **Template 6: Preparation and planning for Return to Worship and use of Church building**

*(Adapted from a document issued by the District Bishop/Office)* ***As at 26 May 2020***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Action** | **Who** | **Status**  |
| 🞎 | * Appoint an individual or team of individuals in the congregation who undertake to be responsible for reading and sharing District and LCA communications both in this time of COVID - 19 but also ongoing. This is may be a role for synodical delegates and a Church Council member
 |  |  |
| 🞎 | * Communicate to the congregation regarding the plans for return to worship and use of building, and particularly any changes
 |  |  |
| 🞎 | * Consider signage at entries and exits regarding hand washing, social distancing and other changes to activities. Some example of signage can be found
 |  |  |
| 🞎 | * Provide clarity on social distancing in the building using tape, chalk or other visible indicator
 |  |  |
| 🞎 | * Attendance records are kept for use in case of possible outbreak. (Ensure multiple pens and hand sanitiser are available at sign in). These should be dated and retained in case of outbreak in order to assist the department of health or relevant authority

Download [Sign In Sheet](http://www.vic.lca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/200522-Sign-In-Sheet.docx) |  |  |
| 🞎 | * Consider likely behaviour after the service has finished. While people may be able to observe restrictions within the confines of the building, as they leave they may relax into the usual social habits.

Remind people of the need to support the church and wider community by behaving in accordance with government restrictions, and not to linger after the service |  |  |
| 🞎 | * Communicate that there are no hospitality events at the church until a further easing of restrictions allows for this.
 |  |  |