



**LUTHERAN
CHURCH**
OF AUSTRALIA

**VICTORIAN DISTRICT
INCLUDING TASMANIA**

Dear brothers and sisters, pastors, members, and friends in Christ,

God's peace be with you this week, the holy week of our Lord's passion and death.

The challenges our world is facing by a pandemic emergency are in some ways unimaginable, and we are all adjusting and attempting to establish a new-normal. This pandemic emergency may go on for many months, in fact our Prime Minister yesterday has indicated we need to plan to be living with this virus for at least six months, so physical distancing measures to slow the spread of this virus must be sustainable for at least that long to protect Australian lives.

On the 2 April, DCC came together via online video conferencing to listen, learn and evaluate our current situation as a District as it relates to COVID-19. This is the second meeting where DCC has discussed our planning and response to the challenges facing our District, to consider and think through the scenarios that may continue to confront us over time, along with the contingencies we may need to put in place, and to look at what we can do together to support our congregations, schools, camp sites and aged care communities through these challenging times.

Keeping up to date

Our District Administrator is regularly meeting with LCA Church Wide (national team) and the other Districts to coordinate planning and response to the Coronavirus Emergency as it relates to our Church and its entities. LCA Church Wide are leading the coordination of communications arising from the Government and Health Authorities advice as it relates to the LCA/NZ.

If you are not already a subscriber of the LCA Bishop eNews we would encourage you to subscribe so that you receive the LCA/NZ COVID-19 Response notifications on a regular basis.

[Sign up to LCA eNews here.](#) Also see the [LCANZ home page](#) for up to date COVID-19 information

We thank you for your emails and calls of encouragement and prayer and would ask that you continue to pray for our Church leaders (Church Wide, District and the local level), our congregations, our Schools including principals, teachers, students and families; Camp sites and staff; Aged Care staff and tenants during this challenging time.

The Office of the Bishop team will continue to make contact with congregations over the coming period to see what support we may be able to offer. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the District and/or any member of District Church Council (DCC) if you need some support or guidance.

Staying Connected as a Congregation

It has been terrific to hear of some of the innovative ways some congregations have been embracing to remain connected with their worshipping community during these challenging times. This is really important for everyone's health and wellbeing.

This is particularly relevant for members who may have to make the decision to self-isolate for a variety of reasons such as age, pre-existing illness or caring for another person within their household.

This pandemic emergency may go on for many months so congregational leaders should continue to explore how your members can receive pastoral care and other supports whilst at home.

Pastors Conference and District Convention – postponed until 2021

The District Convention Planning Committee recently met with the Office of the Bishop team where it became apparent that planning for a Pastors Conference and District Convention in October 2020 presented a range of unforeseen challenges, given COVID-19. The Hobart congregation leadership were also of the mind that their congregation may not be well placed at this time to host the

Convention given the local impacts of COVID-19. As such, the Planning Committee asked DCC to consider whether it was wise to proceed with District Convention in October 2020.

In light of this and the Government advice that we need to plan for at least six months of disruption, which even under a best case scenario for COVID-19 would place Convention right on the end of the pandemic curve, DCC resolved to postpone the next District Convention of Synod from October 2020 at Hobart to a date and Victorian venue to be determined, in 2021.

Some of the key factors influencing this decision included:

- the health and wellbeing of our delegates if the virus was still a risk, given the historical demographic of delegates in our District would see a reasonable number being within the high risk (vulnerable) categories identified by health authorities
- would recovery from the pandemic be far enough progressed that people would have the appetite to travel and gather at this time
- the uncertainty around whether affordable flights will be operating again by October 2020
- that given the evolving financial pressures on many members of our Church, and the pressure this may place on planned giving, registration fees and travel costs may be prohibitive for a reasonable number of delegates this year

This decision was not taken lightly and it is hoped by postponing the Pastors Conference and Convention to mid-late 2021, that the situation will have become clearer and that together we are on a path to recovery where bringing delegates together in Victoria, where travel costs will be more affordable, is a more practical solution. Dates and venues will be advised later this calendar year.

Our Camps are currently closed

Given the government and health authorities public health directives, Araluen and Tandara Campsites have suspended operations at this time. Unfortunately, as a result a very small number of casual staff have been released from duty, whilst the majority of staff are being supported in roles and helping out with meaningful maintenance and upgrade works at each site. Our Camp teams look forward to re-commencing services as soon as practicable post the lifting of the current public health restrictions.

Aged Care and Schools

We are blessed in our District to have strong management teams and supportive leaders in governing Councils/Committees supporting our Aged Care and School communities at this time. DCC affirmed the significant work of staff in our Aged Care (supported by the Office of the Bishop) and Schools (supported by LEVNT) who have worked tirelessly to implement business continuity measures, create new routines, along with new ways of being able to offer their services and education during these challenging times.

Latest support for individuals and businesses

Expect that some members in your local community, including those within your congregation, school or aged care facility, may be approached by members seeking support. The following links take you to:

- [Support for individuals and households from the Australian Government](#)
- [More information and services to help those affected by coronavirus](#)

DCC will continue to keep you updated periodically.

Bishop Lester Priebbenow



Tim Wiebusch (DCC Chair)

