

Response to Covid-19 Crisis

Changes to Services and Activities at Chatswood Baptist Church

As a community we are facing an unprecedented health crisis here in Australia and around the world with the spread of the COVID-19 virus. At the moment, the only effective way that communities have been able to combat the spread of this virus is by dramatically and decisively kerbing our physical contact with one another by limiting non-essential gatherings and practicing self-isolation where possible. Already a number of countries have come to the point of a complete lock down of its citizens. While we have not come to that point here in Australia, today it was announced by the Prime Minister that indoor gatherings of more than 100 people are now prohibited. In other countries that number has been dramatically reduced even more. For instance, in the USA it has been reported that there is currently a ban on gatherings of more than ten people.

Our church's response

I am writing to inform you that last night the pastors and deacons of the church came to the decision that from this Sunday the church will not be holding our normal public gatherings on Sundays. In addition to this we have also suspended the physical gatherings of our small groups and have called off all our social activities for the present. This decision wasn't made lightly by the leadership of the church, but after discussion, all the pastors and deacons voted unanimously to pursue this course of action in order to care for our own members and to love and care for the wider community that we are a part of. We believe that this action is what we need to take as a church community of more than 300 people in order to love and care for one another, our neighbours and especially the most vulnerable in our community. This decision will be reviewed regularly by the leadership and if it is deemed prudent to recommence our large or small gatherings in some form we will inform you of that decision. Over this period, we will be sending out regular weekly emails to keep in touch and all the pastoral team members are available to talk to. Please feel free to call, message or email us.

Sunday church

From this Sunday we will be streaming church and asking all those who normally attend both our evening and morning service to join us, on-line, at 9:30 am for church. While on-line viewing of church can never be a long- term replacement for physically coming together and encouraging one another, in the short term we believe that it can be a helpful way of continuing to engage and strengthen each other in this time of crisis.

The on-line format of church will be a little different to our normal physical gatherings. We anticipate it will be a shorter service, with less or no singing. There will be the reading of Scripture with a short Bible Talk (sermon) and hopefully some everyday stories from people to keep on encouraging all of us. We want to encourage everyone to join us on-line and engage with what is going on through making comments on-line and also posting questions during the Bible talk, so that after the Bible talk (sermon) the pastor might respond to these comments and questions during the live stream. The live-stream link along with accompanying information will be posted every week on the home page of our church's website: www.chatswoodbaptist.com.au

Growth Groups

All our small groups will no longer physically meet. Where possible and practical all our growth groups will meet using an on-line platform. This week we are asking our groups to trial using Google Hangouts/Meet which is a free service. Using this service, people will not only be able to join the on-line meeting using a computer, but also by dialing with a phone. This will be important for those who lack the internet at home.

Youth and Children ministries

Our Sunday and Friday night youth groups and Sunday children's ministry and weekday Playtime groups have also been suspended for the present. Over this time, we want to encourage parents to be taking the opportunity to be more intentionally discipling their children at home. As a pastoral team we will be looking at what we might be able to do to encourage and enable parents to do this.

Loving and caring for one another

During this time we want to keep on loving and caring for one another, especially the vulnerable in our community. It is important that we maintain contact with one another, by ringing and talking to one another or creating community on-line in some form. It's also important that we care for those who might be vulnerable and isolated and who need help among us.

I want to encourage all of us to be doing whatever we can be doing to be looking out for one another. However, it also might be good to have a couple of dedicated teams of people to help us to love and care for one another and make sure no one is overlooked. It would be great to have a team of people who are prepared to call a number of people (especially those older members who are alone) during the week to maintain contact with them and see how they are going. It would also be good to have a team of people who are available to practically assist the vulnerable or elderly who might need some practical help with shopping or getting prescriptions filled etc. If you are willing to help in either please let me know and I will be in contact with you.

At a time that many of us are prone to worry it is good to remember what Jesus said to the twelve about being anxious. In chapter 6 of the gospel of Matthew, after telling them how our Father in heaven looks after the birds of the air by feeding them, and clothes the grass of the field, he reminded them, that if that is how the heavenly Father looks after the birds and the grass of the field, how much more will he look after us. So he tells them don't worry about what they will eat or wear, but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Although you might not be worrying about what you eat or wear (although the shelves in Woolworths suggest that many Australians are worried about what they will eat!) it is good to remember that we have a Father in heaven who infinitely cares for us – much more than for the birds or the grass of the fields. We need not worry, but in this time when many are, we are to keep trusting in our Father in heaven and pursue his kingdom and his righteousness.

Yours in Christ
Pastors Philip Calman,
Matt Kennedy
and Mark Penn