

The Reverend Dr Garry Deverell  
Vicar  
Anglican Church of St Agnes  
35 Arkaringa Crescent  
Black Rock 3193

March 17, 2020

Dear friend of St Agnes' Church

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I write to let you know that Parish Council has decided to cancel all public gatherings at the church – including worship services, bible studies, Merry Melodies, small groups and Saturday Recycle – from today until April the 20<sup>th</sup>. Please note that this will inevitably include ALL the special services for Holy Week and Easter. The Parish Council will convene again on April 20<sup>th</sup> to review the situation and offer further advice.

This is obviously an unprecedented decision, but we live in unprecedented times. The government of Victoria yesterday declared a State of Emergency because of the COVID-19 virus and has strongly advised that all community groups cancel public events or ceremonies for the foreseeable future in order to slow down the spread of the virus. As the vast majority of our parishioners are in the demographic most vulnerable to the virus, we felt that we had no alternative but to act immediately to protect our precious seniors.

We appreciate that this will be a shock to many of you. We considered the matter prayerfully, painfully aware of the burden of our responsibility for the St Agnes community. We lament with you and share in the grief that all of us will feel at the loss of seeing one another as regularly as we do.

The current advice from senior health officials includes strong encouragement to curtail social contact with others beyond our own households, to observe careful hand-washing and to thoroughly clean the most-touched surfaces in our homes and work-places several times per day. Where we must meet with others one-on-one or in very small groups, we are encouraged to stand or sit at least 1.5 metres distant from each other as we converse.

To this important medical advice, I would add that we need to **look out for each other** during this difficult time. Whilst we may not be able to gather with our sisters and brothers in faith, we are blessed to live in a part of the world that has a telecommunications network. I encourage all of you to use it! Check in on each other. Ask how your sister or brother is doing. The more able-bodied amongst us may be able to provide food or go for a grocery run. We may be able to assist with paying bills or cleaning. Please, if you find yourself in any need whatsoever, get in touch with someone you trust from the church or else call me on 0431 866 214.

Please be assured that the church will not be entirely dormant during this time of curtailed activity. The wardens and others will continue to work on maintenance issues. The honorary treasurer will continue to pay the bills. The pastoral care group, the parish council and the vicar will reach out to check on how people are going. I am also planning to work in the church building itself as much as possible so that the doors are open and the community knows that we are here.

Please do feel free to drop in and see me if you have anything on your mind or if you would like me to pray for you.

Also during this time, some of us will be writing reflections and prayers which you might access via my website ([www.christologia.net](http://www.christologia.net)) or else by collecting hard-copies from the church. I plan to send out a weekly email/letter to encourage you in your relationship with Christ and with others. Let me remind you, also, about the Prayer Book of our church, which can be a great source of comfort and a stimulant to faith during difficult times. If you do not have your own Prayer Book, please do feel free to borrow a copy from the church (letting me know you have done so).

We are still planning, also, to distribute an Easter edition of 'Reach Out', our occasional magazine. Please, if you have an encouraging reflection or other article to contribute, get in touch with our parish council secretary, Jean Oliver, on 0400 199 568.

If you are a regular contributor to the church's finances via envelopes, please consider giving electronically. Our bills won't go away just because a virus has curtailed our activity! Our Westpac bank account details are:

Account Name: St Agnes Anglican Church Black Rock  
BSB: 033-033  
A/N: 813-228

If you do make an electronic deposit, please include your name as the reference on the transaction so that our honorary treasurer, Colin Foxwell, can track where money is coming from. Colin will also accept cheques via mail to the church or else to his home address. Please, if you have any enquiries about financial matters, call Colin on 03 9515 0379.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatian church he said 'Bear one another's burdens, for in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ' (Gal 6.2). This is a time to give particular and focussed attention to Paul's instruction. We are together the body of Christ and we are called to care, especially, for those who are most vulnerable in our community. Cancelling public events is an important way to do this just now. But there are many other ways to care. We can still reach out to each other. We can still encourage one another. We can still hold one another in prayer. We can still seek to attend to each other's needs. And we can do so in the name of the God who loves and cares for us all.

I would encourage all of you to think of this season as a 'fallow' period in which the soil of our souls might have a rest in God in order to again be fruitful when the time is right. As it turns out, the disciplines of Lent are even more poignantly appropriate in this circumstance.

Yours in faith

**Garry Deverell**

Vicar