

## Full Gospel Australia Response to COVID-19

### Preamble

Full Gospel Australia (FGA) is an Australian Christian Pentecostal faith-based community. We believe in the efficacy of prayer and the healing power of God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, implemented by faith in his word. We also believe that God gives us the gift of medical science, health professionals and natural medicines, and the wisdom to know what to do in various situations and circumstances. In short, we believe God is good and desires to bless us, his people.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a new challenge to the church in Australia (background information can be found in Appendix 1) and should be met with faith, hope and practical wisdom.

### Call to Prayer

The National Leadership Team (NLT) of **FGA calls all our ministers, credential holders, their congregations and teams to prayer in faith** for their own health, the health of all congregations and ministries in FGA and for the wider Australian community. It is our privilege and duty to surround our nation with **faith filled prayer**.

We call on God in faith that he responds to our prayers and delivers us. Psalm 103 states that he heals all our diseases (ESV). Psalm 138:7 "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me." (ESV).

Please include your staff, associates, teams and congregations as you join with us in prayer for our Nation. Pray for our political leaders, health authorities and businesses as well as the Australian population. **Ask in faith for God's blessing of protection on Australia.**

### Mass Media Reporting

It is safe to say that many media outlets seek to sensationalise news. News reporting surrounding COVID-19 is also susceptible to this tendency. We have seen a rise in the levels of fear and anxiety within communities which can be attributed at least in part, to news consumption.

Full Gospel believes that we are a people of faith, that COVID-19 is little different from other forms of illness (although it is a 'new' illness, therefore people do not have a natural resistance to it) and **should be encountered with faith, hope and wisdom.**

Whilst we believe in God and his word, standing on his promises for protection and healing, we should also act wisely. By taking appropriate precautions to ensure good health and strength we are able to continue to serve the Lord.

Our response to widespread fear and panic regarding COVID-19 is one of faith, hope for the future and maintaining wisdom to know what to do in each situation. 1 Chronicles 12:32 tells of the men of Issachar, who knew the signs of the times, who understood what they needed to do and who could act wisely in difficult situations. Let us act in faith, knowing the signs of the times and whose wisdom is known in our communities.

### The Hong Kong Experience

Hong Kong was one of the first places where COVID-19 spread after China. As it is one of the first 'free' political areas where the church operates to deal with this emergency, we can look to see what has and has not worked there. Many church services in Hong Kong have been closed for some weeks to try and protect their congregations.

Some have live-streamed their services and restricted entry to services to a smaller number of people. Other measures in place have been insisting on the wearing of face masks, banning physical contact, spreading seating out so that people are not touching, and even taking everyone's temperature before entry (those with even a mild high temperature have been refused entry) (S. K. Kenny, personal communication, 13 March 2020).

Some churches have remained open: refusing to bow before a disease that they see as coming directly from the devil. These churches have similarly asked people to remain vigilant, promoting hand washing, increased personal hygiene and providing other various services to their congregations to help combat infection (S. K. Kenny, personal communication, 13 March 2020).

## Preserve Community

Presently, churches, schools and other community based organisational meetings are exempt from many Commonwealth Government restrictions, however, this exemption may not remain in future. We simply do not know where this situation is headed and what policies our governments will employ. We must think, plan and prepare now for what may lie ahead.

One of the Church's greatest needs currently is the ability to **preserve community**. Think creatively about **how your church could include people who cannot attend services**. You don't need to spend thousands of dollars in specialised audio-visual equipment to have a reasonable quality online presence. Some ideas about having an online or off-site presence could be:

- Ask your teenagers to run a Facebook Live workshop to teach others in ministry how to do it with their smart phone, Facebook and an Internet connection.
- Or alternatively, ask them to do it for you. The trust and responsibility you give them will do wonders for their engagement and faith.
- Consider holding your prayer meetings both at their usual venue and online via ZOOM, Facebook Live or other web applications.
- Ask your creative people to help with organising online programs for each of your ministries
- Ask your Children's Ministry Team to produce "Your Church Play School" or online facetime, Facebook Live or ZOOM sessions for Children's Ministries
- Consider how you can meet the needs of your more mature folks, either by using online methods (you might be surprised at how many of our mature people know how to use Skype so they can talk to their grandchildren!) or by smaller gatherings of friendship groups in homes
- Find a way to have communion (the Lord's Supper) in small home-based groups, or in some other way
- Ask your Youth Ministry Team to brainstorm how they can do youth online or in smaller, localised groups
- Look at every department of your church or ministry and consider how you can creatively use available technologies to help you preserve and even increase the sense of community within your church.

We believe even the smallest groups could and should use some of these ideas to preserve community within their group. Almost everyone has a mobile smart phone, so could be enabled to tune in to something online.

Full Gospel will be instituting WhatsApp groups for all pastors and leaders so that you can be in contact with each other and with the NLT.

## What Can Churches and Ministries do Now?

Churches, Ministries, Charities and other Not-For-Profit Organisations attached to The Full Gospel Churches of Australia can ensure their facilities are clean and hygienic with some simple, cost effective methods:

- Regularly wipe down hard surfaces (desks, chairs, tables, telephones, etc) with a sanitising disinfectant
- Regularly spray soft furnishings with a purpose-built disinfectant such as “Glen 20”
- Remind people to wash their hands regularly with soap and running water. Where this is impractical, provide sanitising hand cleansers (gels) in prominent places and remind people to use them regularly. These must be alcohol-based hand sanitisers to be effective against the COVID-19 virus.
- Display posters promoting regular hand hygiene (washing with soap and water / sanitising hand gel) – We have attached one to this email for you to print and use
- Provide paper tissues and closed bins for disposal of used items and promotional material advertising their use
- As some of your members will be unable to join you in public meetings. Consider live-streaming your services, prayer meetings and staff meetings, etc. You can use Facebook Live, ZOOM and/or a number of other services or web applications. This will ensure that your members are still able to join in the life of your church or ministry, even though they may not be able to be physically present
- Consider live streaming your children’s ministries: handouts, activities and teachings can be put online to cater for those whose children cannot attend children’s ministries.
- Consider encouraging your people to give using online banking. There are a number of online payment applications including but not limited to Square (FGA uses and recommends Squareup.com – if you want to use this method, contact us and we can give you a link that will give you \$1000 of fee-free online payments), PayPal, Stripe, etc. Be careful to consider the costs of any payment method you employ.
- Prepare your people to encounter the situation safely by employing personal interactions, hygiene and situational awareness

## What can Churches and Ministries do if COVID-19 becomes active within their Community?

Churches, Ministries, Charities and other Not-For-Profit Organisations attached to The Full Gospel Churches of Australia operating within communities which are directly affected by COVID-19 should consult their local health authorities as well as Commonwealth Government Health Websites. **As well as the measures outlined above**, they can also employ the following measures:

- Ask employees and congregational members to stay home if they have any symptoms of COVID-19, even a mild persistent cough or a low-grade fever of 37.3 C or higher.
- Advise employees and congregational members that if they need to take paracetamol or ibuprofen, that these may mask a mild fever and other symptoms of infection. In this case care should be taken, not to place the entire congregation at a higher risk.
- Advise employees and congregational members that if they have had contact with an infected person or have recently returned from overseas, that they should self-isolate for the 14-day period prior to entering congregational activities.
- If you have a person who is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in your facility, immediately have your facility cleaned (even where the person has NOT been as other people may have

transferred the virus unknowingly). We recommend using a commercial cleaner who has COVID-19 capabilities. If a commercial cleaner is not an option, follow cleaning regimes set out in Commonwealth and State Government web sites.

- Continue promoting appropriate personal interactions, hygiene and situational awareness:
  - Do not shake hands or ‘high five’ with people. If you do have contact, ensure you wash your hands immediately to ensure you do not touch your face with your hands
  - Avoid crowds when possible
  - Use disposable face masks if you and/or your people are praying for those with confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19
  - Carry and use alcohol-based hand sanitiser if you are not able to wash your hands with soap and running water
  - Use sanitising wipes to clean surfaces such as café tables, etc. before you use them
  - Be aware of people who display signs of illness and take appropriate action (some people have no regard for others and will go out in public even though they are ill)
  - Do not stigmatise people who are symptomatic or are self-isolating
  - If someone becomes symptomatic, encourage them to:
    - Self-isolate immediately
    - Telephone their health provider/hospital and explain their circumstances and symptoms
    - Prepare a list of places/people they have been or had contact with in the previous 14 day period

## Conclusion

The NLT of Full Gospel Australia recommends that each board and leadership team of FGA churches and ministries carefully consider the possible impacts of COVID-19 on their community and more closely, on their church or ministry. Points for consideration could include but are not be limited to:

- Implementation of some or all the measures outlined above (as needed in your circumstance)
- Asking staff to take voluntary leave if needed
- The opportunities in your local community for your church or ministry to make a positive impact in people’s lives
- New ministry opportunities and how to fill them safely and wisely
- New creative measures to protect and help your current congregations and members

Full Gospel Australia is monitoring this situation closely and is in contact with health authorities, government departments and international agencies. We are in the midst of preparing further information for the use of our members and their churches. This paper is by no means a complete document but is under review and could be superseded. Please refer to our website for further updates at <https://fullgospelaustralia.org.au>

Find the latest information from your local government website, your State government websites, the Commonwealth governments websites and your local health authority’s websites. Other information can be obtained from:

[www.epi-win.com](http://www.epi-win.com)

[www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019](http://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019)

## Appendix 1

### Background

COVID-19, or the Coronavirus is a new disease (influenza) which first appeared in China in 2019 and has since spread throughout the world. It is carried by people and is spread to other people by droplet transmission when they cough, sneeze or exhale. Droplets of bodily fluids fall onto surfaces or directly into other people. Transmission of the disease happens when people touch the infected surfaces, then touch their eyes, nose or mouth (World Health Authority—COVID-19 Situation Report version 1.4, 2020, pp. 1–2), or by breathing in droplets suspended in the air. It is not fully understood how long the virus can remain potent after leaving the human body.

Most people infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms before recovery, however, some people's experience is much more serious, sometimes resulting in death. These more serious cases seem to be in people over the age of forty years, and especially those in the over sixty age bracket. Other people particularly susceptible to COVID-19 are those with impaired immune systems, such as those with pre-existing conditions.

Governments and Public health authorities around the globe are taking unprecedented actions to contain the spread of the disease (World Health Authority—COVID-19 Situation Report version 1.4, 2020, p. 1). In Australia, the Prime Minister announced on 14/03/2020 that gatherings of more than 500 people would be banned nationwide with a few exceptions (COVID-19 Coronavirus Prevention, 2020) after announcing the closing of Australia's borders to several countries. Travel and social restrictions are increasing and are not likely to be relaxed in the short term.

In the medium term, all indications are that Australian and State governments will take increasingly strong actions in order to attempt to slow the transmission rates of COVID-19. Whilst this may help in slowing the spread of the disease within the Australian public, it is unlikely to stop it. The resulting restrictions on freedoms to travel, assemble, work, pursue sports, leisure activities and other public gatherings is likely to have strong consequences to the medium-term economic outlook and performance.

Whilst this may reduce peak demands on health services, supply of consumables and strain on emergency services, it may also result in prolonging the outbreak. Some estimates are that the emergency could run for the rest of 2020 in some form or other. Others are more hopeful. However, there is no evidence that this outbreak will end soon.

## Appendix 2

### Social and Economic Impacts

Although the Church itself is not a business, nor should a church or ministry be run purely along business lines, it does carry on business activities. Somebody must switch the lights on, so to speak. This means that the church exists within an economic environment and is at least partially affected by that environment.

The Church is also a body of people who live by faith and often accomplishes things which are impossible in this world without the hand of God. This means that the Church is a strange mixture of mortal people who live by spiritual ways. Having said that, the Church must live in this world and things which impact the society in which it is placed, also impact the church.

What are the likely, or possible impacts of COVID-19 on our society and economy?

It is possible that the following things happen in our society:

- Air travel severely restricted and travel by road/train between states
- Schools shut down
- Businesses temporarily closed
- Hospital visitation restrictions
- Shortages of essential and non-essential items
- Panic buying (this is different to shortages. For instance, the recent panic buying of toilet paper caused widespread 'shortages,' yet Australian manufacturers and distributors of toilet paper have over one year's stock currently in warehousing. This means that there was no actual shortage, only local shortages caused by people purchasing more than they need.
- Job losses due to economic downturns (except in the toilet paper industry!)
- Casual employment severely restricted
- 'Public' gatherings restricted or banned
- Many other possibilities.

Note: All the above have already occurred in Australia and Internationally.

The economic impacts on your church could be significant if the community at large is adversely affected. The social impacts are just as alarming. There are many consequences for people who are disadvantaged or dependant on others.

These impacts must also be seen as opportunities. They are invitations to help make a positive difference in people's lives, both those who are already in your care and those who are not yet part of your congregation or ministry. This current circumstance is not only a challenge, but an opportunity for the Church to shine!

## Recourses

- About coronavirus (COVID-19) | Department of Health and Human Services Victoria.* (2020, March). Department of Health and Human Services Victoria. <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>
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- COVID-19 – Self assessment tool | Department of State Growth.* (2020, March). Tasmania Department of State Growth. [https://www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/news/covid-19\\_self\\_assessment\\_tool](https://www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/news/covid-19_self_assessment_tool)
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- Government response to the COVID-19 outbreak.* (2020, March 15). [Text]. Australian Government Department of Health; Australian Government Department of Health. <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/government-response-to-the-covid-19-outbreak>
- Kenny, S. K. (2020, March 13). *Interview with Sarah Kate Kenny—Missionary to Hong Kong* [Personal Notes].
- Novel coronavirus (COVID-19).* (2020, March). Tasmania Worksafe. <https://worksafe.tas.gov.au/topics/Health-and-Safety/safety-alerts/coronavirus>
- Self-quarantine | Take action.* (2020, March). [Text]. Queensland Health. <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/health-alerts/coronavirus-covid-19/take-action/self-quarantine>
- World Health Authority—COVID-19 Situation Report version 1.4.* (2020). World Health Authority. [who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/](http://who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/)