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11th June, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

RE: Covid 19 and other ministry updates

I trust you are doing well. Scripture regularly reminds us of the awesome power of our God. Job has a very dramatic encounter with God, where God challenges him about his attempts to interpret God's plans throughout the confusion and turmoil he experienced. In Job 42:2-3 we read:

"I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know."

While it's interesting to speculate on what God might be teaching the world through our current pandemic, it's comforting to know that no purpose of His can be thwarted. So many plans for 2020 have been undone, whether they be personal plans or ministry plans. Yet, God's plans can not be thwarted. He still seeks to reveal the extent of his love in Jesus to people from every tribe and nation so that the world can experience the life that they were designed to live now and forever.

As I write this, I am also doing some work on a preaching series coming up on the book of James. James 4:13-35 reminds us:

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

If there's ever a recent year where this has been collectively true, it is 2020. So, with that warning in mind I want to share with you some plans we have for transitioning back to building usage, including some opportunities for hybrid services.

CovidSafe plan for St Matthews

I am incredibly thankful to Jane Ford for her assistance in developing our CovidSafe plan. You can find a copy of the plan attached in the email with this letter. Our CovidSafe plan is a legal requirement for us to reopen religious activities. As such we need to ensure compliance with the plan in every circumstance. While this is about "obeying the rules", I trust our motivation will come from a concern for public health which stems from our heart, informed by God, to consider and work toward the well being of others. Staff will be trained in the procedures and guidelines that sit alongside the plan. They will then be able to train other ministry leaders who may use our facility.

We plan to experiment with a hybrid services for our evening congregation this Sunday (they will still be on Zoom, but with some people on site), and are working towards resuming some activities for children and youth onsite very soon.



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It is important to note a few things regarding building use:

1. While we are allowed to have 50 people onsite for a religious gathering, we will not be able to fit 50 in our main meeting area with physical distancing requirements.
2. The experience of meeting together will be very different from our previous experience. We are not allowed to have congregational singing, and will be quite spread out for the meeting.
3. The limit of 50 is a limit for our entire site (including grass, cottage and car park). It is imperative that bookings must be made through the office, along with an indication of the maximum number of attendees. This will help us manage the site within the regulated guidelines.
4. Not everyone will feel comfortable returning to the site at the moment. We need to continue to love and respect each other during this time. The ministry team will continue to provide resources for those unable to physically attend. We anticipate that there will always be some online aspect to church services in the future.
5. We have developed guidelines for having groups in your home (like small groups; or gathering to watch church together). While these are held in your home, when they are done at the request or encouragement of the ministry team, they are seen as an extension of the business of the church. Therefore, we are responsible to ensure such gatherings are safe. The guidelines will help you ensure your home is a safe place for your family and guests. Your ministry leader will make them available to you.

Green Space

You may have noticed some work has begun on rejuvenating the green space on our site. The team has been working hard to ensure this space meets the desired outcomes and becomes a space that welcomes people onto our site and provides opportunity for connection. The progress being made is very exciting with the team hoping to include a few extra's within the budget that will make a significant difference to our use of the area. Please be careful if you are visiting the church property. The front door is the best point of entry and exit while this renovation is taking place. I will provide a further update on progress soon.

Chinese Ministry

I am pleased to let you know that the Rev David Yue has agreed to become the interim pastor of the Chinese Congregation. David has recently retired and will begin with us on 1st July, following immediately on from Clarence and providing much needed stability for the Chinese congregation.

Clarence will finish with us on June 30. I am grateful for his partnership in the Lord and his pastoral work with the Chinese congregation. He will commence a new ministry position at Eastwood Anglican Church. We pray that he will settle well and be used by God to grow disciples of Jesus.

While Kenny technically finishes with us on July 31, he will be taking Annual leave for the month of July meaning he will effectively finish on the ministry team on June 30. Kenny has overseen the



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Asian congregation for a significant period of time. I give thanks for those who have grown in faith through his ministry. While the plans for the next step for Kenny and those members of SMAC who chose to leave with him are currently unclear, we pray that clarity will come soon and that God will continue his work in the world through them.

I have had two weeks of prayer meetings (Tuesday's 8am and 7.30pm) regarding the Chinese and Asian Ministry at St Matts. I was particularly encouraged by a number of the young adult community groups who joined the prayer time on Tuesday evening. If you'd like to join, the Zoom details are: <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/3561183861?pwd=Zk9CbU1MdnpHTXhQYWxhbVdPSFRrUT09>

Meeting ID: 356 118 3861; Password: 779731

ESL Grant

We have been successful in receiving a grant from the federal government to support volunteers who work with vulnerable people. The grant will be used to purchase resources for ESL, which will be of great benefit to our amazing volunteer team and students.

Pastoral Care and Retiree's Ministry

As you are aware David Tyndall began with us on 1st June. David's role is different to Pauline's, and comes with a different brief. It is quite common for roles to evolve and for churches to look to use the particular skills that an employee has for the building of the church and the glory of God. David has been charged with training people in pastoral care across the parish. He has already put his vast experience in this area to work and is developing some resources and training so that we may increase our effectiveness in pastoral care across the breadth of St Matthews. At the same time, David has pastoral oversight of our Wednesday and 7.45am congregations. In the last week, David has put together an online communion service for these members of our congregation. Should you have questions regarding his role, please contact me.

Finally, thank you for your expressions of support during this season. The ministry team has been working very hard in some very difficult situations. even in trying times, our work is made a joy (Hebrews 13:17) by your encouragement, feedback and support. We thank God for you and pray that he may continue to grow us all into the likeness of Christ.

In Grace and Truth,

Ron Irving
Minister