

From The Churchwardens

COVID-19 UPDATE AND PARISH NEWS

9 September 2020

September is here in an “*annus horribilus*” we would prefer to forget (but unfortunately won’t be able to for many generations)! Advent is now only 12 weeks away and Christmas 4 weeks after that. The Christmas season is always a time for celebration and, usually, the robust and joyous singing of carols as we celebrate the birth of Christ not just amongst our regular congregation but with many whom we only see and are able to welcome to St John’s at that time of the year.

Clearly it is extremely unlikely that we will have a vaccine by then and therefore quarantining ourselves from each other during in-person services, personal declarations and avoiding the aerosol transfer of the virus by robust singing will still be our main means of defence against cross-infection. The Archbishop, however, has advised in his letter to the Wardens this week that the current public health orders under which we are operating our in-person service expire on 28 September and he has been in contact with the Minister to try to ascertain what the new orders are likely to include or relax. Understandably though, the Minister, Brad Hazzard, and NSW Health are reluctant to speculate on what the next set of orders will include and therefore what the implications will be for our Christmas celebrations. In his letter he notes that (as also mentioned by some parishioners to the Wardens) - “*A number of people have also raised the inequity of looser restrictions for the numbers allowed to gather in clubs and pubs, and the well-advertised exemption offered to the Gallipoli Mosque where 400 people were permitted to gather for the festival of Eid!*” I am sure this will all form part of his negotiation with the Minister.

However, we can safely presume that in the final analysis, the new health orders will all be totally dependent on infection numbers, both here and in Victoria, and how confident the NSW Health advisers are at that time of keeping those numbers low—and therefore the risk of an infected person ignoring the declarations and attending one of these services also being low. The Archbishop has advised that both the maximum number at services (currently 100) and the prohibition of singing will be part of the review. In his letter he concluded ...

“I (the Archbishop) would value your prayers for these conversations, so that the government might act wisely and justly for all citizens in the State, including people of faith who wish to celebrate significant festivals, especially Christmas with its strong connection with our local communities. I shall let you know the outcome of your prayers as soon as I can.”

The Churchwardens have also been requested to allow a wedding at St John’s. With the agreement of the Acting Rector and the Archbishop—we have agreed to the service occurring at St John’s under the same COVID protocols that govern our Sunday in-person services—ie, social distancing, use of masks, pre-declarations by all guests and no congregational singing. We will also have sidespersons in attendance to facilitate compliance with these. The church seating will be sanitised after the wedding and before the in-person Sunday service is held. However, after consideration, the Wardens have determined that we are not able to meet the requirements for ensuring the COVID safe holding of the requested wedding reception or similar celebratory events on church premises.

Next week ...

The Treasurer will be releasing a budget update incorporating the recent extension of the JobKeeper programme in the next update. In addition, we hope to have a decision from Bishop Chris as regards the timeline for the parish nominators to appoint a new Rector. There will also be a meeting this week of the previous Fête convenors and stakeholders to discuss our way forward and advise the Parish Council as regards fundraising events.

Finally ...

Please continue to remember in your prayers all those in your parish who are working hard to fulfil our mission as a parish and support our community of faith in so many ways. Please maintain your support and enthusiasm for St John’s in these testing times.

“May God be pleased to answer those prayers and restore our fortunes, that we who sow in tears might reap with shouts of joy.” Psalm 126:4-5

The Churchwardens Chris Russell AM JK Seo James Winter