



THE DIOCESE OF SINGAPORE

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Bishop of Singapore: Rt Revd Rennis Ponniah
Assistant Bishop: Rt Revd Low Jee King

Archdeacon of Singapore: Rt Revd Low Jee King

14 March 2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

Advisory for all Anglican Churches

1. I would like to thank all of you for your prayer and strong support to keep our church gatherings and services safe and healthy since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak eight weeks ago. With the World Health Organization (WHO) declaring the outbreak a pandemic on 11 March and PM Lee's speech on 12 March, there is a need for **heightened safeguards**. Here are the measures we will be taking.

Social Distancing

2. One of the key ways to slow the spread of an outbreak is **social distancing**. This means reducing social contact to make it harder for the virus to spread, especially to the more vulnerable among us. When the healthcare system is not overwhelmed by too many cases, those who inadvertently get infected can then get the care they need to recover.

Protecting our Seniors

3. On 10 March, the government announced that they will temporarily suspend for 14 days all the programmes they are conducting for seniors, from 11-24 March. This is because of the surge of new COVID-19 cases this week, and also because the disease affects people 70 years and older, and people with medical conditions, much more severely than others, causing them to require hospitalization and even ICU. With the **healthcare system being strained** by the surge, seniors socially distancing themselves more during this period will reduce their risk of falling sick, so that those who are sick can get the care they need.
4. The government encouraged churches to also temporarily suspend our gatherings for seniors during the same period.
5. To protect the more vulnerable, the Diocese has decided to temporarily suspend from 14-24 March all senior-centric activities, and advise our seniors aged 70 and above to worship from home. This will cover these two critical weekends. We are not rejecting or depriving seniors; our desire is to love them and protect them. This will also help the national effort to "flatten the curve" of COVID-19 surge. The intention is for senior-centric activities and service participation to return to normal after 24 March.
6. Our churches will do our best to be in pastoral contact with our elderly members, especially those without social support, during this time.

Gathering Size and Duration

7. The government has also requested the church to reduce the size and duration of our services to minimize the contact between worshippers of all ages. There has been much dialogue with the government over what is expected. The government has clarified that the instruction to cancel ticketed events above 250 people does not apply to churches. However, the authorities would like churches to bear this guideline in mind wherever possible. They also acknowledged that some congregations will need more time to make alternative arrangements. A consultative approach with the authorities will be taken to interpret the guideline in our context and how best to achieve the goal of increased social distancing.
8. On our part, we are already working on ways to reduce the size of our larger gatherings and where the density of people in a space is tight. **For those of us in large and practically full congregations**, you are encouraged to attend a less crowded service in your church or to worship in a smaller group at home or in a common venue using our online services. You can use the live-streaming services of your own church, or any of the Anglican live-streaming services recommended in the attached list.
9. Each congregation has a different situation, but we have a common goal—to continue gathering responsibly for worship, onsite and online, while “seeking the welfare of the city” (Jeremiah 29:7). The senior clergy team will work with your pastors and church leaders on **various options** whereby we can continue “to meet together” (Hebrews 10:24-25) in a responsible way for Word, prayer and sacrament. We must seek to do so in obedience to God’s Word and in order to be strengthened for the service of good works in our society. We seek your understanding and prayer as we work towards a healthy baseline for the rest of the COVID-19 outbreak period.

Health Screening

10. The Ministry of Health has disclosed cases where people who were unwell with symptoms could “pass through” pre-event health screening for the function they were attending, eventually infecting participants, who in turn infected others at home and in the community. I therefore urge all churches to ensure that our pre-service **health screening is robust as well as respectful and good-spirited**.
11. To keep one another healthy when we gather to worship, please observe the following:
 - a. If you are **feeling unwell** with even mild flu-like symptoms, e.g., runny nose, cough, breathlessness, etc, you should see a doctor immediately, and refrain from going to church, to work or anywhere else. This applies to clergy, church staff as well as worshippers.
 - b. Worshippers, please come to church a little earlier to give ample time for screening. Please bear with the slight inconvenience of filling in your contact information and answering the screening questions sincerely week after week. Let us consider it a **small price for the privilege** of fellowship and worship of Almighty God.

- c. Screeners, please **speak with each worshipper** about their travels and the current health status, and **verify their responses and contact information** before giving them the sticker.
- d. Please direct those who have **arrived or return from overseas in the past 14 days** (Singaporeans and visitors) as well as those who feel vulnerable or unsure of their health status, to speak to a more experienced screener (staff or leader) for a more in-depth confidential conversation, to assess if they should take more precautions during the service, or even seek medical attention and rest at home.

Press on in faith, hope and love

- 12. We are grateful to God for all the government authorities and healthcare workers are doing to care for the people during this time of adversity.
- 13. We continue to pray that God in His mercy will bring the widespread affliction of COVID-19 to an end. We also pray that the Lord in His grace will continue to grant us the conditions to keep our churches open for weekly worship. For this to persist, let us play our part by the social discipline we practise and the care we show to others.
- 14. Let us support one another in loving action and fervent prayer. Let us, in the strength of the Lord, be His faithful witnesses and servants, shining His light in the midst of the gloom (Isaiah 60:1-3).

Yours in the love of Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rennis Ponniah" with a small cross symbol to the left.

The Right Rev Rennis Ponniah
Bishop of Singapore
The Anglican Church

Anglican Live Streaming Services

(A non-exhaustive list of recommendations)

In English

St Andrew's Cathedral

8am Liturgical Service with Holy Communion

<https://cathedral.org.sg/8amlive>

St Andrew's Cathedral

9am Contemporary Service

<https://cathedral.org.sg/9amlive>

Church of Our Saviour

<http://bit.ly/LiveCOOS>

In Mandarin

St Andrew's Cathedral Mandarin

9.30am Traditional Service & 11.15am Contemporary Service

<http://www.sacm.sg/>

In Tamil

St Paul's Church Tamil Congregation

11:30am Service

<https://www.facebook.com/StPaulsChurchTamilCongregation/>