

Gathered church services suspended from Monday 23 March



The Anglican Church Southern Queensland (ACSQ) has today decided to suspend church services from next Monday, 23 March until further notice due to recent developments in the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Any parishes that wish to suspend services immediately are free to do so. The decision to suspend services has not been taken lightly; however, with many of our congregations in our 133 parishes in the high-risk groups of contracting the virus, this is a necessary decision.

While the Government has only restricted gatherings of 100 or over, it is vital at this time that we care for, and stand in solidarity with, our elderly and at-risk parishioners. Encouraging them to attend public worship by holding regular services would be to fail our vocation of care and compassion.

We must now focus fully on how we stay connected with, care for and minister to our church members and the wider community. This will mean being creative and using whatever technology and approaches are available to us.

We will continue to monitor the situation and review it on an ongoing basis.

Some churches will start livestreaming their services from this weekend, including St John's Cathedral in Brisbane and St Bart's in Toowoomba. ACSQ is also offering grants to parishes to assist them with the cost of purchasing equipment/subscriptions/licences that will enable them to communicate in the absence of face to face gatherings.

This pandemic is causing profound disruption to our everyday lives and to the ministry of our Church communities. It is likely to intensify before the situation begins to improve.

I am very aware that the COVID-19 pandemic is causing a high degree of stress and anxiety for clergy, parish staff and volunteers. I want to encourage all of them to care for one another and for themselves.

Government and public health advice should be monitored constantly and followed. Please continue to regularly check our [advice page](#) as we seek to support and resource parishes and ministries in every way possible.

We are also looking at other ways we can continue to support parishes and further information will follow in coming weeks.

Sunday Devotions • Monday 23 March 2020 • By Bishop Bill Ray

Sunday Devotion: 29 March 2020, Fifth Sunday in Lent

What is your answer?

Main Readings: [Ezekiel 37.1-14](#); [Psalm 130](#); [Romans 8.6-11](#); [John 11.1-45](#)

Supplementary Readings: [Psalm 71.1-14](#); [2 Corinthians 11.21-31](#); [Exodus 6.2-13](#); [Psalm 131](#); [Matthew 27.32-56](#)

“Jesus said to her [Martha], “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” ([John 11.25-26](#))

During the 1990s, when I was a Rector of Wandal Parish in Rockhampton, I took a newly-ordained priest to a funeral that I was presiding over to provide him with some additional training. While the ‘Funeral Service’ in our Prayer Book omits the text “Do you believe this?”, at the start of the service I included this question in the Gospel reading, as this is what I was trained to do in my formation. Later the new priest commented, “When you added that question, it really challenged me.”

This passage of Scripture is one of the seven great “I am” statements of our Lord that are found in John’s Gospel. It has been said that the longest journey some people make in life is 33 centimetres, which is the distance in the average adult from the brain to the heart. This journey requires moving from knowing about the promise of eternal life, to really believing the resurrection in our hearts and living it in our lives.

From my study of theology, I was aware of the ‘academic’ aspects of this text. However, it was not until my brother was accidentally killed that this text moved from being something I studied to a reality in my life. While it is difficult to put into words, I had the assurance of eternal life – in that my brother was with God. We continue to grow in our understanding and appreciation of God’s gift of eternal life to us, as we grow in relationship with him.

Just as Jesus asked Martha, he asks us, “Do you believe this?”