



Uniting Church in Australia
Assembly



President: Dr Deidre Palmer

General Secretary: Colleen Geyer

April 3, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For most of us, for the first time in living memory, our congregations are not able to worship together, because of a global catastrophe that is causing terrible suffering. In this time of distress, and disruption to many of the things we hold most dear, we look to Christ and the Christian community to sustain us and bring us through this difficult time.

At this moment, we cannot gather together in our usual ways, because of the restrictions designed to stop the spread of the coronavirus, COVID-19, and keep vulnerable people safe. Congregations are faithfully working on ways of worshipping God and continuing to witness to the liberating Gospel of Christ and act for justice in the world.

Given these extreme circumstances, the Assembly Standing Committee met last night to consider if it was appropriate to give permission for Uniting Church congregations and faith communities to celebrate Holy Communion as a part of online worship.

Following prayer, shared conversation and listening to the Spirit and each other, the Assembly Standing Committee approved permission for Uniting Church congregations to hold online gatherings for worship with Holy Communion in accordance with the guidelines approved by the Assembly Standing Committee.

The Assembly Standing Committee also determined that these arrangements should be seen as a temporary pastoral measure for the period of COVID-19 isolation measures, and that they would conclude no later than March 2021 or until the Assembly Standing Committee advises otherwise.

The following documents are being made available to the Uniting Church today:
“Guidelines: Online gatherings for worship with Holy Communion”
“Resource for Theological Discernment”.

There will be Uniting Church congregations and members, who choose not to celebrate Holy Communion in this way, but instead choose to wait until they are able to physically meet together. No congregation is required to offer Online Gatherings for Worship with Communion. Congregations may, for good pastoral and theological reasons, choose instead to ‘fast’ from Holy Communion for a period of time, or to use liturgies which do not replace the liturgy of Holy Communion, but provide a specific time within the service for the remembrance and celebration of the saving activity of

God through Jesus Christ. The decision whether to offer Online Gatherings for Worship with Holy Communion is the responsibility of the Church Council with the Minister.

As we approach Easter, I am reminded of the way Jesus met the disciples on the Road to Emmaus. In the same way, Jesus meets us, responding to our grief, our confusion and questions. Jesus invites us to remember, to recall the moments when our hearts burned within us on the road. We are invited to remember all that God has done and continues to do, to bring us into an abundant life, shaped by the love of God, love for others and the whole of God's creation.

As we enter into Holy Week and Easter, I pray you will experience the transforming presence of the Risen Crucified Christ.

In closing, I invite you to share in a beautiful prayer that is prayed in the light of the Road to Emmaus story in Luke's Gospel:

*"Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past;
Be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may
know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for
the sake of your love. Amen." (The Book of Common Prayer, A Collect for the Presence of
Christ, Daily Office, p.70 Seabury Press, 1979)*

Grace and peace be with you,



Deidre Palmer



**Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY**

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I pay respect to the Traditional Custodians of the land, past, present and future.