



COVID-19 Vigilance and the Church Response

Ruby Manukia Schaumkel

COVID-19 is dominating our thoughts and discussions. Following the Government's announcement on March 23 of Alert Level 3 and then Level 4, there will be a national closedown for four weeks.

The government announced a \$12.1b stimulus package to support New Zealanders and businesses. It follows the example of overseas nations, but there is still more we can do as a nation. Collectively, we must stamp out the virus in New Zealand, by remaining at low risk.

We need to support the government's decision to introduce a Level 4 Alert. The experience in Italy, France and Spain has encouraged us to act faster, to impose strict travel and isolation rules and to

closely monitor domestic outbreaks.

For the Church we have a faith response to the Coronavirus. We have a responsibility to be more vigilant now than ever before and practice good hygiene at home and at Church.

The link

www.products.pastoral.center/pc/p105/1/download-covi/Coronavirus.pdf reminds us to be faith filled people, and to continue supporting one another especially when times are tough or uncertain. Practice faith not fear, is an example of how we need to do all we can to keep our churches, families, friends and local communities safe.

We should limit the virus' chances to



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spread by limiting social contacts across the country for the coming weeks. The government has provided guidance on what this means and information is being updated regularly. The aim is to minimise the impact on the national health system while aiming to increase its capacity over time. Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan successfully flattened their epidemic curves by rigorous and comprehensive testing, coupled with self-isolation and good hygiene.

Each church should check their health and safety plans/measures, and practice good hygiene. A good place to start is to follow the Methodist Church website where the COVID-19 Pandemic Plan is available:

www.methodist.org.nz/caring_for_our_people/coronavirus_2019_-_advice:

You can also check the Ministry of Health:

www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-for-current-updates.

With community isolation in place, the chance of widespread community outbreak is expected to remain low.

If you develop a fever, cough or shortness of breath, phone Healthline's dedicated COVID-19 number 0800 358 5453 or contact your GP. It is important to call the centre ahead of your visit.

For COVID-19 health advice and information, contact the Healthline team on 0800 358 5453 or +64 9 358 5453 for international SIMS. There is no charge for this service.

These tough times demand rigorous policy thinking and health and safety measures and plans so that the Church and the country as a whole can get through this crisis.

The Connexional Office team will be working from home during the closedown period.

The Church remains open for business but differently!

Look after one another.

AROUND THE CONNEXION

Community gardeners growing vegetables, melons and more

The Ellerslie Tongan Methodist Church has long been running two successful initiatives promoting better living and healthy eating for church members and their families. A fitness group runs regular aerobic classes and member educators provide advice on nutrition and food, and the benefits of regular health checks and healthy living.

Two years ago it was decided to build on these projects by encouraging and assisting church members, their families, and the wider Tongan community to grow their own vegetables.

There are currently 22 members and families from the church who participate in planting a vegetable garden on land leased from Transpower New Zealand. Justin Fotofili, secretary for the garden group, says, "The project promotes healthy eating and generates a sense of communal spirit as we care for our environment and God's creation."

In March they will harvest the third season's crop of organic kumara and other vegetables. A trial of watermelons last year was a success and this year dozens of ripe melons will soon be ready. The community project has helped to encourage others to participate and inspired many to grow their own vegetables at home.

The project has had its challenges but a combination of hard graft and subsequent funding support solved the major issue the gardeners encountered when they started out. "Access to water was a major issue in the early stages and we endured the hard work of taking heavy buckets of water from our homes to our garden every day."

"In 2019 we applied to The Community Care Fund from Transpower New Zealand to help us install an onsite water system. We now have a water pipe and a number of taps to assist us in watering our plants. This has made life much easier for our members and their families who travel 30 to 40 minutes after work to water their gardens."

This non-profit project has not only provided families with organic vegetables but motivates families - across all generations - to participate. For many it brings back memories of growing up in Tonga where they cultivated their land for their livelihood.

As well as being enjoyable, social and physical, the project is an educational experience, especially for children who are learning about planting vegetables in school. "It's about bringing a community together to engage in something that is important, yet fun and



Group members and their wives in the community garden.



Dr Fisihoi Mone (3rd from left) died suddenly in January.

exciting. We are looking forward to another successful year harvesting our kumara and vegetables and of course, our watermelons," says Justin.

"We dedicate this project to Dr Fisihoi Mone, a member who has been actively involved from the very beginning and who sadly passed away suddenly at the beginning this year. (RIP)".



Maata Tuipulotu waters the watermelon.