



Archbishop of Sydney

17 September 2021

Dear brothers and sisters

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Romans 13:1

When the apostle Paul wrote these verses the governing authorities were certainly pagan and possibly persecuting. While ever government regulations that restrict Christians meeting together also apply to the general citizenship to prevent indoor gatherings of any kind - even in family homes – we should not think that we are experiencing religious discrimination, but rather a specific, temporary response to the public health emergency. While I have advocated for the unvaccinated not to be denied access to community and church life indefinitely or for any longer than absolutely necessary, I have not advocated civil disobedience. As you will recall from my letter last week, I reminded you that **compliance with Public Health Orders is mandatory**. This means that at 70% vaccination, unvaccinated people are subject to stay at home orders.

If you anticipate that people may attend in breach of the Public Health Orders, I suggest you do not open for services rather than turn people away. It is not appropriate to ask volunteer welcomers to be responsible for turning away unvaccinated people. It is likely that we will reach 80% within two or three weeks after we reach 70%, and we are yet to see what provision will be made by the government at that time. In any case, for as long as the 4sqm rule is in place, it will be appropriate for many churches to continue to offer online ministry if at all possible. It is essential that when we reopen we follow the safety protocols mandated by the government including masks and distancing etc.

I have also made clear in public and in communication with you, that the advice from reliable medical professionals is that vaccination decreases (but does not extinguish) the likelihood of getting sick, requiring hospitalisation or dying. It is both self-protective (and good stewardship of our bodies) and loving and protective of others to be vaccinated. This video produced by the Christian Dental and Medical Fellowship may be of help to those who are 'vaccine hesitant.' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQ8choouzA&ab_channel=GiffordDennison

Nevertheless, some will maintain conscientious objection to vaccination and we must ensure that they are able to participate in the ongoing life of the local church. This forms an essential part of our conversation next week.

I trust that you are able to attend one of the regional meetings next week to discuss further plans for eventual reopening. The parameters within which we must operate are obedience to the law, safety in church for those who attend, access to ministry and fellowship to all who desire it and the primacy of love.

I am aware that managing diversity of opinion in your church is challenging. Please be prayerful, as I am, that no 'root of bitterness or division' gains a foothold among us. Thank you for patiently addressing those who are anxious, angry or fearful. Your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. Romans 13:8

In Christ

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