**Pastoral Guidelines for visiting of the sick and elderly during the COVID-19 crisis.**

The government’s current restrictions are designed to block community transmission of COVID-19 by those who may be infected by non-symptomatic or not yet displaying symptoms. The following guidelines are given with the primary focus being the protection and care of church and community members, particularly those most vulnerable.

As a general rule, we would be advising that pastoral visits by either the pastor or volunteers that involve entering another person’s home or involve physical contact are currently not acceptable.

We are likewise advising that hospital visitation is not acceptable under current restrictions, unless there are exceptional circumstances (ie. end of life or serious illness for non-COVID-19 patients). This is primarily for the safety of the person they are visiting, not for the pastor or volunteer’s safety.

People in our congregations will and do need pastoral care and support during this time. So, wherever possible such support should be offered by phone, email, or online. As a guideline, we would discourage church members from pastoral care and support, where it is seen as being on behalf of the church, without the pastor’s knowledge.

We do encourage volunteers (who are under 70 years and without health vulnerabilities) to find ways to support those who are self-isolating. For example, by picking up/delivering essential supplies and medication to them. Even assisting them with ways they can connect with friends of family via technology.

In the case where a person is requesting a personal pastoral visit and you feel it would be in the interests of their mental or emotional health to see them in person, we strongly advise consideration of the following:

* Who have you been connecting with in the past 14 days – including children, people who have travellers, public places that may make you vulnerable to passing on the virus to the person you are visiting?
* How can you be physically present in a way that doesn’t involve being inside their home. For example, could you speak to them from the other side of their front door or front gate (maintaining the social distancing guidelines of 2 metres).
* If you are visiting people in hospital or aged care homes you should follow advice from the hospital staff on attendance and infection control. It is strongly recommended that you use appropriate personal protection measures.

*These guidelines are current as at 31 March and are drawn from the Government’s updates, in particular this document.* [*https://gazette.legislation.nsw.gov.au/so/download.w3p?id=Gazette\_2020\_2020-65.pdf*](https://gazette.legislation.nsw.gov.au/so/download.w3p?id=Gazette_2020_2020-65.pdf)

*Please continue to stay informed of daily changes as released by the NSW Department of Health at* [*https://www.health.gov.au/*](https://www.health.gov.au/)