



COVID-19 Update for Treasurers

**Port Phillip East Presbytery
Uniting Church in Australia**

Issue date: Thursday 2 April 2020

Greetings

In a time of non-gathered church, many congregations are concerned about their finances. We're facing a situation where for some time we may not have the income usually linked with Sunday services, hall hirers and op shop income. While there aren't easy answers to this, here are some initial suggestions, relating to sustained income from giving, congregational financial hardship, congregational employees, renegotiating terms of placement and contracts, and employment advice from Synod's People and Culture team.

Sustained Income from Giving

Be aware that people are concerned about the basics of health, food, transport, and accommodation costs. Some people will be experiencing sudden or gradual loss of income. However, congregations also have commitments, including stipends and wages of ministry staff. Be honest about these issues with members. You could ask if people need to adjust their level of giving at this time. That way you can plan ahead. You could ask people whether at this time it is going to be better for them to give weekly, monthly or in other instalments.

We're aware of five ways congregations are addressing the lost offering-in-the-plate income. You may need to coach some members over the phone with forms or internet banking.

1. Encourage people to consider automated electronic giving through U Ethical. We've attached the Direct Offering Form here. It can be filled out by hand or on a computer and posted. You can provide the form to your members with the BSB, account number and name pre-filled.
2. Invite people to give directly to the church by Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) on internet banking – provide them with your BSB and account details. Members can choose one-off payments or schedule regular weekly or monthly payments. You may provide a systemic way to indicate who the payment is from.
3. Ask people to mail a cheque to the church.
4. Ask people to make a deposit into your congregation's account at the bank, once again providing the BSB and account details.
5. Suggest that people have an offering bowl at home and put their offering in it in an envelope each week. You could arrange to collect the envelopes each few weeks.

Congregation financial hardship

The Presbytery is keen to hear about your ongoing financial situation and to find ways to help you navigate the challenges that you are facing. If your congregation is experiencing financial hardship through unexpected income reduction, let us know. If needed, the Presbytery will contact the Synod for possible financial assistance.

The Synods are working with the Assembly to gain advice and, if appropriate, to approach the Australian government for access to government grants to assist various parts of the Church that are experiencing financial hardship. Further information will be distributed if the Church is eligible to seek grant relief.

Congregation employees

Where possible make arrangements for employees to **work from home**. This is a Government guideline. Only essential employees who cannot perform their tasks from home should only be attending work places at this time of state emergency.

Stop transmission

State Government information on coronavirus is available at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>.

You must provide information to all employees and contract staff, volunteers, including cleaning staff about how to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Below is a link to information about how to stop transmission.

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-transmission-reduction-measures>

Employees who have returned from overseas are required to follow government rules and isolate themselves at home for 14 days and monitor their health closely.

Employees who have been in contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus, should isolate at home and monitor their health.

Employees must report to their employer if they confirmed case of COVID-19.

Please see the information at the following link to assist employees with health assessments: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-self-assessment>

Renegotiating terms of placement or contracts

Where possible, the Presbytery is keen to do whatever we can to maintain people's employment, however we understand the challenges facing many congregations. It is very important that laws about employment are followed.

Congregations and ministry agents (Ministers of the Word, Deacons, Pastors etc) who wish to change their placement or contract arrangements can do so with the support of the Presbytery's Pastoral Relations Committee. The Presbytery has set up a team to provide support and advice in the first instance: Jeff Gardner, Duncan Macleod, and Jay Robinson.

Employment Advice from Synod

We are able to arrange for expert information and advice from the Synod's People and Culture team, relating to employment terms and conditions.

Questions that can be addressed:

1. Can I terminate a staff person because we have no work for them?
2. What do I do if a person can't work from home?
3. Can I reduce or change their working hours?
4. How much do I need to pay people if we terminate their employment?
5. What other arrangements can I make so people don't lose their jobs?
6. Can I expect people to do a different job if needed?
7. Do we have to keep paying people if there is no work left to do?
8. How can I support staff to work from home?
9. Do employees apply for sick leave if they contract COVID 19?

People and Culture can be contacted, Monday to Friday:

Telephone (03) 9251 5917

Email: people&culture@victas.uca.org.au

As we said earlier, Presbytery is keen to hear about your ongoing financial situation and to find ways to help you navigate the challenges that you are facing.

God's strength and peace be with you.

Jeff Gardner, Presbytery Treasurer

treasurer@ppep.victas.uca.org.au

0419 886 659

Duncan Macleod, Presbytery Minister: Team Leader

pm-tl@ucappep.org

0439 828 718