

# East Camberwell Baptist Church and COVID 19 Restrictions

19 October 2021

The Diaconate of East Camberwell Baptist Church have discussed the issue of COVID 19 restrictions after the government announcement this past Sunday, and the official position of our church in general terms is as follows:

- At a minimum, the church will comply with all the recommendations of the Chief Health Officer of the State of Victoria.
  - While this is also a legal and insurance-related issue (i.e. the church could be subject to heavy fines and a loss of insurance coverage for not complying),
  - **our primary motivation** is that we believe it is important to safeguard those in our community who are most vulnerable, and in particular the more elderly members of our congregation.
  - We acknowledge that this may require sacrifices in other aspects, but ...
  - we believe this is the best way that we can demonstrate the love of Christ to the broader community
  - We would also note that this is consistent with the BUV guidelines that emphasize “the Christian perspective of putting the common good ahead of asserting individual rights”
  
- In some instances, we may also **want to go a step further** than the mandated requirements in order to protect the vulnerable, but at this stage we believe the Chief Health Officer’s advice is sufficiently cautious.
  
- We are painfully aware that this position ...
  - may cause some members of our community to feel isolated and left out, and
  - we are open to suggestions as to how this can be rectified or minimized, but
  - we are firm in the belief that care for the vulnerable and elderly is our first priority.

In practical terms, what action should we take?

For the period that the state government refers to as **Stage B** (i.e. beginning 22 Oct) ...

- The Diaconate is not intending to follow any of the 'outdoor service' options
  - We see holding a service outdoors as very problematic for the elderly members
  - As well as running a Zoom version of the service becomes impractical, which isolates the members who can only attend by Zoom
  - Not to mention the potential for inclement weather to disrupt everything
- Thus, we are left with two possibilities
  - A 20 person indoor service with only vaccinated members attending, and the rest remain on Zoom, or
  - Two indoor services - one for vaccinated (20 max) and one for unvaccinated members (10 max), plus some will remain on Zoom
- We believe that the first option is the only practical one
  - We have essentially 21 regularly attending members who are fully vaccinated, and two who are not vaccinated, plus 6 who will always be Zoom-based
  - Given that many or most of our elder and vulnerable really should and probably will want to keep their distance from unvaccinated members for the moment, the two service option would probably result, at best, in something close to a 16 - 5 split, and at worst in a 20 - 2 split
  - Plus, we have to be concerned that our minister, with his diabetes, is potentially one of the vulnerable people we have to be concerned about.
  - Fortunately, this should only last for two weeks or so before the next change in rules

As for **Stage C** and the situation beyond, the Diaconate will be having one-on-one discussions with the various attendees before making our decision.