

Waiuku and Districts Combined Churches – Covid-19 Protection Plan Dec 2021

Factors in our decision

We acknowledge that Covid-19 is a serious threat to our community, and we believe that the single most effective tool for containing it is vaccination. We are uncomfortable, though, with the idea of forcing people to be vaccinated by withdrawing the normal benefits of church life from them. We are committed to providing worship, fellowship and pastoral care to all who come to us, whether vaccinated or not. We aim to do this in the safest way we possibly can.

As the ‘traffic light system’ is introduced throughout the country, a great deal of uncertainty about the future remains. Daily cases are still quite high, and are expected to rise as restrictions are lifted. There will be progressive changes to restrictions throughout the summer, and the effect of these is not yet known. The vaccination program is still below target, and all children under 12 are still at risk. Not everyone is able to access their vaccination pass yet. Another variant of the virus is spreading overseas and its risk-level is still being assessed. The advice from the Ministry of Health and our parent churches is still developing, sometimes contradictory and highly likely to change as events unfold, with little advance warning. In this environment we need to adopt a cautious, conservative approach. We are not going to return to pre-pandemic church life anytime soon.

The challenges facing us

We need to maintain our unity. We are all in this together, vaccinated or not. At the same time, we need to make a special effort to protect those in greatest danger of catching this disease. We will need to show patience and forbearance, respect and support each other, and accept change to long-held practices. It will call for creative solutions and we will have to be nimble. It will cost.

Steps already taken

Due to the long period in lockdown, we have already taken many steps to reduce risk:

- All of our staff are fully vaccinated and working within the regulations
- Op Shop volunteers who have health problems or are unvaccinated have been asked to stay home for the present so that they and our customers can be kept safe. Numbers in the back of the shop have been limited. This is a major sacrifice for them and for us. We thank them and we miss them.
- Masks are encouraged at all times, and compulsory where the regulations require it
- The church building is closed to all groups (both external and internal)
- Worship is being conducted on-line through Zoom, with those who do not use Zoom receiving services by email or hand-delivered mail-outs. Links to the services are being provided to the community through Facebook and our website
- Several church groups are meeting on-line through Zoom or Messenger
- Phone groups are operating to maintain contact with individuals

- Pastoral visits are continuing subject to the rules and safety advice from the Ministry of Health
- We are continuing to produce a monthly newsletter for our community

Plan for the future

Our strategy is to treat the next two months as a bedding-in period, in which we mostly continue what we are doing, refining and improving what we can, cautiously experimenting with a relaxation of the rules, always well within the Ministry of Health guidelines. We will review our strategy at the end of January, by which time we expect that most of the current uncertainties will be resolved. This means that:

For Sunday Worship

- Our Sunday worship will continue to be mainly on-line. We will continue to improve our off-line offerings to those who do not have access to Zoom.
- We will experiment with bringing small groups into the church auditorium to participate in the broadcast service. Priority will be given to regular attenders who cannot access Zoom at home. The groups will be clearly identified as “Vaccinated-only” or “Open” They will be restricted to a specific area of the building and all the corresponding Ministry of Health regulations will be followed. This will give us experience in opening the building for worship with minimal risk. With careful building management, it may be possible to permit several groups to worship at the same time. Registering on entry is required.
- Worshippers at home will be encouraged to invite others in to their home to share the service and fellowship afterwards. Invitations must clearly state whether it is “Vaccinated-only” or “Open” and the corresponding Ministry of Health regulations must be followed.

For Use of Church Buildings

- The church buildings will remain closed to external groups. Exceptions may be made for community service groups such as the Blood Transfusion Service, or Vaccination clinics. In such cases, the groups will be restricted to a specific area of the building, and the regulations for “Open” gatherings must be followed. Registering on entry is required.
- Weddings and funerals will be allowed for people who have a connection with the church. In such cases, the gatherings must be clearly identified as “Vaccinated-only” or “Open”. The funeral director or wedding celebrant will be responsible for ensuring that all of the corresponding regulations are observed. Registering on entry is required.
- We will experiment with allowing church groups to use the church building for meetings. As with worship groups, the meetings must be clearly defined as “Vaccine-only” or “Open”, the group will be restricted to a specific area of the building, and all corresponding Ministry of Health regulations must be followed. Registering on entry is required.

For Pastoral Care

We will continue to offer pastoral care by phone or home visits, subject to the regulations.
Entry to the church and offices is by appointment only.

For Parish Council

Peter Winfield
Chairman Parish Council
Waiuku and Districts Combined Churches

2 December 2021