



The Anglican Diocese of Gippsland

The Rt Revd Dr Richard Treloar
Bishop of Gippsland

A Pastoral Letter to be read at Sunday Services on 17 October 2021

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings on this twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost!

We have been through so much together over these last 20 months. In recent weeks a new challenge has arisen: how we will bear witness to the love of God in Christ in a (so called) 'vaccinated economy'.

I have been in touch directly with the clergy of the Diocese several times this last week, as we have tried to process the details of the Acting Chief Health Officer's Directions in relation to mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations for authorised workers – directions which arise from the Victorian Government's powers under State of Emergency provisions.

I will not attempt to rehearse the complexities of that information in this pastoral letter. Your ministry team will work through it with you in the days ahead, and perhaps you have already begun the conversation as to how these requirements apply in your local setting.

Suffice to say, there will need to be some attention given to how we organise our worship and outreach while such directions remain in place. Please support your leaders, lay and ordained, as they respond to our evolving missional context creatively and carefully.

My purpose in writing to you is threefold:

- to acknowledge the additional burden that these directions place upon our clergy and people at a time that is already stressful, after many months of uncertainty, anxiety, and fatigue;
- to thank you for the vital part you will play in ensuring that – as a diocesan family – we fully comply with the lawful, if exceptional, public health requirements; and
- to assure you that we will 'making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph 4:3).

As Anglicans we have a strong sense of our mutual belonging in the body of Christ, and of the responsibilities that go with that privilege – including our duty of care to the wider community, especially the most vulnerable. This is part of what it means to be a church-in-society tradition. At the same time we take seriously the role of individual conscience and treasure a polity that embraces difference and celebrates diversity.

The Anglican Church generally, and the Diocese of Gippsland in particular, is not requiring any of its clergy or people to be vaccinated. We do, however, have obligations to ensure that our activities reflect community expectations and enforceable requirements with respect to how unvaccinated Church Workers (a definition under the Directions that includes volunteers) exercise their ministries.

There is no escaping the fact that the choice not to be vaccinated, or not to disclose one's level of vaccination, carries implications as to how and where and with whom one can work or volunteer.

We will, therefore, need to find a way of holding in tension our proper ecclesial convictions around the radical inclusion of the Gospel, with a commitment to honouring civic authority.

You may be feeling a mix of confusion, frustration, and exhaustion; you may be relieved at these measures, or outraged by them.

Wherever you find yourself in relation to this emerging way of living with COVID, our households of faith and fellowship are ultimately governed by the divine economy of grace, of which the altar-table is a primary symbol: a table at which everyone has a place, and there is enough and to spare.

At this table we encounter, as both Guest and Host, God's living Word made flesh; in whom there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, and – with apologies to St Paul – neither vaccinated nor unvaccinated, for all of us are one in him. (See Gal 3:28)

These are complex issues which will evoke strong emotions and robust dialogue. We need to be ready to have those hard conversations well, in the right spirit, guarding the dignity of each other in the body of Christ as fiercely as we might defend our own personal views on these matters.

With your Archdeacons, Dean, and Regional Deans, with the Registry team, with your clergy and lay leaders, and with our ecumenical and wider-church colleagues, I am determined to seek ways of expressing our common life such that that no one be prevented from exercising their baptismal ministry, that no one be impeded from receiving the grace of the Sacraments, and that no one be marginalised on the basis of their vaccination level.

We will be compliant, and we will be Christian: disciples of him who came not to be served but to serve.

Again, please support, encourage and collaborate with those in your local ministry centre who have oversight of these matters. And please pray for our leaders – temporal and spiritual.

I am available to you should you have any questions or concerns.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Eph 4:4

Grace and peace,



Committed in Christ, Connecting in Service, Creative in Spirit

We acknowledge the First Nations people of this region as the traditional custodians of the land on which the Diocese of Gippsland serves.

We are committed to ensuring our centres of worship and outreach are safe places for all.

Postal Address PO Box 928, Sale, 3850, VIC
Telephone (03) 5144 2044 **Mobile** 0418 337 990
Email bishop@gippsanglican.org.au
Website www.gippsanglican.org.au