

27/05/2020

Serbian Metropolitane of Australia and New Zealand - Bishop Siluan's further appeal to the Australian Prime Minister



Dear Prime Minister,

I write to you in the wake of media reports noting that, given the success of current measures dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, restrictions on cafes, pubs and registered clubs will be eased to allow greater public access to these spaces. This easing of restrictions is to be welcomed as a step towards dealing with the difficulties people have had to face and deal with as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. We understand that they will be an important step towards improving the economic and social wellbeing of the nation. However, they will not address the deleterious effects to the religious and spiritual well-being of the millions of Australians, and in my case, the tens of thousands of Australia's Serbian Orthodox Christians.

The Church till date has done its best to meet the government requirements placed

on its places of worship whilst continuing to preach the Gospel of Christ and serve the Holy Eucharist, albeit in extreme circumstances; all of this in line with Romans 13, 1-8 and Acts 2:42-43, Corinthians 10:17 and Hebrews 10,25.

The Church and community welcome the proposed easing of restrictions mentioned above, but also in like manner expect the easing of restrictions on places of worship to follow. In short, apart from looking forward to being able to socialise and, in many cases get back to work, we also would like to stress that a return to communal worship is fundamentally important for Christians, as the Eucharistic gathering (synaxis) constitutes our Christian identity and ethos.

[In my previous letter to you](#), I explained the issues affecting those entrusted to my spiritual care, and I can only add that those same issues are becoming more serious and the situation more complicated. An easing of restrictions would be a welcome development. Faith communities are deserving of respite as are other sectors of society.

In this respect I urge you to ease the restrictions on gatherings at places of worship. The current restrictions limit the number of people that can enter a church, attend a wedding or a funeral. For example, a maximum of 10 persons can participate in a religious service or wedding. I strongly recommend that the number be increased to at least the maximum numbers allowed for indoor gatherings such as restaurants, cafes, and pubs subject to the same requirement for appropriate social distancing within the 4 square metre principle.

Apart from allowing more of the faithful to participate in religious services this would also provide consistency in application of the guidelines and would address concerns expressed in our community that the government has taken into account economic concerns without an equal consideration of the spiritual and social wellbeing of its citizens.

The government has successfully built public trust in, and compliance with, its public health messages concerning Covid 19 and as we move to relax restrictions it will be increasingly important to retain that trust.

Australia has done remarkably well in terms of containing the spread of Covid-19 and Australians, be they believers or non-believers, have accepted the sacrifices that had to be made. I believe that they accept that the path back to normalcy must be approached with caution and that the nation is in a position to take the first steps in that direction. In that respect, the easing of restrictions on gatherings at places of worship must be part of that process.

Wishing you wisdom and a continued commitment to justice and compassion.

Yours sincerely,

+Siluan

*Bishop of Australia and New Zealand
The Serbian Orthodox Church*

[Source](#)