

Upcoming dates.

Mar 18 2020

March 19th 7:30pm meeting at church to discuss and form pastoral response team for covid19- anyone is invited.

March 21st Revised men's mini muster- morning only, 8:30am at CBTB

March 22nd NOTE!!! church is the Park, THIS SUNDAY Pier St, 11AM

March 22nd. 6pm-7:30pm Special small group leaders meeting: Those who are leading, or have lead or those who would like to help lead a small group please come and help us work through how we can best navigate how we meet and encourage each other through this time.

The logo for 'church by the bay portarlington' is displayed within a rectangular border. The words 'church by the bay' are in a large, dark blue, lowercase sans-serif font. Below this, the word 'portarlington' is written in a smaller, dark blue, lowercase sans-serif font. A light blue, brush-stroke-like graphic element is positioned behind the text, extending horizontally across the width of the logo.

Dear Church,

On Wednesday the government made an announcement that gatherings over 100 (indoors) are to be banned. The prime minister said, *“Churches, mosques, synagogues or others, should comply with that before the end of this week where we’ll be considering further the rules that are established amongst smaller gatherings.”*

As an eldership we’ve been discussing this possibility and looking at how we gather and other responses to covid19 in alignment with the DHHS. In this e-news I’ll talk about our Sunday gatherings, our smaller places, how we can practically love those most affected by the virus and our finances as a church. But before I do this, I want to encourage you that I believe the Lord had **already shown us** some of the impacts of this event and how He wants to flow through us.

Almost 12 months ago we received three words in a listening time at church. The first was *“trouble is coming but don’t ask why but how you can glorify me through it.”* Two weeks later the impact of the exempt benefits error hit which caused us to have to look at our finances and structures in an unprecedented way. The second picture was of a snake shedding its skin. You may have heard me speak about this. Snakes shed their skin for two reasons; for growth and to get rid of parasites. From this picture I believe God’s inviting us to consider the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that have been “parasitical” to our intimacy with him and how he wants to work through us. Finally, is the third picture, which went like this.

“There was of a strong wind blowing in off the sea - I immediately sensed it was the wind of the Spirit blowing into the church. It lifted the roof clean off the church building, and then the four walls fell outwards - ever so gently! The people (the church) then started walking out of the building carrying little lights, but these little lights started other lights as they went into people’s houses and businesses, there were also great big fires (beacons) - they seemed to be around the foreshore lighting the way to safety for ships and travellers (people from further afield). As I looked from above I saw many lights all over the peninsula - they seemed to be multiplying amazingly fast. The word I got was - “A church without walls.”

I believe what God gave us that Sunday was a word to help us see what he is doing now, so that we can keep in step with Him.

I’ve been reading John this last week. I want you to forget for a moment that this is something from “the bible” and rather see it as John, recounting the intense and challenging times he went through with Jesus and the disciples as Jesus faced his eminent betrayal and execution.

With their heads and hearts still reeling after Jesus washed their feet, they move towards having the Passover meal. Imagine the food being brought out, the smell of the lamb as the disciples find their place around the low set table. As they settle in Jesus tells them that one of them, one of the 12, is going to betray him.

*"I am telling you now before it happens, so that **when it does** happen you will **believe** that I am who I am."*

Jesus saying "I am who I am" was not a play on words, it was Jesus using the words God used of himself when he asked Moses to go to Egypt. At that time, Moses asked, "who will I say has sent me?" God replied, tell them "I am sent you." As the disciples wrestled with the thought of Jesus being betrayed, Jesus was telling them that his predicted betrayal was further evidence that Jesus was the great "I am". That those events, just like Moses', were a part of God's sovereign plan to set captives free and that he was, like he had done with Moses, inviting them to "**Believe.**"

In John, belief is never just a mental thing, but it is always accompanied by action. I believe that 12 months ago God gave us a series of pictures that encouraged us that he was not only with us, but that God was going to use the events to "*blow the roof*" off of our structures as a part of his sovereign plan to see people saved and restored. Like Moses, like the disciples, God is inviting us "**to believe.**"

Of course, the disciples didn't see the whole picture then, it was only years later that they saw clearly. We undoubtedly will have the same experience as we look back years from now.

But the "belief" that I believe God is inviting us to will require new and different actions *now*.

Our Practical responses to Covid.

1. Pastoral response team.

We want to be able to care well for those who are affected adversely from the virus. Our first priority is to care for people from our own church, then those in our wider community. This might include shopping, taking people to appointments, dropping off a meal or visiting someone (with appropriate health measures) who can't get out. If you're interested in being a part of this then we're meeting **Thursday night the 19th, 7:30pm at CBTB** to look at what we can do, who we could help, how to organise this response and how we can resource what we do.

2. Small groups.

As our roof is "*blown off*" I believe our small groups have a far bigger part to play in what God does next. The early church and the persecuted church have never had buildings, and yet God has done amazing things through them. I think this is an opportunity to perhaps, "*shed our skin*", and grasp with new vitality our understanding of what it means to be a temple of living stones, a church without walls.

Vital to this is those who lead small groups. So if you currently lead a small group or have lead a small group or would be willing to help lead a small group, I'd like to ask you to meet this **Sunday 22nd at 6pm at CBtB**. We will discuss, in light of our inability to meet together on Sunday's:

- How we can organise our small groups
- What resources we may need
- What equipping would be helpful
- How new people can connect and belong
- What new small groups we may need

I really need the collective wisdom of others, I can't do this on my own and need the perspective, skills and abilities others have.

3. Sunday gatherings.

The government has said groups of up to 500 people, with appropriate health measures are able to meet outside. We've asked and been granted permission from Bellarine Bayside to meet in the park **this Sunday the 22nd** and for the following Sunday on the **29th**- our planned outdoor service. We will meet at **11am for both services**. This Sunday we're celebrating Craig's 14 years of leadership in our church. We've got some special things planned, so come along, bring some lunch and let's continue to light a foreshore beacon.

After the 29th of March, we won't be meeting on Sunday's as a whole church until advised that this is permissible. We'll let you know more about how we're going to connect, but small groups are going to be a vital part of how we continue to encourage and build each other up as we seek to listen and obey what the Spirit is doing. If you're *not* currently in a small group or have to self-isolate because of covid19, can you please let us

know. Please text, phone or email Julie on 0420930818 or julie.ann.rock@gmail.com. We'll then seek to place you with a group and find out how we can care for you through this time.

4.Finances and giving.

I'm very conscious that some of you will have been hit hard with the share market slump, while others have small businesses or employment that will be affected as a result of Covid19. This may affect your ability to tithe, so remember we're under grace, not law so please, don't be under even the illusion of condemnation if you're unable to give. However, if you do currently tithe in cash, would you consider shifting this to online? We will as a church continue to tithe what we receive to groups outside of the church. Our new EGS group (External gospel support) has just had approved by the elders a revised list of those we support directly with our church tithe, and associate ministries we will support through promoting their events. Regardless of what finances do come into our church, we will give a tithe of our income away.

Our church online giving is:

Church By the Bay

BSB: 633 000

Account number: 110333457

Thanks for reading through all of this, I know it's a lot. Perhaps if you have a small group or sit together as a family you could read this out. We're in interesting but very exciting times. I'm looking forward to seeing how the Spirit is going to lead us with no roof.

God bless,

Pastor Dave

Pastoral Care Support

Just as a reminder, I encourage any of you who require pastoral support, or are aware of someone who needs pastoral support, to please contact Annette and Paul at pastoralcare@churchbythebay.com, or on mobile at 0490 112 289.