



# Archbishop of Sydney

12 August 2021

Dear brothers and sisters

At the end of the Letter to the Romans the apostle Paul says to his readers: I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf. Romans 15:30

It is striking that in the preceding verses Paul has rehearsed his plans, unsuccessful up to that point, to visit the church in Rome (15:23-29). Though he is well-acquainted with members of the church, and others who are among them (16:1-15) he has not been able to visit. Yet, he does not hesitate to acknowledge them as 'brothers and sisters' and common sharers with him in the fellowship of the Triune God. Specifically, he appeals to them to 'strive together with me' *in prayer*. Though they are separated by distance and have no personal knowledge of each other (mostly) yet they are co-sharers in God and his gospel, and fellow workers in the mission *through prayer*. In our locked down circumstances, we are acutely aware of the limitations on our fellowship, but here is a wonderful reminder of the triune shape, the power and purpose of our prayers – a mutual striving in the service of the gospel.

During the week I had a phone call with the Minister for Sport, Multiculturalism, Seniors and Veterans, Natalie Ward MLC, and Joseph La Posta, CEO of Multiculturalism NSW, who is also the government's liaison with multicultural communities on Covid responses. The Minister conveyed the thanks of the Premier to our churches and agencies for your leadership in supporting the community and adhering to the government's measures to contain the spread of the virus. She acknowledged the heavy imposition on church life and ministry, and expressed appreciation for our cooperation and sacrifice.

I engaged her at length on the matter of pastoral 'mental health' visits to parishioners including in the locked down LGAs. She was sympathetic and agreed to raise it 'upstream' but she was not optimistic about the outcome. I offered the possibility of Anglican Churches serving as pop-up sites for vaccination hubs. This will be directed to the regional health area offices for consideration.

I understand that there are a range of views about vaccination in congregations and staff teams – as in the community. Ray Galea has written helpfully about how to approach disagreement within the church family on this subject. <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/vaccine-wars-and-the-church-of-god/>

Vaccination is an important element of keeping the community safe. If you have no objection, please get vaccinated yourself and do your best to address the concerns of those in your congregation who are 'vaccine hesitant'. I am not asking you to dispense medical advice. We

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are encouraging people to talk to their GPs about medical concerns. However, social media is awash with fanciful theories including that the vaccines are a Trojan horse for governmental control or 'the mark of the beast'. These ideas need to be repudiated graciously but firmly. Ethical concerns include the use of the HEK-293 line of cells derived from an abortion in the early 1970s and the risk to others in *not* being vaccinated. These issues are helpfully considered by Dr Megan Best in her updated piece which can be read and shared at <https://sydneyanglicans.net/news/should-christians-accept-the-covid-19-vaccine/51508>. I have also included with this letter, PDFs of SMH coverage including statements from me. For the purposes of full disclosure, Bishop Glenn Davies, all of the Regional Bishops and I have all received at least one jab.

I know that a great many people are exercised about the complete 'ban' on weddings. We are making regular and forthright representations on this issue. The government struggles to appreciate how there could be a wedding 'without a party' or why there would be urgency to 'sign the piece of paper'. We continue to advocate vigorously in this area.

In closing may I thank you again all for your hard work for the Lord and his people. It is important to recognise and appropriately accommodate to the reality that enforced confinement and the disruption to routine means that you ought not to expect the same levels of productivity as you usually achieve. Please ensure that you take time each day to rest and recreate. The apostle Paul says 'Be kind to one another' - those with whom you share a household, those with whom you share in ministry paid or voluntary, yourself. Where you need to, give yourself or others permission to go at a slower pace. This is not self-indulgence, it is stewardship. You cannot serve the sheep if you do not care for yourself.

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13*

In Christ



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