



Queensland Baptists COVID-19 Update 24 March 2020

As we navigate recent restrictions to how we do church moving forward, we are mindful that uncertainty and ambiguity exists, and as we look more globally it is evident that further restrictions will come into effect in order to reduce the spread of COVID – 19. It is with this in mind, that we seek to guide churches of the QB Movement to be thinking about getting ahead of the trajectory of restrictions.

Further to the restrictions handed down from the National Cabinet, effective as at midday yesterday 23 March 2020, we have updates from Queensland Health that require further consideration and adherence to.

In the [Non-essential Business Closure Direction](#) from the QLD Chief Health Officer, in accordance with emergency powers arising from the declared public health emergency (Section 362B of the Public Health Act 2005 QLD), we see a clearly defined definition of non-essential business capturing churches:

“A place where persons congregate for the purpose of worship or fellowship, including weddings and baptisms.

Funerals except where the gathering does not exceed 1 person per 4 square metres and social distancing, including keeping 1.5 metres between people, can be accommodated”.

We also see restrictions placed on non-essential business from operating or undertaking business during the period of the declared public health emergency, *including operating at a private residence.*

In a separate direction from the Chief Health Officer in relation to [Mass Gatherings](#) we are advised of restrictions in relation to allowing, organising and attending mass gatherings. In the definition of mass gatherings, we see the following captured:

- A gathering of 500 or more persons in a single undivided outdoor space at the same time; or
- A gathering of 100 persons or more in a single undivided indoor space at the same time; or
- A gathering of fewer than 100 persons in a single undivided indoor space at the same time, unless:
 - the total number of persons present in the single undivided indoor space at the same time, which is an indoor space accessible to the public, does not exceed one person per 4 square metres; or
 - the gathering is at a person’s private residence.

In the case of church gatherings conducted on church property, the provisions on mass gatherings relating to maximum allowable numbers are overruled by the non-essential business directive. We cannot run church events on church property even for less than 100 persons. Additionally, erring on the side of caution with this level of ambiguity, and because we are defined as a non-essential business with restrictions on *operating at a private residence*, we recommend churches plan on encouraging “virtual” home groups/home church. This can be facilitated via a range of platforms such as [Skype](#) or [Zoom](#).

Additional tools that will be useful for churches in running small groups includes [Alpha Online](#) and [Right Now Media](#)

We reiterate that the spirit of the limitations being placed on our communities is intended to reduce the spread of the virus to ultimately save lives. It is a challenging time and each day we are seeing changes.

We have prepared the attached FAQ's to help churches navigate decision making, but we also understand the National Cabinet will be considering further Stage 2 restrictions and so our desire is to be as proactive as we can to get ahead of this and start getting our "new normals" in place for church.

This health crisis has caused rapid change, uncertainty about the future and restrictions on previously assumed freedoms, which could easily be the source of fear and anxiety. It is times like these that we need to 'be strong in the Lord' and hold on to exhortations such as Philippians 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

May the peace of God be multiplied to you as you respond with faith filled prayer to the situation at hand.

Stewart Pieper
Director of Services