

REOPENING OUR DOORS

VACCINATION AND
NAVIGATING THE ROAD AHEAD



Personal perspectives

Margaret

Margaret is an Elder and member of the Church Council at Warapina Street UC, keen to have the chance to gather again as soon as possible – aware of the deep desire of so many of the community to reconnect.

Through her pastoral connections, she is aware of a number of members of the community who have been feeling very isolated and struggling with their mental health. Margaret has been part of a small team of pastoral carers helping with meal deliveries, shopping, home support, special care packages and regular phone conversations to keep in touch.

Margaret is concerned that others, including some on Church Council, seem to be overly cautious about coming back together. There are a few members of the congregation who don't want to get vaccinated for various reasons. Margaret has chosen to be vaccinated, but it is a person's individual decision, and Margaret and a number of others feel strongly that Christians shouldn't discriminate amongst each other.

Margaret was glad when Church Council agreed at its last meeting that it was really important to meet together as a Christian community, to offer each other support and encouragement, and that vaccination status shouldn't exclude anyone from gathering in person.

However, now that restrictions have eased, no one seems willing to actually come along or

help lead the service. Some have mentioned they don't want to put their Christmas family gatherings at risk, which are much more important than church gatherings, that can happen just as well online.

The Church Council called for a special meeting, explaining it was essential to keep everyone together, and proposed that the congregation would continue with online worship until the pandemic was over, or until everyone felt safe again. Margaret was wondering if she could challenge the Church Council on this decision. But what would she want to say?

Ramesh

Ramesh has been an Elder and member of the Church Council of Arrinara UC for the past three years. After shifting into the town a few years earlier, when he bought the local computer repair shop, he has become involved with the local church, and it seems people have come to trust him.

Ramesh meets Bill, the Chairperson of Church Council, coming out of the local supermarket. Bill greets Ramesh warmly and tells Ramesh how glad he is the Church Council will be able to make a decision tomorrow night, and get on with things.

Bill tells Ramesh how important it is for the congregation to get back to worshipping together as soon as possible. Bill is glad they are just a small community and don't have to worry about vaccination restrictions.

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Uniting Church in Australia
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Ramesh is a bit surprised. He's aware there are a couple of people in the congregation who have quietly said they object to being vaccinated, and others recently told Ramesh they felt anxious about coming back together because of health worries. A few of the older members have been having treatment for cancer, and another, who cares for her adult daughter with a disability, has said she wants to avoid any risks for her daughter's sake.

It was only last week that Ramesh talked with the retired minister in the congregation, who confided he was in the middle of investigations. It seemed his cancer might have spread and it was likely he would need more chemotherapy. He told Ramesh how hard it was to leave the congregation without a worship leader since the last minister left, but he was wondering if it was time to call it quits.

Personally, Ramesh would deeply love for everyone to all be worshipping together. Everyone needs it! And there haven't been any Covid cases in the town. He is feeling torn. What will he say at the Church Council meeting tomorrow night?

Chloe

Chloe is a member of the Children And Families ministry team and heavily involved in the Manira Street UC's activities. She isn't a member of Church Council, but has been doing a number of practical things in the congregation in the past 18 months, including organising a roster to deliver meals for families in difficult situations, and running an alternative Zoom worship for families and an online kids' group on Saturday afternoons.

Recently, she found herself providing care packs for VCE students coming up for exams, and delivering meals to some of the older members of the congregation and keeping in touch with a few of them on the phone.

Chloe would love to see her community have the chance to get back together and is getting the feeling many people would like that, too. Church Council hasn't made a decision, but she is worried. It was only a few months ago that one of their families lost their grandmother because of Covid, and the mother of another family contracted the disease late last year and still hasn't been able to return to work. It seems like everyone has forgotten how serious this disease is.

The mother of one of their families is undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer. A teenager has a chronic illness and is immunocompromised. Another family has two children on the autism spectrum who are severely anxious about the virus. And several of the older members have expressed concern about feeling vulnerable.

Chloe says it is strange that there are so many people wanting to get back together when the risks remain so high. Surely the Church Council should only allow services for fully vaccinated people. Chloe is left wondering ...

How can she raise her concerns?

