

8 September 2021

The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian
MP Premier of New South Wales
cc: **The Hon. Brad Hazzard, MP**
52 Martin Place
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Premier Berejiklian,

I'm writing to you in my capacity as the NSW State President for the Australian Christian Churches (ACC). The ACC represents over 300 Churches across NSW with a constituency of approx. 100,000 members, and nationally as a movement has over 1000 churches.

Firstly, we want to thank you, Mr. Hazzard, and Dr. Chant for the leadership you have provided to us during this most difficult time within our State. We recognise that this has been a challenging time for you as a leader to navigate, but please be assured we have felt led and valued by the leadership you continue to bring to us.

Secondly, I would like to assure you that our regular communication and message to all of our constituents has clearly and strongly encouraged them to follow the guidelines that the NSW Government has set before us.

Additionally, from all the feedback I have received, and services I have watched on live stream, our churches are working hard to make sure they are abiding by all the guidelines. I would like to reassure you that as we emerged from the last lockdown, our churches were extremely diligent in their Covid-19 safety processes in order to keep people safe. And we are confident that our churches will be able do this again.

However, the main purpose of this letter is to bring to your attention a number of concerns and requests we would like you to consider when it comes to the opening of churches across NSW as you begin to remove some of the restrictions in October:

- As leaders of a faith community that is engaged with the broader community, we are deeply concerned about the mental, emotional, and spiritual health of people at this time. I believe, and I have heard it said in different meetings with yourself and other members of your team, that churches provide a great environment for people to care and nurture not only their spiritual health, but that churches have a role to play in their mental and emotional wellbeing as well.

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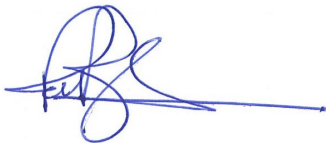
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Historically, the church has also been a great aid practically to our broader local communities and we believe as we come out of some incredibly hard restrictions, we will be part of the solution moving forward to support those who have been adversely affected by this season in our State.

- We understand that the NSW State Government will encourage churches to be vaccinated. We do however, respect that this is a personal decision that should be made on conscience and/or individual medical advice.
- I implore you, to please ensure that when our churches are allowed to open-up to their congregations and their communities, that unvaccinated people are not disallowed from attending church venues. The very centerpiece of the church has always been one of inclusiveness and it is absolutely critical that we can continue as churches to have an inclusive model that allows everybody, regardless of who they are, to be part of the local church. In saying this though, we realise that in allowing our churches to be safe and healthy places for all people to gather, we must adhere to the strong Covid-19 Safety Plan and health guidelines set by the NSW State Government for large gatherings across all our churches.

Once again, thank you, and we do appreciate all that you and your team are doing. We look forward to receiving a favorable response from you.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Paul Bartlett', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Pastor Paul Bartlett
NSW & ACT State President
Australian Christian Churches