

16 September 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Greetings in Christ.

As we are sure you know, the Victorian Premier has recently been talking about moving from a Covid-19 “lockdown” policy to a “lockout” policy, saying that there would be “a lock-out of many, many venues for those who are not vaccinated.” The Federal and some other state governments have made similar announcements of what has been called a ‘Vaccination Passport’ policy.

We are especially concerned that a policy like that could be applied to churches. We urge you to pray about this, and consider calling or writing to your representatives in the Victorian Parliament to ask them not to apply a vaccination passport rule to the churches of Victoria.

We know that there are differences of view in the community about the safety and wisdom of being vaccinated and of not being vaccinated. And there will be differences of view on such things within our own congregation as well. At a time like this it’s important to seek to maintain unity among God’s people. In Romans 14:19 we read: *“So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.”* In Ephesians 4:1-3 Paul exhorts: *“I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* The Lord Jesus said: *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”* (Mt 5:9).

We must live together peacefully and in love even when we disagree on various matters of Christian living. In 1 Corinthians 8, for example, the Apostle Paul calls the Christians in Corinth to mutually respect their brothers and sisters in Christ who had different convictions about eating food offered to idols. In Romans 14:5-13 Paul exhorts believers not to judge one another, but to respect that each person must make their own decisions in good conscience before God. When we apply this to our own situation, some may think it best to get vaccinated and do get vaccinated, and some may think it best not to get vaccinated and hence do not get vaccinated. Each person must decide in good conscience before God, but we must also respect the freedom of others to come to a different conclusion.

We would be deeply concerned if the Victorian Government’s foreshadowed “lockout” policy left no space for this freedom of conscience.

Of even more concern, if it were applied to churches it would seriously compromise the unity and mission of the Church. The Lord calls us to *“make disciples of all nations”* (Mt 28:19), bringing them in to our community to worship and love God (Jn 13:35; 1 Cor 14:24). Following the apostles’ examples, we are even to put ourselves at risk to make the gospel

known and bring people into the worship of the Saviour (2 Cor 5:11-6:10). We must not turn anyone away from the church, either on the basis of their vaccination status or anything else.

In the Belgic Confession Article 36, our spiritual forebears said that the government should function “in the sphere entrusted to them.” The Westminster Confession of Faith likewise says that “Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments” (WCF 23.III). We believe that these statements summarise the teaching of scripture well. While civil government has been granted the power of the “*sword*” for the good ordering of society (Rom 13:4), it has not been granted power to regulate the ministry of the Word or Sacraments.

Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper helpfully articulated the idea of “sphere sovereignty”, meaning that the variously ordained authorities must operate only within their God-appointed jurisdiction. If the Victorian Government were to make it mandatory to exclude certain people from worship they would be inviting judgement, as King Uzziah did when he usurped authority over worship (2 Chron 26:16-20).

We therefore urge you as a matter of first importance to be constant and urgent in prayer over this serious matter. 1 Timothy 2:1-4 teaches us that even our praying for the civil authorities is to have a gospel motivation: “*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*”

And we again urge and encourage you especially to contact your representatives in the Upper and Lower Houses of the Victorian Parliament by phone and in writing. Attached are some templates which you might use as a basis to draft letters to the party leaders, to your local representatives, and the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition in the Australian Parliament. Please feel free to modify these templates to add whatever further comments you would like. It is urgent that letters like this are sent as soon as possible, as it is likely that governments will be making decisions and announcements on this very soon even though they might not be implemented for some weeks or months. Letters and phone calls do make a difference, and it is important that our representatives know our views on this. The more contact they receive, the more they are likely to consider the issues carefully.

You can find eMail and phone contact details of your Victorian representatives at: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/findelectorate/>.

Contact details for Members of the Australian Parliament can be found here: https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Guidelines_for_Contacting_Senators_and_Members

Brothers and sisters, if you need any further help with contacting your representatives, please reach out to us and we will be happy to assist you. May the Lord give peace to His people, so that we may indeed lead peaceful, quiet lives, in all dignity and godliness, as we seek to worship Him and to tell out the gospel to all people.

With love in Christ,
Albie, Isaac, and Ken.

DRAFT LETTER TO VICTORIAN PREMIER

Your Name

Your Full
Postal Address

Mobile: Your Mobile Number
eMail: Your eMail address

[Date]

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier of Victoria
Parliament of Victoria

Dear Mr Andrews,

Thank you for bearing the responsibility of being Premier of the State at this challenging time. As a Christian, I pray regularly for God's blessing and leading of you and all your Parliamentary colleagues in fulfilling your demanding responsibilities.

I am writing to you to express concern at comments you have made about Victoria moving from Covid-19 'lockdown' to a 'lock-out' policy, which has been referred to in the press as a 'Vaccination Passport'.

I would reject any interference by the State in applying any form of lock-out rule to regulate attendance at church worship activities. It would not be a legitimate exercise of government power to limit citizen's freedom of worship in that way, nor in any way for the government to seek to determine classes of people who can and cannot attend worship services.

Notwithstanding how difficult it has been, I and most other Christians have throughout this pandemic complied with the government's restrictions on movement and rules on isolating from others. It would, however, be beyond the legitimate authority of governments to impose rules which prevented certain classes of people from participating in the life of churches, or from accessing the other supports provided freely by churches and religious institutions throughout Australian society.

I therefore appeal to you not to introduce any such rules, which Christians would be duty-bound by their adherence to biblical principles to both oppose and disobey. If the government was to do so, it would alienate the people on whom it most needs to rely to build and maintain the strength and welfare of society in this State.

I continue to pray that you and your parliamentary colleagues will be given great wisdom and clear principle as you govern through these difficult times.

Yours faithfully,

DRAFT LETTER TO LEADER of the OPPOSITION in the VICTORIAN PARLIAMENT

Your Name

Your Full
Postal Address

Mobile: Your Mobile Number
eMail: Your eMail address

[Date]

The Hon Matthew Guy MP
Leader of the Opposition
Parliament of Victoria

Dear Mr Guy,

Congratulations on your election by your colleagues as the Leader of the Opposition in the Victorian State Parliament. Thank you for bearing that responsibility at this challenging time. As a Christian, I pray regularly for God's blessing and leading of you and all your Parliamentary colleagues in fulfilling your demanding responsibilities.

I am writing to you to express concern at comments the Premier has made about Victoria moving from Covid-19 'lockdown' to a 'lock-out' policy, which has been referred to in the press as a 'Vaccination Passport'.

I would reject any interference by the State in applying any form of lock-out rule to regulate attendance at church worship activities. It would not be a legitimate exercise of government power to limit citizen's freedom of worship in that way, nor in any way for the government to seek to determine classes of people who can and cannot attend worship services.

Notwithstanding how difficult it has been, I and most other Christians have throughout this pandemic complied with the government's restrictions on movement and rules on isolating from others. It would, however, be beyond the legitimate authority of governments to impose rules which prevented certain classes of people from participating in the life of churches, or from accessing the other supports provided freely by churches and religious institutions throughout Australian society.

I therefore appeal to you to reject and oppose the introduction of any such rules, which Christians would be duty-bound by their adherence to biblical principles to both oppose and disobey. If the government was to do so, it would alienate the people on whom it most needs to rely to build and maintain the strength and welfare of society in this State.

I continue to pray that you and your parliamentary colleagues will be given great wisdom and clear principle as you govern through these difficult times.

Yours faithfully,

DRAFT LETTER TO YOUR REPRESENTATIVES in the VICTORIAN PARLIAMENT

Your Name

Your Full Postal Address

Mobile: Your Mobile Number
eMail: Your eMail address

[Date]

[Name of Local Member] MP
Member for [Electorate Name]
Parliament of Victoria

Dear [Name of Local Member],

Thank you for bearing the responsibility of being my representative in the Victorian state parliament at this challenging time. As a Christian, I pray regularly for God's blessing and leading of you and all your Parliamentary colleagues in fulfilling your demanding responsibilities.

I am writing to you to express concern at comments the Premier has made about Victoria moving from Covid-19 'lockdown' to a 'lock-out' policy, which has been referred to in the press as a 'Vaccination Passport'.

I would reject any interference by the State in applying any form of lock-out rule to regulate attendance at church worship activities. It would not be a legitimate exercise of government power to limit citizen's freedom of worship in that way, nor in any way for the government to seek to determine classes of people who can and cannot attend worship services.

Notwithstanding how difficult it has been, I and most other Christians have throughout this pandemic complied with the government's restrictions on movement and rules on isolating from others. It would, however, be beyond the legitimate authority of governments to impose rules which prevented certain classes of people from participating in the life of churches, or from accessing the other supports provided freely by churches and religious institutions throughout Australian society.

I therefore appeal to you to reject and oppose the introduction of any such rules, which Christians would be duty-bound by their adherence to biblical principles to both oppose and disobey. If the government was to do so, it would alienate the people on whom it most needs to rely to build and maintain the strength and welfare of society in this State.

I continue to pray that you and your parliamentary colleagues will be given great wisdom and clear principle as you govern through these difficult times.

Yours faithfully,

DRAFT LETTER TO the PRIME MINISTER of AUSTRALIA

Your Name

Your Full
Postal Address

Mobile: Your Mobile Number
eMail: Your eMail address

[Date]

The Hon. Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House of Australia

Dear Mr Morrison,

Thank you for bearing the responsibilities of the Prime Minister of our nation at this difficult time. As a Christian, I pray regularly for God's blessing and leading of you and your Parliamentary colleagues in fulfilling your demanding responsibilities.

I am writing to you to express concern at comments you and other Federal and State leaders have made in foreshadowing the introduction of 'vaccine passport' regimes as part of progressively opening up the nation from the current lock-downs and other restrictions.

I would reject any such interference by governments in applying any form of vaccine passport rules to regulate church worship activities. It would not be a legitimate exercise of government power to limit citizen's freedom of worship in that way, nor in any way for governments to seek to determine who can and cannot attend worship services.

Notwithstanding how difficult it has been, I and most other Christians have throughout this pandemic complied with the various government restrictions on movement and rules on isolating from others. It would, however, be beyond the legitimate authority of governments to impose rules which prevented certain classes of people from participating in the life of churches, or from accessing the other supports provided freely by churches and religious institutions throughout Australian society.

I therefore appeal to you not to introduce, or support the introduction by state governments of, rules which Christians would be duty-bound by their adherence to biblical principles to both oppose and disobey. Any government which did so would alienate the people on whom it most needs to rely to build and maintain the strength and welfare of society in this nation.

I continue to pray that you and your parliamentary colleagues will be given great wisdom and clear principle as you govern through these difficult times.

Yours faithfully,

DRAFT LETTER TO LEADER of the OPPOSITION in the FEDERAL PARLIAMENT

Your Name

Your Full
Postal Address

Mobile: Your Mobile Number
eMail: Your eMail address

[Date]

The Hon Anthony Albanese MP
Leader of the Opposition
Parliament of Australia

Dear Mr Albanese,

Thank you for bearing the responsibilities of the Leader of the Opposition in our federal parliament at this challenging time. As a Christian, I pray regularly for God's blessing and leading of you and all your Parliamentary colleagues in fulfilling your demanding responsibilities.

I am writing to you to express concern at comments Federal and State leaders have made in foreshadowing the introduction of 'vaccine passport' regimes as part of progressively opening up the nation from the current lock-downs and other restrictions.

I would reject any such interference by governments in applying any form of vaccine passport rules to regulate church worship activities. It would not be a legitimate exercise of government power to limit citizen's freedom of worship in that way, nor in any way for governments to seek to determine who can and cannot attend worship services.

Notwithstanding how difficult it has been, I and most other Christians have throughout this pandemic complied with the various government restrictions on movement and rules on isolating from others. It would, however, be beyond the legitimate authority of governments to impose rules which prevented certain classes of people from participating in the life of churches, or from accessing the other supports provided freely by churches and religious institutions throughout Australian society.

I therefore appeal to you to oppose the introduction by the federal or state governments of rules which Christians would be duty-bound by their adherence to biblical principles to both oppose and disobey. Any government which did so would alienate the people on whom they most need to rely to build and maintain the strength and welfare of society in this nation.

I continue to pray that you and your parliamentary colleagues will be given great wisdom and clear principle as you govern through these difficult times.

Yours faithfully,