

# On Track



## Connecting the congregation in COVID-19



I still remember the night of Sunday March 22. In the morning our congregation at West Footscray met together to worship with the usual joy of being together.

However, conversations were dominated by one subject that brought uncertainty, apprehension, and even a sense of defiance. The shortage of toilet paper hardly got a mention. The issue of concern was how long we would be able to meet together and what would we do if officially forbidden? The common desire was to continue meeting together for as long as we were able, yet at the same time we wanted to be good citizens and love our neighbour. It was shaping up as a wisdom call.

But that night, the decision was made for us as Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced the decision of the National Cabinet: 'Effective immediately, public services of worship are not to occur.' It no longer mattered what we thought we should do; the decision had been made for us.

First thing Monday morning my focus was to have the online church platform confirmed and a service format organised. There were additional technical infrastructure needs with many non-negotiables: I wanted to stream live, have the ability to include others in the service, and the online format definitely had to be simple to use by the end users.

I had heard about Congregation Connect: the worship service program that PIM uses for people living in remote localities. I went to the website for quick answers, and then without a second thought I called the PIM CEO and then Dennis Rayson. Clear guidance and support came quickly. The immediate encouragement was that the program offered all I wanted, and so much more. I could live stream, be seen as I ran the service, invite others to participate, have a PowerPoint presentation running during the service, and play music or video clips. Last, but not least, it was really simple to use.

That first Sunday came and went without a hitch. I quickly started exploring ways to exploit the lockdown situation for some wider gains to our gospel ministry, starting with inviting someone different each week to give a 5-minute mission update during the service. They then join us for virtual 'morning tea' afterwards. We have had a range of speakers from all over Australia, and from as far away as Ecuador.

We have also invited people from congregations where services have completely stopped. From this we have begun to have regulars 'at Church' who live interstate. I also send out a weekly newsletter with prayer points and news updates to everyone with whom we have had some contact.

I've even recently begun to use Congregation Connect to run business meetings, hold social catch-ups, prayer meetings and Bible studies – I've even live-streamed two wedding services!

There is no way I would call myself tech savvy, but PIM's Congregation Connect is well within the parameters of my skill sets and can be adapted for most aspects of congregational life. For us at West Footscray, it is a life saver and a ministry multiplier. Church buildings may be darkened during COVID-19, but God's people are continuing to 'shine their light'!

Pastor Martin de Pyle, West Footscray Presbyterian Church ●

## An unexpected blessing

During the past couple of years, we have been working with the Public Worship and Aids to Devotions Committee (PWAD) of the PCA to develop a computer programme to help people who, for whatever reason, can't get to church each and every Sunday. We call this programme Congregation Connect and have been trialling it across a number of locations. It allows people to easily 'join' a church service or Bible study group even if they can't physically get there. It has been a blessing to many people. And we were planning on expanding it further this year.

However, the COVID-19 situation rapidly progressed our plans. At the time of writing, more than 60 churches have been using Congregation Connect to continue 'meeting together' even though they can't actually gather. This means more than 3000 people are participating in a worship service each Sunday, courtesy of Congregation Connect. We hadn't expected that! ●



### 🗨 In conversation

## Phone patrol

Like many activities around our nation, face-to-face visits by PIM Ministry Teams have been suspended for an unknown period of time. For Kim Jaeger in his 'Midlands' Tasmania patrol area, this has meant finding alternate ways to keep up contact and minister to people living in rural communities. Kim does not want to 'disappear' from their lives and let people down. He is keen to maintain the relationships which he has worked hard to establish, therefore it is out of the four-wheel drive and onto the phone. Through regular phone calls Kim is able to offer support and encouragement to Christian believers who do not have a local church. He can also stay in contact with his 'regular' non-believing friends, offering a listening ear, genuine care and the opportunity to discuss the Gospel in these uncertain times. Here are three short stories about what he has been up to. Names have been changed for privacy.

John and Laura live on a small property in the Southern Midlands. Their income is derived from sheep, both meat and wool. A few months ago, John developed medical issues which will require many months of treatment for full recovery. As John is the only car license holder in the household, and he is not allowed to drive at the moment, others are required to help out. On occasion, Kim has been able to deliver mail and groceries to them. He also remains in regular phone contact, which John appreciates as his health situation and the COVID-19 restrictions have greatly limited his activities.

Jack, a non-believer, is a regular whom Kim visits, and they sometimes have discussions on spiritual matters. This relationship is one that Kim does not want to put on



hold. Thankfully, this friendship continues through phone calls, regular text messages and emails. These interactions are even continuing to touch on spiritual matters. This relationship has remained strong and Jack is very keen to resume face to face contact as soon as possible.

Kim has been visiting Bert and Jane for three years. This contact is kept up via phone and recently Kim was requested to give a written character reference for Bert. They are very keen for Kim's visits to continue as soon as restrictions are lifted.

These three brief stories are indicative of how the patrol work has kept going throughout the pandemic's restrictions. Practical and spiritual help is given, and relationships continue to be strengthened. ●

## 📍 From the patrols

# Farewell Greg and Janet

For more than 7 years, Greg and Janet Cripps have been serving with PIM in the SW corner of Queensland. During this time they have made countless visits to people living on many of the very large properties in the area.

Greg and Janet have made many friends there and they have been able to share the Gospel of the Lord Jesus with many people, some of whom had never heard it before. They have also been privileged to play a part in discipling Christians living in remote places. We give thanks for all the ways the Lord has used Greg and Janet.



Sadly, due to some health challenges, Greg and Janet have had to resign from PIM. Please pray for them, and for the people living in SW Qld to whom they have ministered.

If you have been financially supporting the Cripps, thank you! We invite you to continue supporting Gospel ministry in remote places by transferring your support to another PIM Team. ●

## 📡 News & updates

# Gap Year at New Dunesk

Sadly, all our initial programmes planned for New Dunesk had to be postponed due to the coronavirus. However, we are using this time to continue to adapt the property and we look forward to getting underway with an exciting set of activities post coronavirus.

We plan to launch the Gap Year programme starting in Feb 2021, and will start accepting applications from July this year. Places are limited so if you, or someone you know, is interested in this fantastic new opportunity to develop vocational and ministry skills in a rural environment, please register your interest by emailing [gapyear@pim.org.au](mailto:gapyear@pim.org.au). ●

# Mt Magnet update

The COVID-19 restrictions in WA meant we had to pause our ministry activities in Mt Magnet for several months. However, we are anticipating that in July, Alvin and Narelle Chai and their children will be able to move to Mt Magnet to take up their new role. Please be in prayer for them as they take on the challenge of re-establishing church and community activities. If you would like to join the Chais' team of financial supporters, please call the PIM Office for information. ●



# New office address

It has been a long time since PIM had its own 'home-base', but with the purchase of New Dunesk, we now have one. Please update your records with the following address details for PIM:

All mail to:  
PIM, PO Box 9, Ardlethan NSW 2665

Our physical location:  
New Dunesk, 6550 Newell Highway, Ardlethan NSW 2665

New phone number: 02 6100 3510 ●

# My gift to show Jesus' love to Australians in the outback

I want to help share the Gospel with more people and communities in remote and isolated regions of Australia.

Enclosed is my gift of  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_

I'd like to receive future  
On Track updates from  
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Postal address:

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Please detach and return with your gift.

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## Reply form

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Web donations:  
[www.pim.org.au](http://www.pim.org.au)

 CEO's corner

## From Andrew to you



We have been ministering to isolated people for more than 100 years. Usually those people are considered as isolated because they live in remote places. But what about people who find themselves isolated at home in a capital city? Now, that is something new for PIM.

The 'lockdown' associated with COVID-19 has required most of us to stay at home, most of the time. For Christians who have been going to church every Sunday for their entire lives, not being able to meet together with fellow believers each Sunday has been a new and strange experience. For many, it has added significantly to a sense of isolation.

What a privilege it has been for PIM to be able to help the wider church by making Congregation Connect freely available. This tool, developed to help people living in remote areas, has been quickly deployed to help churches across the country to continue meeting.

For our PIM Ministry Team, the lockdown has put a stop to their patrol activities, but it hasn't put a stop to their ministry efforts. Many of our teams have found creative ways to keep in contact with people, and in some instances they have been able to have deeper conversations with people by phone than they had previously been able to have in person. Truly, our God can use any situation for His glory!

Like many organisations, we are feeling some financial pain from the economic impacts of the coronavirus. We are deeply grateful to our regular donors who have been able to maintain their financial support in recent months. If you haven't given previously and would like to be part of the vital financial support team that keeps the wheels of PIM turning, please visit the PIM website to make a donation, or call our office to talk about ways you can help.

Thanks for being part of the PIM journey,

Andrew Letcher  
CEO

PRIVACY: PIM values the privacy of the people we work with, therefore, we may at times change the names of people in stories, substitute photos or obscure some geographic details that might identify them. However, all the stories we tell are true and accurately convey what we see God doing in people's lives.

PO Box 9, Ardlethan NSW 2665  
☎ 02 6100 3510 ✉ [admin@pim.org.au](mailto:admin@pim.org.au)  
📘 @PresbyterianInlandMission  
[www.pim.org.au](http://www.pim.org.au)



worth driving for