



Pacific Conference of Churches



United Church in the Solomon Islands



Biblical Theological Guidance during COVID-19

Dignity and Protection in the Home during COVID-19

Led by the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC)

The following guidelines draw on these sources:

- A Pacific Conference of Churches' letter entitled "[Pastoral letter to Pacific Christians: Keeping Pacific Homes Safe in the Time of COVID19](#)"ⁱ;
- A Pacific Conference of Churches' letter entitled "[PCC Ecumenical Advisory to Member Churches after Fiji's COVID-19 confirmation](#)"ⁱⁱ;
- United Church in the Solomon Islands Safety and Protection in the Home Under Coronavirus;
- [God's Vision for Human Relationships: Bible Study Resources on Human Dignity and Equality \(Volume 1 and 2\)](#)ⁱⁱⁱ;
- [Framework Paper: Human Dignity and Gender Equality from a Biblical-Theological Perspective](#)^{iv};
- [Child Protection and Care: A Critical Pathway into Our Future](#)^v bible studies; and
- [Theology of Disaster Resilience in a Changing Climate](#)^{vi}

Additional resource:

- The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu – Video "COVID19 – We all deserve to be treated equally" <https://vimeo.com/413472024/1078f6567e>

For use by all Christian churches

These guidelines could be used by Church leaders as they lead their churches nationally, in synods and presbyteries, in radio or television interviews, and social media. They can be sermon guides for Ministers preaching to congregations and in communication to members.

Summary of key messages

1. All people are created equal in God's image and deserve to be treated with dignity, NOT violence.
2. Jesus commands us to love one another and there is NO place for violence in this love.
3. The fullness of life promised by Jesus cannot be experienced by all when there is violence in the home.
4. The home should be a safe place for all women and girls.
5. The home should be a safe place for all children.
6. The home should be a safe place for all vulnerable groups.
7. The home can be a place for family spiritual strengthening.



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An opening message from the Pacific Conference of Churches:

“While protecting ourselves and our families from COVID-19, there are issues we continue to struggle with at home. In particular, the issue of violence in the home. There are a number of homes in the Pacific and around the world that experience domestic violence: gender-based violence, violence against children, the elderly and people with disabilities and other minorities. These forms of violence can be physical, verbal, emotional, economic or sexual violence. They can be structural, meaning about how decisions are made and whose voices are heard, who does what work in the house that may have many people. It can also refer to those, particularly women and children who because of lockdowns, isolation, curfews, extended school holidays, etc are forced to stay in homes that may not be safe for them.

COVID-19 has made some of these situations worse as there are many people feel frustrated with being “stuck at home”. These frustrations include the fear of the virus, the fear not knowing whether they will have work and be able to contribute for the care of the family when this is all over or those who have already either been sent home on leave without pay or been laid off. In homes and communities that are male-dominated, there could also be frustration if the males in the home have lost gainful employment while women may still be working or earning an income. This frustration is very easily expressed in violent behaviour towards others in the household.” – Rev James Bhagwan

Introduction:

These resources are a collation from the PCC, The United Church in the Solomon Islands, the “God’s Vision for Human Relationships” Gender Equality Theology biblical resources, “Child Protection and Care” bible studies and the “Theology of Disaster Resilience in a Changing Climate” bible resources to assist Churches, Church leaders, Ministers and community leaders to support families and communities as we all seek to live this COVID-19 journey, true to our faith and in care for those around us.

1. All people are created equal in God’s image and deserve to be treated with dignity, NOT violence

Guidance from Rev Dr Cliff Bird and Siera Bird, theologians and leaders from the United Church in the Solomon Islands

“Each member of the family is unique and different, and every member is equally significant and valuable. Each family member is equal and different.

The uniqueness, equality and dignity of each and every family member is given by God and cannot and must not be taken away by any person, culture, teaching/doctrine, power, theology or religion.” – Rev Dr Cliff Bird and Siera Bird



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Guidance from God’s Vision for Human Relationships: Bible Study Resources on Human Dignity and Equality

Volume 1, Bible Study 1: Humankind Created in the Image of God (Pages 10-15)

“This passage records God’s original and noble vision and intention for humanity. Whatever the situation is or may be that we face in life, this story tells us that we belong to God, that we (men and women) bear God’s image in equal measure, and that we live to carry out God’s vision and dream for the earth.” (See page 13)

- **Genesis 1:26-31** - Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

When violence is experienced in the home, the dignity given by God is disrespected. The perpetrator of violence fails to see the image of God in the victim, and is also failing to live out the image of God in themselves.

2. Jesus commands us to love one another and there is NO place for violence in this love

Guidance from the Pacific Conference of Churches

“In the midst of such potential for added suffering in our homes and communities, we are reminded of Jesus’ new commandment, given to his disciples.” – Rev James Bhagwan

- **John 13:34-35** - A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

“St. Paul, in his first letter to the church in Corinth, reminds us of the type of love we are to practice with one another as family, as community. This practice of agape is very much needed at this time as we find ourselves frustrated, stressed, worried and afraid, and sometimes, angry. – Rev James Bhagwan

- **1 Corinthians 13:4-8** - Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no



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record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

It is not a sin to feel frustration, fear, worry or anger. Throughout the Gospels we can see that Jesus experienced each of these emotions. But to act out of these in violence is not the way of the love God calls us to.

3. The fullness of life promised by Jesus cannot be experienced by ALL when there is violence in the home

Guidance from the Pacific Conference of Churches

“Our Pacific way of life includes not only seeing the community as an extended family but also living in multi-generational and extended family households. Just as in times of natural disasters, the lockdowns for prevention of spread of COVID-19 means that everyone is home together. This brings a large diversity of people under one roof and may add to tensions in the home. Just as we are reminded by the prophet Micah to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God in our personal life, we must do our best to practice this in our homes.” – Rev James Bhagwan

Guidance from God’s Vision for Human Relationships: Bible Study Resources on Human Dignity and Equality

GET Vol 2. Bible Study 3: Fullness of Life for All of God's People, John 10:1-10 (See pages 28-34)

“At the very heart of the good news of the reign of God is life – God’s offer of life for all people through Christ...The sad and painful truth is that this offer of life from God is not realised by so many people, especially women and girls and people living with disabilities. There are various explanations for this situation, and two of them are as follows: many cultures and traditions around the world, including Oceania, continue to look down on women and girls as not equal to men, and are therefore denied ways and means to realise God’s offer of fullness of life; and many biblical interpretations continue to support and justify these views about women and girls. Both of these stand contrary to God’s offer of life for all people.” (See page 28)

- **John 10:10** – The thief comes only to steal and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

The fullness of life that Christ promises is for ALL people. For women, men, boys and girls, people with disabilities, and those who we deem different from ourselves. Yet, this fullness cannot be experienced when violence is lived in the home, not by the perpetrator nor by the victim. Even in the toughest of times, we are called to live out love so that all people may experience Christ’s offer of a full life.



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4. The home should be a safe place for all women and girls

Guidance from the Pacific Conference of Churches

“As many of you know, according to current information, the Pacific region has some of the highest rates of violence against women recorded in the world – twice the global average with an estimated two in every three Pacific women impacted by gender-based violence.

...It is important to recognise that with families being forced, to a certain extent, to stay together, that women, girls (and boys as well), may be at risk of sexual abuse or exploitation.

Women and children who live with domestic violence have no escape from their abusers during quarantine, and from Brazil to Germany, Italy to China, activists and survivors say they are already seeing an alarming rise in abuse. Even though helplines have been set up for women and children to call to seek help; many cannot make calls because they fear being overheard by abusive partners or are stopped from leaving home. Already lockdowns in other regions have resulted in domestic violence fatalities. In one case a woman was murdered by her husband in front of their children.” – Rev James Bhagwan

- **Micah 6:8** - He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Guidance from Rev Dr Cliff Bird and Siera Bird, theologians and leaders from the United Church in the Solomon Islands

“Usually the most vulnerable members in the family are children, girls and women (mothers/wives). Both the Old Testament and New Testament witness to the truth that God cares for all such vulnerable people. It is part and parcel of our Christian discipleship to exercise care and demonstrate compassion toward all such members in the family.” – Rev Dr Cliff Bird and Siera Bird

Guidance from Framework Paper: Human Dignity and Gender Equality from a Biblical-Theological Perspective

Foundation 11: Women ARE accepted, affirmed, uplifted and EMPOWERED in the Reign of God (See pages 28-30)

“Within Jesus’ vision of God’s reign, women are seen and treated as having equal dignity and importance as men. In a society and at a time where women were seen and treated as objects and properties of men, and their importance was primarily attached only to bearing children and the home, this was very radical and countercultural. Jesus accepted, affirmed and uplifted women, and by so doing empowered them. He was sensitive to the insurmountable and burdensome cultural, socio-economic, legal and religious hurdles and handicaps with which they had to struggle. He showed them compassion whenever and wherever he had the opportunity. In numerous Gospel narratives Jesus met a woman, talked about a woman, or mentioned a woman in a parable.” (Page 28)



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Some examples include **Luke 7:1-11, Luke 7:36-50, Luke 10:38, Luke 13:10-17. Luke 21:1-4, John 8:1-11, Matthew 15:21-28**

Foundation 14: Women are Equal Members of the Body of Christ (See pages 32-33)

“Women and men are created equal and are equal in the reign of God as proclaimed and lived out by Jesus. In the New Testament, particularly in Acts and the Epistles, followers of the risen Christ gathered in fellowship groups that later became known as ‘ecclesia’. Various images are used to describe this new development, the common and well known one being the Body of Christ, and those within it – men and women –are all called members of the Body. It follows that men and women are equal within the Body of Christ, the Church.” (Page 32)

- **Galatians 3:28** - There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus

Jesus challenged the culture of the day to proclaim the equality of men and women, boys and girls. Violence in the home counters this equality, which was created by God in creation and lived out by Jesus as an example for us to follow.

5. The home should be a safe place for all children

Guidance from the Pacific Conference of Churches

“These quarantine measures and restrictions on movements disrupt children's routine and social support while also placing new stresses on parents and caregivers who may have to find new childcare options or forgo work. Children and families who are already vulnerable due to socio-economic exclusion or those who live in overcrowded settings are particularly at risk at this time.

Children globally are at risk of physical and emotional maltreatment, reduced supervision and neglect of children, increase in child abuse and domestic violence.

...We must to reach out to the families in our faith communities and encourage parents and guardians, to remain positive when dealing with their children, create daily routines for the children and family, spend one-on-one time with each child, and manage their own stress as best as possible. Family prayer time is a good time for sharing, reconciliation and inclusion of children in bible reading, sharing, prayers.” – Rev James Bhagwan

- **Matthew 18:1-5** - He called a little child to him and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me".
- **Matthew 18:6-7** - "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be



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drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!"

Guidance from the Theology of Child Protection and Care

Children were a significant part of Jesus’ ministry on earth, which underpins the significance of children within the reign of God.

Bible Study 1: Jesus’ primary concern over the ‘little ones’, Mark 9:33-37 & 42 (See pages 7-13)

“There should be no doubt whatsoever that as far as Jesus is concerned, children are of paramount importance in the Kingdom of God. As such, every effort must be made by churches throughout the Pacific to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and strive to ensure that the church, the home and wider social spaces are safe for children; ensuring that every child is protected, and feels protected. This is integral to what it means to follow Jesus today.” (Page 10)

- **Mark 9:33-37 & 9:42** - Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

(v42) “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.

Bible Study 2: The rod is for protection and provision not punishment or abuse, Proverbs 13:1 & 24, and 14:3 (see pages 14-19)

Proverbs 13:24 is often misinterpreted and used as a justification to physically abuse children. In this passage, the ‘rod’ must not be taken literally. The proverb does not provide permission to use the rod as an instrument of physical abuse, but instead is a moral instruction on how to lovingly guide and protect our children so that they can safely grow and flourish.

“‘Corporal’ discipline is a form of discipline that is used commonly by many families, communities, schools and churches in the Pacific. Too often, however, this has led to child abuse. The biblical text for this study is often used to justify this form of physical or corporal discipline.

Generally speaking, many people understand the ‘rod’ in this text as referring to correcting, rebuking or providing wisdom through forms of physical discipline such as spanking or even using objects such as sticks and belts, etc. Many have taken the rod literally! This understanding of the rod takes it out of the context of the time and overshadows a meaning that always seems to be ignored or forgotten: the (rod)



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is that of a shepherd. From this perspective, the (shepherd's) rod is to re-direct sheep, to make sure the sheep remain within the sheepfold, to provide protection for the sheep from danger and to guide sheep to where they can enjoy greener, healthier pasture and sufficient streams of water.” (Page 14)

We can now read this passage in new light:

- **Proverbs 13:24** – Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them

“Many people tend to take Solomon’s Proverb literally and use it to justify and encourage their actions on physical discipline, which can lead to child abuse. Moreover, this action of physical discipline is used by husbands as well to physically whip, punch, hit or smack their wives or partners, supposedly to discipline them.

The text encourages children to respect their parents and to listen to their teachings and advice because parents have more experience of life to share with their children. It’s like a saying on a magnet on my fridge door: “A Father is someone you look up to, no matter how tall you are.” The Ten Commandments also state that children are to ‘honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you’ (Exodus 20:12). However, the respect and honour are also to be reciprocated by parents to their children, and as such, parents must understand their children.

The text is not an instruction to parents to physically discipline their children, but for parents to provide the most loving, healthy and safe environment for the children in their homes, communities and churches to enable them to grow and flourish. Parents are to provide love and to nurture the development and growth of their children.” (Page 18)

Bible Study 4: Jesus embraced and blessed children despite socio-cultural norms and expectations, Matthew 19:13-15 (See pages 28-33)

“Jesus, and the kingdom of God that he declared and practiced, were countercultural. He was born a vulnerable child, and as he grew, he lived as a child in a social structure where his status was near the bottom. He knew what it felt like to be seen and treated not as an equal and how his status was less important to adults, especially adult men. During his short period of ministry, he not only elevated the level of children but also presented them as a central part of the kingdom of God. He was adamant that children be treated with dignity and respect, even warning would-be abusers that the fitting punishment for them would be to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck. Jesus was for the protection and care of children and so should everyone who claims to be his follower.” (Page 32)

- **Matthew 19:13-15** - Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.



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Even in the midst of tough times and family struggles, we need to be careful that we do not misuse the texts in proverbs and ignore the teachings of Jesus to love and embrace children. The Gospels teach us that children are important to the Kingdom of God, so we must do all that we can to treat them with dignity and respect, guide them well and to provide a safe and loving home for them.

6. The home should be a safe place for all vulnerable groups

Guidance from the Pacific Conference of Churches

“In times of crisis our sisters and brothers living with disabilities, our elderly also need to be included in plans, home-based activities and be treated with dignity and respect. People with disabilities experience the world differently and this experience must be considered. Similarly, the wisdom of our elders and their needs must be heeded in these challenging times as they are particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus.”

One of the challenging issues for us to discuss in our Pacific faith communities is that of the LGBTIQ or sexual minorities. Whatever our views on gender, lifestyles and morality, it is important that everyone in our families, homes and communities must be safe, and receive the same care and protection from both the coronavirus and from violence.

Regardless of our personal, family or community relationships and status, let us, as sisters and brothers in Christ, as members of the Body of Christ, be encouraged by the words in 1 John.” – Rev James Bhagwan

- **1 John 4:16-21** - God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

Guidance from Rev Dr Cliff Bird and Siera Bird, theologians and leaders from the United Church in the Solomon Islands

“Some members of the family may be, and are, more vulnerable than others for one reason or other. The home must be made a safe and protected space for such members. Everyone must look out for the safety and protection of one another.” – Rev Dr Cliff Bird and Siera Bird

Guidance from the Theology of Disaster Resilience in a Changing Climate

Bible Study 3: There is always room at God’s banquet table, Luke 14:15-24 (See pages 21-26)

“The parable of the Great Banquet is a story of insiders/outside, of inclusion and exclusion. It is also on the other hand a story of great hospitality and welcome to all and a reminder of how costly discipleship



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can be, in that it calls us to continuously make room for the other at God’s table; and that God’s table is never full, there is always room for one or many more. The challenge for us though, is that usually, it is those we find hard to welcome, for whatever reason, are the very ones God challenges us to welcome and include.” (Page 21)

- **Luke 14:15-24** - One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” Then Jesus said to him, “Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, “Come; for everything is ready now.” But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, “I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.” Another said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.” Another said, “I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.” So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, “Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.” And the slave said, “Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.” Then the master said to the slave, “Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.”

“The twist for us is as party guests we then are expected to become party hosts in turn and to demonstrate the same measure of hospitality and welcome to those who most need it. It is our role as party host to honour the invitation given to all regardless of gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation - ‘those who miss the kingdom of God do not miss it because God decides they cannot attend. The choice is made by them’.

The issue is those whom we marginalise – women, children, youth, LGBTIQ, those with disabilities, want to be at the table but those of us at the center of power often exclude them.

So we return to the question that is at the heart of this parable; who do we need to make room for at the table? How do we listen to and include the voices that we deem inferior? How do we intentionally make space for them at God’s table? Is it even our place to assume that it is our decision to make regarding who is in or who is out? Is it God’s decision or ours?” (Page 23)

Jesus spent much of his time with those that the religious leaders deemed unclean and unworthy. Those excluded by the religious leaders were embraced around the tables at which Jesus sat. We are called to live out this inclusion, care and love to those most vulnerable and excluded within our own communities and families.



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7. The home can be a place for family spiritual strengthening

COVID-19 brings many challenges, but amidst these challenges are also opportunities. While we are spending more time at home and with our families, we have an opportunity to focus our eyes on God, practice love for one another and deepen the spiritual strength of our families.

Guidance from the Pacific Conference of Churches

“When the church was forced underground during the persecution of the early Christians, it experienced an exponential growth in faith and in the numbers of the faithful.

Today we are placed in such a situation not by persecution but by the circumstances forced through a deadly virus during the Lenten Season when we traditionally reflect on how to become better people.

Let us seize this opportunity to deepen our faith by reflecting in our homes on God’s word, praying for...the countries which have been affected by COVID-19.

The early church worshipped in homes, in the equivalent of what we today call cell groups. This is an opportune time to generate the closeness of a Christ-like community by worshipping at home...the number of worshippers does not matter. What matters is that those who worship do so in spirit and in truth.

Family prayer time is a good time for sharing, reconciliation and inclusion of children in bible reading, sharing, prayers.” – Rev James Bhagwan

- **Matthew 18:20** – For where two or three have gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst.
- **John 4:24** – For God is spirit and his followers must worship Him in spirit and truth.

Guidance from Rev Dr Cliff Bird and Siera Bird, theologians and leaders from the United Church in the Solomon Islands

“Lessons from the body (of family unit):

- a. **Heart:** love one another and demonstrate compassion. Say a loving word; do a loving deed often to strengthen each other.
- b. **Head:** utilise knowledge and power in service of each other. Appreciate beauty in family relationship. Think with a family member, support a vulnerable member, write a song or poem on beauty in the family
- c. **Hand:** Exercise power and strength responsibly for protection and guidance of family members, especially children, members with disability, and provide for their needs.
- d. **Arm:** Extend good and positive influence, life-giving support and grace-filled gestures.
- e. **Eyes:** Look out for each other, and especially for a child’s best interest. Perceive opportunities for building life-affirming relationships, and watch out for dangers and threats.



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- f. **Legs/Feet:** *Journey together. “Walk” and “think” (head) through issues and questions together. Take good news of life to those who need it – making sure of your safety and protection.”*

– Rev Dr Cliff Bird and Siera Bird

8. Conclusion

There is no doubt that the world is experiencing immense suffering, loss and pain during these unprecedented times. There are real challenges, fears and frustrations that face us all. But amidst these challenging times, let us give thanks to God and pray for strength, healing and courage. Let us support one another and practice love in our homes, families and communities so that all may experience the hope, reconciliation, peace and goodness of Christ Jesus.

ⁱ <https://pacificconferenceofchurches.org/f/no-covid-19-no-violence-in-the-home>

ⁱⁱ <https://pacificconferenceofchurches.org/f/stay-safe-innovate-sanitize>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.unitingworld.org.au/gendertheology/>

^{iv} <https://www.unitingworld.org.au/gendertheology/>

^v <https://www.unitingworld.org.au/childprotectionbiblestudies/>

^{vi} <https://www.unitingworld.org.au/theologydisasterresilience/>