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**The Most Reverend Donald Tamihere**  
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To the office of the Prime Minister, and members of the New Zealand Cabinet  
sent via email

E te Pirimia, e ngā mema o Te Rūnanga o te Kawanatanga o Aotearoa,

Nei rā te mihi ki a koutou katoa i runga i ngā tini ahuatanga o tēnei wā. Tēnā tātou i o tātou mate huhua. Mā te Atua rātou e okioki ki runga i te mārie nui. Māna anō tātou o rātou waihotanga nei e arahi ki runga i te huarahi o te tika, te pono, me te aroha.

Dear Prime Minister and members of the New Zealand Cabinet,

We write as leaders of the Te Haahi Mihinare and Te Haahi Katorika – the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand. We do so with the support of the Bishops of both our Churches and we believe that other Churches within the Christian Community will have similar views.

We, and our whānau and communities pray for you throughout these demanding weeks that we are going through as a country. We join with others in expressing our respect for the quality of leadership you have shown. We are proud to be part of this country's response.

Equally, we are proud of the work of our pāriha and iwi, our City Missions, our Anglican, Catholic and other social service agencies, our kura and schools, our whare hauora and elder care institutions, and the several thousand clergy, lay workers, and volunteers who have continued to offer care to the most vulnerable in our society throughout Aotearoa New Zealand, through authorised and regulated means. Our Church's members have demonstrated significant self-discipline and service throughout all the stages of this pandemic, and have contributed immensely to the safety and wellbeing of our nation.

We are also very aware of the innovative ways our people have sought to worship, pray and gather virtually during this crisis, providing much needed support and pastoral care not only to our own members.

**However, we do not understand the rationale that regards Churches as 'uncontrolled environments' by comparison with "public venues, or playing professional sports, which are controlled environments".**

We have had strong, consistent and distressed reactions to that definition and to the continuing limit to 10 people, from many of our communities over the last 24 hours. People are particularly concerned that pubs and bars have been consistently highlighted as high-risk venues, and yet they will be able to open before the situation of the churches is even given further consideration.

The limiting of '... wedding ceremonies, funerals and tangihanga, religious ceremonies...' to ten people would make perfect sense if this was a principle being consistently applied in this first stage of Level Two. But it is not being consistently applied.

Many permitted activities are much higher risk than attendance at worship, or attendance at a carefully managed funeral service. You can see clearly from the attached material that our churches are preparing for a situation where the focus is on carefully managed worship.



1. Many in our communities are vulnerable. We are extraordinarily conscious of our responsibilities to keep vulnerable members of our communities safe. We have exercised those responsibilities carefully and effectively, and have especially cared for our elderly insisting on physical distancing etc.
2. We attach examples of the significant planning we have in place for the management of Church services under Level 2, which indicates our determination to ensure that it is safe to Worship God, and to farewell loved ones, together.
3. The regulations set out in our guidelines around social interaction before and after services of Worship maintain strict physical distancing as people enter churches and are seated, and either include a continuing ban on any gathering for tea and coffee after services, or a requirement that our communities adhere strictly to the regulations under which cafes can open.

Consequently, on the basis of the attached material and the immense collaborative work that produced them, we know without a doubt that our Churches are as safe, if not safer than cinemas and can be as controlled if not much more so than shopping malls or markets.

4. The continuing limiting of funerals and tangihanga to 10 people when the other activities that are permitted, including sporting and commercial activities have potentially much higher risk, is eliciting the most heightened response from our people.

Enormous distress has been managed by our nearly 2,500 clergy and lay ministers over the last two months as they have had to deal remotely with hundreds of mourning family members. The fact that a carefully controlled funeral managed by Clergy and Funeral Directors still does not allow for all members of an extended family to gather to farewell a loved family member, according to the rites of the Church they have been part of for their entire lives, is both distressing and hard to reconcile with the other activities which the Level Two regulations are allowing for.

We understand the argument that instinctive human reaction at times of grief is to offer physical support. However, our experience suggests that when carefully explained people are prepared to show restraint in order to gather with extended family members. Families have even suggested to us that they would be willing to self-isolate for 14 days in order to be able to honour their dead and gather as families.

We have already made detailed representations around the long term impact on individual and community, psychological and emotional wellbeing of the necessary restrictions on Funerals and Tangihanga in Level 4 and Level 3 conditions. The Deputy Director General of Health for DHB Performance, Support and Infrastructure did respond. The extension of these damaging conditions into Level Two in the light of activities that are being permitted is hard to understand.

We now find ourselves in a situation where people across the faiths will be denied the opportunity to gather to express their faith and gain from that the contribution to their wellbeing which is essential. The impression is being given that because faith is not regarded as a contributor to economic activity it is thus discounted.

Sir Mason Durie carefully produced the model of “Te Whare Tapa Whā” as a description of the fundamental principles of human wellbeing, and which the Ministry of Health has adopted for Maori Health. That model brings together four key beliefs fundamental to community hauora. One of those is Te Taha Wairua,

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spiritual wellbeing. We believe that this model should be adopted not just for Māori health, but for the wellbeing of the entire population in Aotearoa New Zealand.

**We request an urgent response as to why the ability of faith communities to contribute to that aspect of wellbeing remains so severely and unfairly constrained.**

We have consistently led our communities responsibly and within the Government guidelines. We are, at heart, a people who simply express our faith through our contributions at every level of society and we are not given to 'stamping our feet'. We gather for worship because we believe that life is a gift and there is a Giver. Giving thanks to that Giver is the heart of worship. We offer our dead to God and comfort those who mourn. It is what nourishes and sustains our people.

We look forward to understanding the reasons behind the current restrictions on the practice of our faith, because to date the explanations given do not add up.

We continue respectfully and gratefully yours,

**Archbishop Donald Tamihere**  
Te Pihopa o Aotearoa

**Archbishop Philip Richardson**  
Archbishop of New Zealand

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Archbishop of Wellington