



Firstly, a big thank you for all your patience whilst the planning team prayed and discerned the way forward for Hearts Aflame 2022. We wanted to wait until we had the most information we could get to help us make the best decision.

Rather than draw it out I will start with the fact that **the team has made the very difficult decision not to run Hearts Aflame 2022.**

The team have sought advice, prayed and discerned a lot over recent weeks. We have taken the Government guidance whilst also reflecting upon what makes Hearts the special event it is, and used this to inform our decision.

Some of the factors that we have considered include:

Marton comes under the Whanganui DHB and this area of the country is currently in red traffic light. This means that we could only have a max of 100 on site with vaccination and 25 without. It is also being anticipated that with the opening of the Auckland border it will take approximately 2 weeks for cases to increase in numbers around the country.

That's at a practical level. Further to that very practical numbers aspect is one of the things that's really important in the way we operate at Hearts Aflame. If you've been to Hearts Aflame before you know that we move together as a community through the school, we don't support people opting out of things, we do it all together - and this is very much a Catholic thing, not just a Hearts Aflame thing.

We have also considered our Bishops and the approach they have taken to this issue. As many of you will know, they have encouraged Parishes to ensure everyone has access to Mass and to limit division where possible.

When the team weighed up all these aspects we were in alignment that under the current traffic light system we are unable to offer Hearts Aflame without excluding some participants who have registered for the school. During this time we all know people who have been excluded from places of work, who now are precluded from entry into cafe's pubs, and many from family functions including christmas. As a Catholic organisation we do not want to further the pain and exclusion people are already suffering for a choice they have made in good conscience.

We are aware that this news will be disappointing for many of you, trust me I know how that feels and we are praying for you, please keep us in your prayers as we too work through this. I'm sure there will be questions so if you are emailing us in the next week or so please bear with us as we work our way through those.

We are aware that this situation is changing frequently, which is why we held off as long as we could before making this decision. We will begin the process of refunding all registered participants their money. Please again bear with us as this will be a time consuming job and so it will take a few weeks to get sorted. If you haven't had a refund from us by the end of December please get in touch via



email. If you would like to leave your deposit or registration with us as a donation please let us know via email to [info@heartsaflame.org.nz](mailto:info@heartsaflame.org.nz).

As people have become aware of the increasing complexity of running Hearts Aflame this year, many have asked us whether we would run a *virtual* Hearts Aflame instead. As a team we have considered a lot of different options. In regards to virtual, there are so many virtual conferences being offered around the world with amazing world class speakers that this isn't an area of need. The length and residential community experience is a really important aspect of Hearts Aflame and we can't achieve that in a purely virtual experience, so our prayer for you is that you use this year to have a restful summer holiday and build up a thirst for Hearts Aflame 2023. The 2023 School, whilst not being the 30th consecutive year, will still be the Hearts Aflame 30th Anniversary. We know that competition for places was high this year and so we will ensure that all participants who are currently registered will get offered places first for next year before we open up general registrations.

Whilst I didn't want this message to be long and drawn out I do want to acknowledge the speakers who have been working, and especially the Planning Team. Not only has the Team pretty much completely planned the school but we have also spent time planning how to run at different levels and with different restrictions. I am so grateful to all of them for never saying, "Can we hurry up and just make a decision so I can make holiday plans" or for just saying "It's too hard, let's just cancel and focus on next year". Every single one of them kept planning and praying about how we could proceed. That to me is a remarkable testament to the commitment of every single person on the Team. In this discernment process I have been blown away by their total focus on doing the best for you as participants and for Hearts Aflame with no regard for themselves. So please if you see any of the Team in the coming weeks do give them a word of encouragement and thanks. They might not have run the school but they have worked really hard.

Finally as I've said you have been in our prayers and you will continue to be. Stay safe this summer and keep a watch on our social media, we will be issuing more podcasts and talks over the break, and we have some ideas percolating to try and connect up with some of you in person if possible. Until then, have a blessed Christmas and may God show up in a way that you aren't expecting this January.

Jemma Brunton

Director, Hearts Aflame Planning Team