

**To: H.E. Cyril Ramaphosa, President, Republic of South Africa**  
**From: Rt. Rev. Malusi Mpumwana, SACC General Secretary.**  
**Subject: Towards SACC Policy of Norms & Standards for Church in COVID Time**  
**Date: May 18, 2020**  
**CC: Minister Jackson Mthembu, Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Minister Zwelini Mkhize.**

*“The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.” - Psalm 28:7*

Your Excellency,

Greetings! Grace and peace to you and all your industrious teams of working groups! We write to communicate what has become a set of specific requests to your Government Sir, and these begin at the bottom of page 3 below. Otherwise this is a summary of a document that the SACC National Church Leaders Forum has developed over the last two weeks, working towards developing a policy framework to guide to self- regulate ourselves at the time of the COVID pandemic and beyond.

First, we commiserate with all humanity that has been severely affected by COVID-19; especially those who in this country have lost their lives, and the bereaved families who remain with their own anxieties of infection. Much uncertainty has led to serious concerns about own future and duration of this current situation, including confronting poverty, food security, the prophetic voice of the Church, and the role of public theology currently, achieving broader-based ecumenism, the plight of the homeless and destitute, lack of food amongst poor families, concerns about possible social upheavals amongst poor communities, school /tertiary institution closure and questions around the academic year, to name a few, and the challenge of the witness of the Church under such conditions.

South African society is at a crossroads in the struggle against the coronavirus/ COVID 19. On the one hand, we are bracing ourselves for a “storm” of infections as large-scale, country-wide testing reveals the true infection rate. The winter flu season raises the prospect of more infections that will reach a peak in the Spring. There is a growing number of Covid-19 related deaths and a growth in gender-based violence. On the other hand, many South Africans are expressing lockdown exhaustion, with hundreds and thousands of livelihoods lost, many more jobs on the line, and many people starving, with prospects for a revival of the economy and an increase in Government revenue becoming more and more distant. The revenue challenge is just as big for the church institutions whose functioning depends entirely on the dedicated giving of the members, and for some, even more on the weekly takings without which there is no way to support the ministers of the church.

The Church, as an integral part of society, is faced with the same challenges as the rest of society. It's necessary and essential ministry has been disrupted as much as that of the work of any other sector, and its loss of revenue – which depends heavily on weekly giving at services – has a considerable impact on the estimated one million or more employed by the churches in various forms of ministry and pastoral social services. As we consider the policy options for the church, our people are in the throes of starvation, leading them to run in all directions with not a remote prospect of finding food, to mitigate the serious food insecurity. These are the large

immune-compromised communities, not the ones flooding the beaches, but rather the ones risking to flood the food lines.

The reality of the vulnerability of poor people to this virus and its effects stares every sector of society in the face. We learn from StatsSA that 55% of South Africans are in dire poverty and therefore as immune-compromised and vulnerable as the elderly. We have in our communities some 300,000 people with TB, about 7 million people with HIV/AIDS, some 2 million are said not to be on anti-retroviral medication. We note too, that a significant percentage of South Africans, have conditions such as renal failure, and will require dialysis for the rest of their lives.

In the tough choices between lives and livelihoods that all of society faces, the Church is obligated to place theological and pastoral imperatives, derived from the Scriptures and our lived experience as people of faith, at the forefront of our considerations. In the current situation, to reflect the compassion of Christ, we must prioritise the vulnerability of the poor to this virus and its effects.

The SACC National Church Leaders Forum established a Task Team to focus on this task, chaired by Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, and it includes leaders of the various traditions of our churches, including the Evangelicals and the African Independent Churches.

The Task Team developed a questionnaire to assist in collecting and collating submissions by member churches. The question posted on Twitter and Facebook was: “What are the conditions under which we can encourage a return of the faithful to congregational worship?” The SACC General Secretary, Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, followed up on the churches that did not initially submit their responses. The majority then responded. On the whole all denominations made submissions on their own accord and did not require a follow up. The responses were collated and put together by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba as scribe, and analysed.

A first draft was presented orally to the meeting of the National Church Leaders Forum. Their inputs were incorporated into the draft document and this was sent to subcommittee for further input. The subcommittee then met with the revised document and made further suggestions. The revised document was sent to the national church leaders and affiliates and some who had made individual submissions. They were given two and half days to consult and to make comments and they submitted these. A further national church leaders meeting was held and the Chair of the subcommittee presented the report.

After robust discussion and input, the document was adopted. The chair and General Secretary were asked to proof read and edit the document, insert further comments that the church leaders made. The leaders further suggested that, a succinct letter consisting of the summary of the report be urgently sent to the Government, and that the final report be circulated to all church leaders and affiliates. The methodology that has characterised us throughout the Covid-19 season and before, and thus informs our journey towards the development of criteria, can be summed up as follows: We were informed by **Scripture** in our SEEING, and an exploration of our common traditions and **experiences** in our JUDGING, we have **reasoned** together before ACTING.

### **The Church in its Public Service Ministry:**

The lockdown regulations that prohibit our meeting in public worship feel very hard on us and our churches. With the shift to Level 4 of Lockdown, many are asking why we cannot now have the churches open for worship? We have supported suspending public worship for very practical pastoral reasons, and it is necessary to remind ourselves of that context today. We have



learned from science and observing trends in other countries that, while everyone may be vulnerable to infection, some 80-85% of the infected will not be seriously affected but that it is among the remaining 15-20% that the most danger to life will be. This includes the following categories of people: Those with weak immunity - mainly with underlying health conditions such as TB, diabetes, cancer, and HIV, especially those not taking anti-retroviral treatment.

Some denominations own and run private church schools with priests/pastors as chaplains, and as we prepare for schools to reopen, these clerics will be bound as they always are to be part of the church's polity and the schools' practice. We run private theological seminaries, colleges and Bible schools, registered with the Department of Higher Education and employing a number of staffs. We run NGOs, including social welfare NGOs which employ social and health workers as well as oversee volunteers. This list excludes clergy who are police and army chaplains, as they are governed by their institutions, but they are an offering by the churches to the country in service to the common good and to promote social cohesion.

We believe the the time has now come for the Government to treat our clergy/ministers/pastors, lay workers and volunteers as a service corps of "essential church frontline workers", based in church buildings and other structures. In that capacity, they can play a vital role in caring for our people's spiritual, emotional and material well-being under carefully-formulated guidelines to protect them in the way health workers, the police and the army are protected from infection. The World Health Organization defines "Health" as: "A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition. ([www.who.int](http://www.who.int) - Click on "About us", Click on "Who we are", click on "Constitution"). In this context, pastors/priests/ministers are providing essential health services while caring, counselling and attending to the mental, spiritual and social well-being of community members even during the lockdown period. For this reason, we hold the view that Priests/Pastors/Ministers are also performing essential services and should have been regarded as such.

The question may asked as to under what are the conditions under which we can encourage a return of the faithful to congregational worship, private prayer, counselling and feeding the hungry and other pastoral work such as weddings? Churches were among the first institutions to impose restrictions on worship in the face of the initial rapid wave of coronavirus infections in South Africa.

The Church supports the staged adjustments to the lockdown, tailored according to regional and sectoral needs, upon which the Government has embarked. However, our ability to contribute to our people's spiritual needs – and therefore the nation's morale at this critical time – as well as the material contributions to people's welfare which our social ministries offer, have been curtailed by a failure to recognise us as providing an "essential service" to the communities in which we work.

In this context, the SACC National Church Leaders Forum now submits the following requests for the consideration of the Government:

1. That under the current Level Four provisions, safer spaces be created by applying the aggressive testing that Government is currently conducting, to target geographic blocks of communities, enabling safer communities to gather in appropriately limited numbers for worship, using the COVID-19 safety self-regulation already proposed. This would also speak to the value of a varied approach that eases up areas of the country, that have markedly less infection;

2. That religious worship be reopened more broadly in the next level of the risk-oriented, phased-in approach of the lockdown - i.e. Level Three, and that the proposals outlined above form the basis of holding the churches accountable for safety, for reducing the rate of infection and for the well-being of their members and all South Africans wherever they operate;
3. That the churches be accredited and allowed to designate selected clergy, lay workers and volunteers as a service corps of “essential church frontline workers” to carry out spiritual and pastoral work as essential services under COVID-19 safe measures. A slight adjustment to the existing provision for heads of churches and institutions to commission clergy to conduct funerals can enable clergy to be given specific assignments to minister and bring pastoral counselling as needed in specific situations for which the head of the church will take responsibility.
4. That SACC-affiliated churches be granted the opportunity to self-regulate for COVID-19 compliance as suggested above. This we would ask for any other formation of religious communities (of any faith tradition) that can satisfy appropriate COVID self-regulation measures;
5. That churches be considered for financial assistance under COVID-19 related provisions, including Temporary Employee/Employer Relief Scheme (TERS) and other support for essential church workers (ministers) who offer essential pastoral services, including workers such as caregivers and counsellors.
6. Local Municipalities be requested to suspend as a matter of urgency, payment of rates and taxes for the duration of lockdown.

What are the criteria for reopening places of worship during the Covid-19 pandemic and the possible impact on society at large?” The church leaders had a number of areas of consideration under which they deliberated. These include theological, constitutional, financial and practical. Below we share only the financial and the practical considerations which looks at what the churches must do to regulate themselves for COVID readiness, by way of norms and standards for worship management.

#### **Financial Considerations:**

The Church as a contributor to the South African Economy is an understated and unknown quantity. This has an impact on how seriously the Churches are taken by others, especially the government. This has an advocacy Churches may wish to make to society. For that reason, the SACC wishes to invite heads of Churches to give an indication of how many people are on the payroll of the church nationally and to give an indication as to the rand amounts involved. This information, will assist the SACC in advocating for financial relief from the government in these hard times of COVI19.

Amidst restriction of civil liberties, minimal economic activity has led to the closure of business and professional practices, and fears of job losses and unemployment. As such, our income has been affected because our members’ income has been affected seriously by the lockdown. Nonetheless, the generosity of many South Africans has been heart-warming, as the lockdown brings out the worst and the best in all of us. Some Clergy have already sacrificed their allowances, others have forfeited Easter offerings, so the sacrifices have already been made in certain instances in concert with many South Africans who have contributed from their earnings. While those who have in abundance have

struggled to find methods of distribution, many who are poor, have done so spontaneously amongst themselves.

The financial repercussions for different Churches have been varied. In some instances, the Stewardship contributions have increased. In others, a slight decline has been experienced with regards to monthly budget contributions from the various Presbyteries due to which some Churches have had to delay salary increases due to ministers in April. While for others, COVID-19 has a devastating impact on the finances of the Church. Many Churches, as do business and other sectors of society, have battled financially. With congregations no longer gathering during the Covid-19 Pandemic, and some of the Church members dealing with lost jobs or reduced working hours, the Church feels the financial impact. The main source of the Church income are contributions from members. Without Sunday offerings, congregations are feeling the financial strain from being closed, except for some individuals who bank electronically. This is particularly difficult to address where the online Church operates on very thin margins.

Irrespective of the financial standing of the various Churches, the Church leadership continues to encourage Members to sustain the Church even during this difficult time utilising written communication and social media. The following practical steps are recommended:

We encourage the Church members to do online tithing. Members need to be invited during the virtual services to donate via Snap scan or EFT. Use of reserves and the electronic transfer into the bank for operational expenses. We recommend the suspension of all capital expenditure activities.

Given the highly infectious nature of this virus and the fact that a percentage of those infected will require hospitalisation, it would be desirable to keep the medical aid benefit in operation. Church Pension administrators should be approached for possible relief with contributions. Churches should also benefit from the Government relief programs. Some Churches may be a small business with lost income while others have significant economic contributions to the economy as financial entities.

There is a need to consider cost-saving measures, for example pastors/priest/ministers not to receive their traveling allowance, and other additional incomes that can be forfeited.

As stated earlier, the Church is not immune to the employment issues facing our country, with some church members having lost jobs or income. Most members are doing their best to stay positive and make ends meet but are worried about the long-term impact of the pandemic on their work and income. Many are already experiencing insecurity and shortages regarding food and finances. Congregations are feeling the financial strain from being closed. Even with online giving the Church operates on very thin margins and denominations report cash flow difficulties. Congregations sometimes cannot meet their obligations to central church bodies, some of which report that they already cannot meet their financial responsibilities.

Our unequal society means there is huge food insecurity. The church by virtue of its presence in every community is well placed to assist with this. We should consider a direct partnership with the State. This should be carefully done so that both we and the State can properly account for money spent. We could also become centres for the collection and distribution of food under strict conditions to guarantee the safety of volunteers.

#### **PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS AS NORMS AND STANDARDS FOR CHURCH SELF-REGULATION:**

All of us are committed to cooperating with the government in every way we can. We would not want to reverse the gains that have been made thus far. However, the impact of the pandemic will soon have long-lasting effects on the Church and the country. At this point, we need to assess if an



appeal to the government should be considered to address whether and how to reopen Churches, which must take into consideration the gains of living faith during the 'hard lockdown' period, and recommendations of how the regulations could reasonably be amended in such a way as to achieve government's objectives, while at the same time give maximum protection to religious rights under the circumstances. This needs to include reasonable but concrete proposals for engagement of the Church, possible staggered easing to its activities as guided by the scientific evidence, and re-opening of our Churches based on necessary precautions.

A discussion with the government in which we are assessing the degree of freedom to meet albeit under strict conditions which faith bodies and states should agree together is a democratic way forward. Based on the collaborative discussions, the decisions taken need to be put into practice. Based on the recommended scenarios for continued Church practices available to the Clergy, the following practical steps can be taken:

## 1. Social media gatherings

During the lockdown, an important aspect of Church life that is dearly missed by many is the celebration of Holy Communion. Being strengthened by sharing and receiving the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is good for the souls of Churchgoers and encourages us in our struggles faced during our daily living. Although we usually only celebrate Holy Communion when we are together and the Pastor or an appointed preacher is there to celebrate it, we may now celebrate Holy Communion at home in this time, especially when we feel a need for the special comfort such a celebration gives to a home community e.g. a birthday or special day of celebration, or of course when there is an illness or other distress. Since the lockdown entails that currently, we are not able to celebrate the sacrament as we are not gathering as a Church, the channels of social media need to be explored for achieving the cause.

Many ministers/ priests/pastors have been streaming Holy Communion services via the internet or through WhatsApp recorded messages. In effect, the minister/priest/pastor was receiving the Holy Communion on behalf of the people (either live or by recording). At the same time, every person who does not attend live Eucharist service should be encouraged to continue to undertake some religious practice on Sundays (for approximately the amount of time they would spend at the Eucharist) for the good of their souls and fulfilment of their religious obligations.

Irrespective of lockdown restrictions, as social media provides a unique opportunity for the Clergy to keep in touch with those congregants who are unable to physically attend Church, it is a medium that needs to be made available to such potential Celebrants. While much training is required to bring this form of interaction to perfection, it is a form of interaction that has been used highly effectively, by a variety of religious institutions, be it radio, digital or social media via smartphones.

## 2. The following practical steps are required to be taken:

### 2.1 Use of technology:

All Pastors and congregations are embarking on learning to use technology through which Church services, on social media, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, or other live streaming. The following are steps to fill the gaps in communication created by the lockdown:

- We have approached the SABC with a view to providing regular slots on its radio and TV services to enable us to engage with all our people. For example,



- o Allocating a weekly hour-long time-slot (across their various channels) to the various denominations. This would help other faith traditions as well in our multi-faith society.
- In this setting the national church leader or other senior priest/minister/pastor could conduct the service within the afforded hour together with an instrumentalist and vocalist to encapsulate the worship experience of the specific faith tradition in ways that are familiar to members of the respective denomination. All the usual elements of worship could be satisfied, and people thereby edified.
- Where faith traditions prefer radio broadcasting, the very same conditions as set out in the point above would apply.
- Lobbying for the reduction of the costs of the smaller data packages for mobile phones to enable all our people to engage in church communications online;
- Using every platform, we can to discourage the circulation of fake news and perhaps to have a central point where people can check authenticity prior to disseminating information. To this end the SACC has established a WhatsApp platform and a dedicated website, [www.churchinaction.org.za](http://www.churchinaction.org.za).

And in managing worship:

- Ministers/Priests/Pastors to receive the Holy Communion on behalf of the people.
- Some Churches have resorted to utilising social media and video conferencing platforms for worship.
- Sermons are pre-recorded and live-streamed on the Church's YouTube and Facebook accounts. This process is managed centrally where a programme is issued. However, Ministers are also encouraged to have local services and keep connected to local parishioners utilising technology.

Resources need to be made available or shared, i.e. technological instruments such as smartphones, computers, and tablets. Not all congregants have access to the internet and data, which makes it difficult to access e-sermons. An offer to supply data for those who cannot afford it needs to be considered. Schedules of services and regular devotions can be shared, as well as bible reading plans.

## 2.2 Worship Services and COVID Considerations

The return to Church will require careful management by the minister and local congregational leadership as Churches reopen. Strict adherence to laws regarding COVID-19 at all times and all protocols as prescribed by the government are to be observed. Church leaders/ Bishops and other clergy should continue to make it clear that attending a live Eucharist service, is a decision for people to make, without risking themselves and others; and that churches were possible, will continue with streaming live liturgies. Ministers /Priests/Pastors should help their congregants/ parishioners make good decisions in this regard. Those regarded to be at high risk of infection, such as the elderly, should be encouraged to be most cautious; and Priests, Deacons, Churchwardens/Stewards/officers and lay ministers should be most solicitous to ensure as many as possible who cannot attend live Eucharist services receive it using social media services and home visits.

### i. Pastors are not Immune:

In our considerations we need to remind ourselves that none of us are immune from contracting the virus, including the ordained. So precautionary measures must be practiced all the time. These include precautions that the Church must lead, and those that lay in the hands of its Clergy, and Congregation.

### ii. Church Buildings COVID Prepared:

Before opening our buildings for services, each parish/local Church needs to be fully prepared. Each parish/local Church must have a task team (with people with skills and knowledge of our guidelines



and measures given by the State). Their sole purpose will be to inform and advise the Priest/ Minister/Pastor and Parish/Management Council, on the developments surrounding the COVID-19. So that the local leadership can reflect on the recommendations presented to them, on how to continue with their Canonical responsibilities under all lockdown levels. The following practical steps can be considered by the task team:

### iii. Congregation Load-Shedding

Load-shedding of meetings entails while encouraging attendance, that the congregation must be dispersed to limit congregation size for each service held. To do so, the following practical steps are suggested:

- It is recommended to plan the schedule of services to ensure compliance with regulations in terms of the numbers and social distancing. For example, check for a quota of attendees permitted, such as the current arrangement at funerals where only 50 people are allowed.
- Possibly defining attendees per service by age range, so that members above a certain age worship together.
- Based on the above, services may need to be spaced. This can be accomplished by:
  - o More services may need to be introduced to accommodate for numbers, for example:
    - More than one gathering per Sunday can be allowed, or
    - Sundays and mid-week services can be arranged, and congregants encouraged to attend only one service and not two services per week,
  - o Where more than one service in a building is required per Sunday, time must be allowed for cleaning between services.
  - o Daily worship can be arranged on selected days of services. A specific time should be allocated for daily worship. Lay Ministers can assist the ordained minister in conducting the worship service.

### iv. Contact Tracing

- A register of attendees needs to be maintained for contact tracing.
- A roster, possibly, alphabetical order, of all congregations to be maintained.
- Service times and attendance registers to be maintained with the personal details of attendees.
- A register of all those in attendance should be kept and archived for possible contact tracing.

### v. Church buildings to be 'safe places'

- Cleaning with detergents of all the buildings before and after services to thoroughly sanitise the Church for the new congregation.
- Floors and pews/benches/chairs need to be wiped down before and after services with cloths soaked in disinfectant.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Make sure that the Church is well ventilated by opening windows.
- Safety bins to be provided with plastic liners to be easily and safely disposed of after each service.

### vi. Toilets need to be kept hygienic:

- Ensure adequate supply of 70% alcohol-based hand sanitisers.
- Soap, water, and paper towels (no cloth towels) must be provided. Even in the most rural of congregations, sanitising will be required. Ideally, running water and handwashing with liquid soap ought to be used in this process.



- Hand towels to be disposed of in a bin with a lid.
- Sacristans/attendants need to be particularly careful in their preparation of the sacred vessels and the elements to be used in a service and both hygiene and sanitising must be strictly observed.
- Sacristans/attendants, Lay Ministers, and servers must observe a similar discipline. Should a second or even third service follow, all the precautions observed for preparing for the first service shall apply.

#### vii. Entrances

- No greeters to be present at the door; only stewards to control the numbers entering based on social distancing requirements as per the regulations
- Stewards at the door will take people's temperatures and those with readings of 38 degrees Celsius and above will be asked to return home.
- Provision of sanitisers at all entrances.
- Persons to be assigned at the entrance door to spray sanitisers on the hands of every member coming to and leaving the service.
- They must also wear gloves, and wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

#### viii. Contact time

- Reduce the service duration to ONE hour.
- Allow at least 30 minutes before the next one.
- Varying service times such as 9:00 am and then 11:00 am can be implemented.

#### ix. Controlling people-to-people transmission

- People will need to be actively discouraged from attending if they have an infection of any type. No one with even the slightest symptoms of cold should attend services.
- Anyone with close contact with people who are showing symptoms in the past 14 days should also be prevented from attending. Members who have flu-like symptoms must avoid coming into contact with each other.
- If any members present with flu-like symptoms, or have been exposed to any person exhibiting such symptoms in the last 14 days, they must be recommended to consult their family, family physician, or local clinic or hospital, as appropriate.
- Medical personnel within the congregation should be reached out to assist with screening before congregants enter the Church and all those who screen positive be directed to seek medical help and possible COVID-19 testing immediately.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

#### x. Use of masks:

- Everyone entering the Church must wear a face mask to cover the nose and mouth completely.
- The Church can supply cloth masks to those without any, or
- Church Groups or members who have sewing skills can be requested to sew and sell masks at a reasonable price.
- Cough or sneeze into the crook of one's arm, or into a tissue, then dispose of the tissue in a plastic-lined rubbish bin with a lid.
- Indoor confessions where this practice is practiced regularly, to use antibacterial spray and a stack of paper towels, so that each penitent can spray the kneeler and wipe it down, and the area immediately surrounding it.



#### xi. Social Distancing

- Social distancing must be maintained as per regulatory guidelines. As such, it will be based on the size of the Church and social distancing requirements that will determine the number in the congregation.
- Attendees must be allocated by regions/blocks/sections to limit the number of persons per session to assist in the management of flow, attendance, and numbers at any given time (**wykgemeentes**).
- Seating must be according to the 'social distance' of the recommended distance between participants in every direction.
- Marking out pews for the appropriate seating order.
- Seating encouraged to be by alternate rows.
- Only persons belonging to individual families (who live together without social distancing norms) may sit together.

#### xii. Parishes/local congregations/churches

- All members of the Church and congregation need to be frequently trained and educated about precautions and kept up to date with government regulations.
- No one with even the slightest cold ought to attend services. This applies particularly to the Clergy, servers, and sacristans as they will be the common denominators in the event of the spread of infection across services held at the Church.
- The congregations/parishes to procure forehead thermometer to screen and use members of the health team in the parish.
- The president of the mass/Holy Communion, must sanitise before the service, at the preparation of the elements for the Eucharist and after receiving Communion.
- Those leading worship, by the very nature of their task, could be allowed to not wear masks, but only during the worship.
- Presider/preacher should ideally be the same person. Two ministers may share the services only in the presence of a cleric more susceptible to the virus, as a caveat against his/her exhaustion.
- All should move into the sanctuary discreetly to limit contact with others as far as possible.
- After disrobing, the Clergy shall again wash their hands with soap under running water for at least 20 seconds. Where this is not possible, a sanitising liquid must be used.
- Pastor/Bishop/Moderator should take the responsibility on behalf of his or her Church, and should there be a breach, heavy punishment/penalty be placed on the responsible Priest, Pastor or Bishop, and not excluding arrest, to demonstrate the seriousness and importance of ensuring that Churches too, are COVID-19 compliant.

#### xiii. Holy Communion

- The most visible ritual for sacramental churches is Mass, Eucharist, Holy Communion or a service of common meal. Because Holy Communion is the meal of the whole faith community, when we do celebrate it in our homes it is important to let our brothers and sisters know that we are celebrating it, for them to intercede for us in prayer and rejoice with us in the celebration.
- Physical distances to be strictly observed, with no hand contact during the service, especially at the peace.
- Communion in one kind should continue as was the case before the lockdown, still with no kneeling at the altar rail, but instead standing with the social distance provision. The Celebrant would administer the Sacrament at a safe distance, and only place it on the hand of the recipient and NOT the tongue.
- Communion in one kind, individually received, whilst standing.
- This means that only the minister will use the chalice.
- The priest/minister/pastor, standing centrally at either the altar rail or sanctuary steps, shall administer the host to the communicant's hands.
- Communicants must stand in a single file observing a two-meter distance between each person.
- Churchwardens/ushers/stewards or their deputies must ensure the orderly approach to the distribution point and the safe return to the communicant's seat.
- The blessing of non-communicants will require no physical contact with the person receiving such a blessing.
- Communion to be distributed with sterile gloves. Lay Ministers of Communion sanitising hands regularly whilst administering Communion.
- Preferably no wine to be served to prevent recipients from touching the chalice. If served, please note:
  - Communion wine to be taken only by the Celebrant, otherwise small distribution cups can be provided where permitted by regulations.
  - No handshaking, hugging, or kissing even during peace.
  - No greeting by hand, use your feet if need be, or just wave.
  - No holy hugs, only holy hand wave.
  - No elbow greeting, only waving of hands be done during Peace time.

#### xiv. Collection

- Collections and dedicated giving envelopes to be offered at the sanctuary step into large containers.
- Collection to be done as people exit Churches maintaining distance.
- Arrangements for planned giving to made at the banks otherwise the collection be put in a box or bag.
- People taking offering should wear gloves and wash their hands as required.

#### xv. Service suspensions

- There will be no singing:
- Droplets are carried further when we sing and we also breathe in more deeply in singing, and as such, choirs have been known breeding grounds for the virus.



- Instrumental music or solo singing can fill the other slots where hymns would usually be sung.
- The singing of hymns may need to be considered VERY carefully. Two meters is not far enough apart for hymns to be sung. Similarly, responses need to **sotto voce (intentionally lowering the voice)** to avoid expressing any saliva.
- All hymn books, bibles to be removed from pews:
- Readings and hymns to be provided by electronic means where possible or printed in leaflet form.
- Where projection of services on overhead screens is possible, these can be used to avoid the use of books such as hymn and prayer books and bibles that would ordinarily be found on pews at each service.
- No offertory procession with either the elements or the collection. There should be no processions in and out of the Church.
- There need only be one Lay minister assisting to lead the service, as well as one altar server to assist at the altar.
- Presbytery meetings and other majority assemblies to be postponed indefinitely; unless they can be conducted electronically.
- Sunday school is suspended until further notice.
- Catechism classes are suspended until further notice.
- No group meetings after services.

#### xvi. Outside Church

- No socialising before or after service.
- Following the dismissal, the Clergy must observe social distancing when speaking to persons outside the building. Should it be raining, this form of greeting will not occur.

#### xvii. Outdoor confessions with masks.

- Confessions may also be conducted outside the church, to avoid having to sanitise the confessional furnishings.
- No tea fellowship after the Service.
- People attending Services should not walk in groups.
- Individuals and family cohorts maintaining social distancing in Church parking lots.
- No gathering outside or coffee bars after the service.

#### **In Conclusion:**

The physical premises of the local churches have been closed in compliance with the COVID-19 regulations and physical Church services and meetings are not being held, also in compliance with the regulations. South Africans, in general, are become increasingly restless. There is no easy answer to this vexing question, but people need to see and experience something different, like connecting more meaningfully with their faith traditions. This restlessness is seeing an increase in all manner of anti-state statements which are in most cases nameless. The restlessness makes people



susceptible to rebellious behaviour and it is easy to whip up emotions when there is an existing source of discontent.

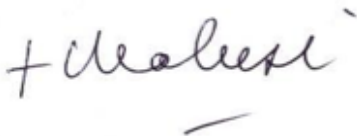
While Pastoring people is a serious concern due to the current restrictions, we are still hopeful and trusting in God to pull us through these difficult circumstances. We have however grown more spiritually, our homes have been turned into places of worship, while the pandemic “will test as never before our capacity as a Church to innovate and share with one another”, there is an understanding why we cannot meet physically but we are one in spirit, but virtual services are bringing some members together, their prayers are strengthening and encouraging, and regular phone calls and social media contact is kept and loneliness is countered.

The economic disparities in society are stark and it is impossible to ignore them. The poor and oppressed people have significantly different expectations than the privileged. The hermeneutical principle of what you see depending on where you stand is palpably clear. God is truly known in community – whether this community is physical or not, we belong and we know that we belong. There are conditions under which churches can be opened, as outlined above, and in negotiation with the Government. We want to look seriously at these at this time.

With Apostle Paul we say, “may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”. Amen.

With kind regards,

Yours for a Coronavirus-free South Africa.



Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana  
SACC General Secretary