



South African Council of Churches

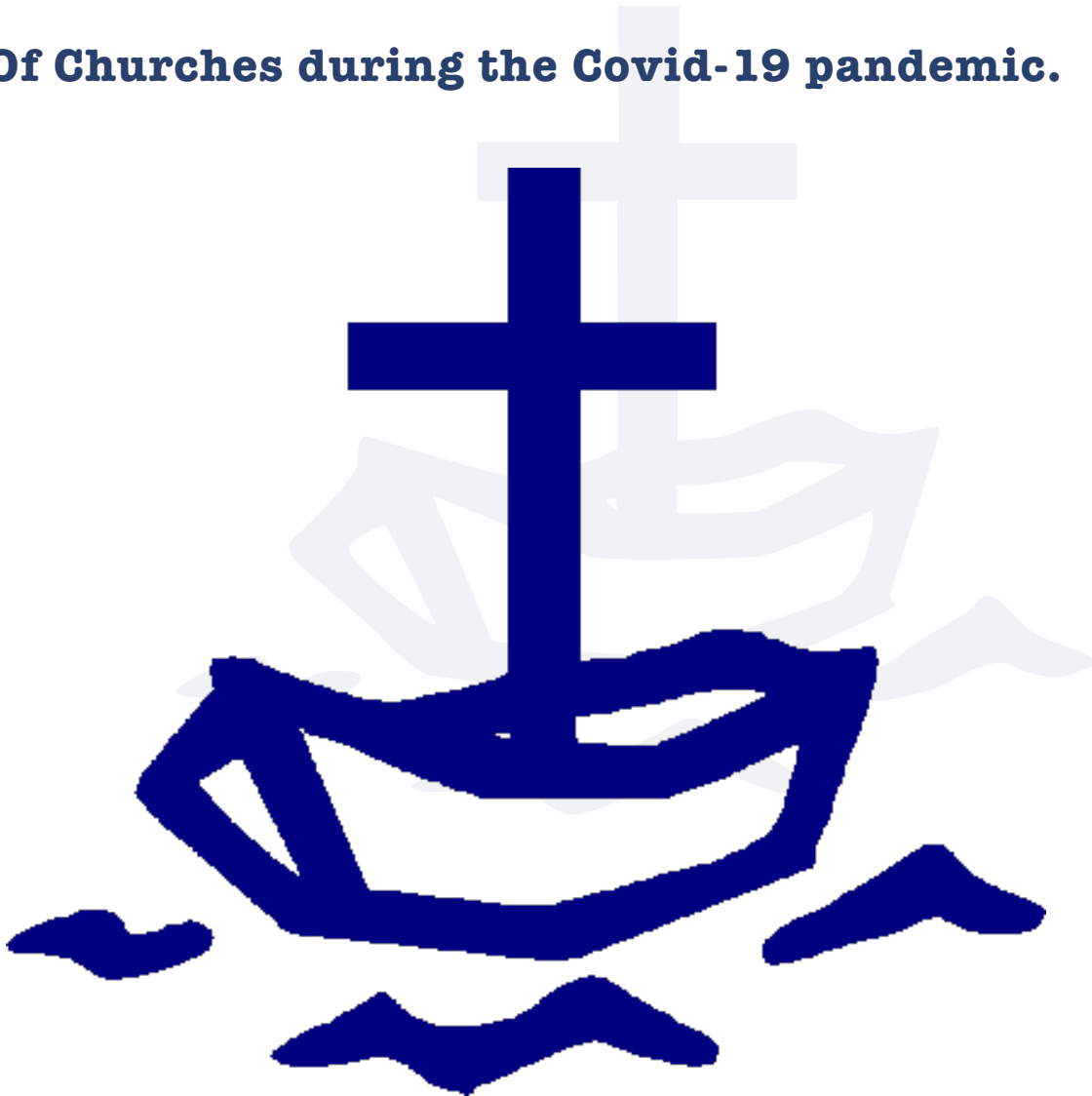
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## **Policy Guidelines for the SACC Churches**

### **On Post Covid-19:**

## **Criteria, Norms & Standards for the Reopening Of Churches during the Covid-19 pandemic.**



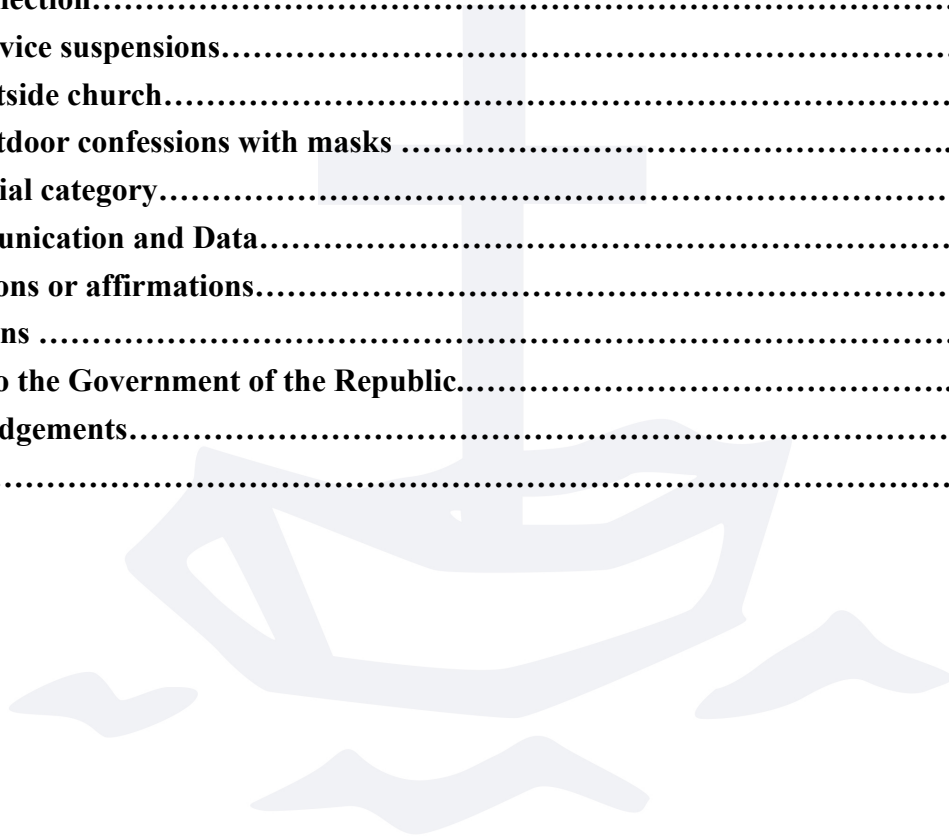


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**Policy name:** Criteria for the Reopening of Churches during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Date:** 11th May 2020

### Task Team:

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**“Covid19 will test as never before our capacity as a Church to innovate and share with one another” -Thabo Makgoba, (Church Times, 2020)<sup>1</sup>.**

### Objective:

**Towards developing a policy framework to guide member churches and affiliates to self-regulate during the Coronavirus/COVID19 pandemic and beyond.**

### Raison d'être, values, biblical and theological principles

#### Raison d'être

The methodology that has characterised our reflections throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and before, and that informs our journey towards the development of these criteria, can be summed up as:- SEE-JUDGE-ACT. As we reflected on our existing context and reality, we were informed by Scripture in our SEEING, and by an exploration of our common traditions and experiences in our JUDGING. We have reasoned together before ACTING.

#### Biblical Values

The Bible instructs pastors that our vocation is to care and respect the dignity of each person as created by God (Gen 1:27, Ps 127:3, Jeremiah 1:5, 1 Cor 3:16, John 13:16, Mt 7:12, to cite a few) as well as celebrate our diversity as God's children (Gal 3:28, 1 Cor 12:12-14; Rev 7:9-10). We are to revere creation and be good stewards of God's creation (Numbers 35:33-34; Gen 2:15; Jeremiah 2:7; Revelations 11:18; Psalm 24:1; Ezekiel 34:18 and Revelations 22:1-2). We are called to comfort God's people (Isaiah; 40:1) and assure them of God's vision of life in its fullness (John 10:1-10) especially at a time of uncertainty and fear. We are called to write down the vision clearly and make it plain so that a herald may understand and put it into action (Habakkuk 2:2).

#### Theological principles

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.Churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/3-april/news/world/south-african-Church-offers-prayers-and-resources-in-testing-times>



We are of one mind, although, our theological emphases may vary, that the mystery of the solidarity of the Triune God, expressed in the incarnation, passion, death and resurrection, of Jesus Christ, informs our solidarity, our pursuit of the common (public) good and our work for peace with justice. The respect for human dignity and for human life are paramount. Every human person is sacred, but also social, thus they have a right to shape their own lives and the society in which they live. Covid19 reminds us again, that while every person's needs are important, the needs and lives of the most vulnerable people are paramount as we strive for radical equality and respect for the inherent worth for all human beings. We commit to care and to be good stewards of creation.

### Prophetic ministry at this time.

The case for re-opening our churches is argued on the basis that people's living faith and moral lives are threatened by isolation and that accepting the risks involved in re-opening is justifiable. Moreover, just as front-line medical personnel have accepted heightened risk to do their jobs, priests/ministers/pastors should accept heightened risks to care for souls. For those Churches in the "catholic" tradition, the sacraments are essential lifeblood, and to be deprived of the sacraments weakens the body of Christ and its members. Churches in "apostolic" tradition who celebrate yearly thanksgiving ceremonies, experience a void and feel guilty when ceremonies are not done taking cue as in Exodus 13:4 / 23:15 / Deuteronomy 16: 1.

We cannot continue for too long under these lockdown restrictions and conditions. Many aspects of the rules promulgated by the Cabinet seem to many of our people to be arbitrary, and imposed without consultation. This is a danger to our society and weakens the social fabric of our nation, both for the present and for the future. We must have a social compact if we as a nation are to build a healthy democracy. We need engagement with Government so that we can open our facilities to pray, worship. We should be trusted to self-regulate and at the same time accept that there will be severe consequences for any faith group that fails to keep to the regulations. Regulations for how we as churches can open our buildings/facilities should be the outcome of the social compact.

The request to reopen our places of worship may seem a departure from the Churches' tradition of prophetic vocation. Prophetic, is not only towards a government but also against the folly and bravado of the people. It's a ministry of truth that Aaron failed to exercise and the golden calf was built while Moses was away with God. The Churches thus, make a commitment to promote life affirming practices and to ensure the protection of all who attend their services. The Churches remain resolute to be advocates of justice, righteousness and peace. As church leaders, we affirm the following three aspects of prophetic ministry as interdependent. The first model, is that of Elijah, who engages King Ahab over injustice against Naboth (1 Kings 21), or Nathan upon David's sin against Uriah (2 Samuel 11). This is when we deliver uncomfortable messages to those in power.

The second model, is that of Daniel, who absorbs the sin of his people in his confession (Daniel 9). This is when we acknowledge the sinfulness of our nation and confess it on behalf of all. In this, we lean in penitential prayer, on the pledge that God made to Solomon,: “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

The third prophetic model, is that of Jeremiah, who in witness to hope he purchases a piece land in the despair of war, as a sign that “houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. (Jeremiah 32:1-15). This is when the churches initiate hope-engendering programs of ministry.

As church leaders, we aim to create a framework or “norms and standards” that will enable both pastoral presence and prophetic ministry during the Coronavirus pandemic and beyond. “One size fits all” is unhelpful We will need a phasic approach, as we operate within levels 4 to 1 of lockdown, with a risk assessment strategy as various parts of the country will be at different levels of lockdown.

**Scope:** Criteria and guidelines are for the SACC member churches and affiliates to self- regulate during the Coronavirus/COVID19 pandemic and beyond

### Decision making process.

Criteria will be applicable when adopted by the SACC National Church Leaders Forum. Member churches and affiliates may create further regulations to care for their congregations and the most vulnerable in their communities and congregations.

### Terms and Definitions

Terms	Definitions
Covid19	Coronavirus, a respiratory virus
DMA	Disaster Management Act
Levels	Categories of severity of Covid19
Essential service	Defined in xx
Reopening	Phased in reopening of worship
Pandemic	Prevalent throughout world
Freedom of Religion	As per chapter, article RSA
Lockdown	Reduce Covid19, restrict moving
WHO	World Health Organization
nCdc	National Centre for disease control
DSD	Dept Social Development



NCCC	National Coronavirus Command Council
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
Religious gathering	Worship in halls/church facilities/outdoor
Church offices	Management places
Pastoral work as essential "service"	Social development, feeding, counselling, bereavement counselling in particular, weddings and funerals.
ECD	Early Childhood development

## 1. Introduction

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.

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 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 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. These guidelines are tabulated in this report but the SACC will assist member churches and affiliates who may need to supplement their guidelines.

### The question:

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 southern Africa. This preceded announcements by governments in the countries we serve announcing their lockdown procedures. In this document we restrict our report to the Republic of South Africa, conscious that some denominations operate throughout the SADC countries and that there are Councils of Churches in other countries.

The Disaster Management Act (DMA), as opposed to a State of Emergency under security laws, is what regulates and guides our system for controlling coronavirus in South Africa. The questions faced by the churches are:

- How do we as the Church, construct guidelines for the phased re-opening of our places of worship before or following the discovery of a vaccine for Covid-19?
- What is our logic, bearing in mind the possibility of an ‘exclusion principle’?
- What are the worst-case and the best-case scenarios as we formulate these guidelines?





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.

### The visible manifestation of the Church

(Which for now we only see in a mirror, dimly – 1 Corinthians 13:14)

We have within our rank small parochial churches, medium-sized ones and mega-churches, which vary in size of membership. There are also churches with many young members, while others have older members, identified as more vulnerable to Covid-19. We have rural, township, peri-urban and urban parochial units. We have those focused on the Sacraments and those focused on worship through the Word. We still have churches whose membership is racially-skewed. There is a wide divergence in the access which congregations have to economic resources. Access to social media and IT have kept urban and endowed churches alive, whilst small ones have found the cost of data and poor connectivity a stumbling block. The public broadcaster and private broadcasters were meaningful partners prior to Easter, for which we are grateful.

Our ongoing engagement with Government, the Department of Social Development, the Solidarity Fund, business, labor, and with other people of faith, those of no faith and with each other is unveiling a potential we never realised or mainly only used during the struggle against apartheid. We have never before had to define for ourselves what we stand for, nor to be apologists for the existence of the Church. Now we are forced to work out for ourselves what is Church, apart from a worshipping community and an agent of charity and social welfare. While we understand the need for extreme caution in the present pandemic and are committed to exercising this caution, the present restrictions deprive us of an essential part of our lifeblood, and the Church will experience what the economy of the country is now experiencing, severe weakness and spiritual malnutrition.

Scripture forbids self-praise, however, the churches in South Africa must be commended for the support they have given during the difficult and challenging time related to the Covid-19 pandemic. There has been great respect for the need for “social distancing” and the prohibition on group gatherings, leading to the cancellation of services and meetings of whatever kind.



Clearly the sacrifices have been significant and willingly entered into by far the majority of churches.

An approach to reopen churches must take a number of factors into consideration, the primary one being the need of people to connect in a meaningful way to their faith traditions. For Christians, it would mean the ability 'to go to church', to participate in the rituals of the church. The Level 4 lockdown calls the Church to share and promote justice for all. Within our churches, we need to look beyond those who are the "face" of the Church: those who lead our Saturday and Sunday services, the pastors and priests and leaders such as moderators or archbishops.

We need to look to those we employ as administrators, legal experts, teachers, Early Childhood Development assistants, security guards, social workers, nurses, property managers, pensions officers, media officers, to mention just a few, as well as to the hundreds of volunteers who enable our ministry to happen. This poses the question: Who is a pastor?

### Who is pastor?

This is not an easy question to answer in our southern African context. Pastors are "shepherds" of the flock of Christ. They are referred to as ministers or priests interchangeably. They are called from amongst their communities, formed, trained and set apart to care, teach, oversee and watch diligently the flock of Christ. Scripture has stipulations over and above the denominational requirements of who qualifies to be a pastor. They need to be holy, just, patient, prayerful, not drunkards or self-willed or lovers of money.

They need to have patience and gentleness of spirit. We regret the times when we have failed God, the people and the nation in falling short of these values. We confess, resolve to amend our ways, and ask God through his love and mercy to remould us to live up to this vision on our journey towards the healing of our nation. Different denominations have their prescribed requirements for qualification. Pastor is someone who has met requirements for entry into licensed or ordained ministry and is registered with his or her denomination to fulfil the duties of a pastor of that church. Perhaps Covid-19 has come to remind us of the need to establish some minimum, agreed-upon experience and qualifications for pastors/ministers/clergy for our member churches.

Covid-19 furthermore exposes as never before the disparities between pastors and churches. For example, a well-resourced urban congregation or parish may have two pastors, a treasurer, a secretary, a media officer, an education director, a music director, a youth pastor, 10 soup kitchen volunteers, and a director of social outreach with about 4 staff members and 8 volunteers. In an urban congregation in a township context, one pastor/priest may be expected to carry all or most of these roles, including putting together a YouTube service during lockdown.

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.

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 TABLE 1 – SACC AFFILIATED CHURCHES/AND GROUPS OF CHURCHES

	African Catholic Church	Dutch Reformed Church	Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ	Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference
	African Methodist Episcopal Church	Ethiopian Episcopal Church	Methodist Church of Southern Africa	The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa (TEASA)
	African Presbyterian Bafolisi Church	Evangelical Church of SA	Moravian Church in Southern Africa	The Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa
	Anglican Church of Southern Africa	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (Cape Church )	North Eastern Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa, short NELCSA	United Congregational Church of Southern Africa
	Apostolic Faith Mission of Southern Africa	Evangelical Presbyterian Church in SA	Presbyterian Church of Africa	Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa
	Baptist Convention SA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa	Quakers in Southern Africa	Volkskerk van Afrika



	Coptic Orthodox Church	Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika	Rhema – International Federation of Christian Churches	Grace Bible church
	Council of African Independent Churches	Grace Bible Church	Salvation Army	

## 2. Method of compilation of data

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.

### 2.1. Denominational responses

Table 3: Denominational/organisational responses



	DENOMINATIONS/BODIES	Church Leader	Parishes/congregation/circuits/churches / denominations	No. of Diocese/	In how many countries
1	African Catholic Church	Archbishop Ouboy Mathopa	79 congregations	3	1
2	African Methodist Episcopal Church	Bishop Earl McCloud Jr	240 congregations	7	3
3	Anglican Church of Sothern Africa	Archbishop Dr. Thabo Makgoba	We estimate 4-6 million confirmed parishioners and about 1000 parishes/ congregations and 670 fulltime clergy and +/- 330 self-supporting clergy and more than 7000 lay ministers	30 RSA, Namibia, Lesotho, Angola, Eswatini, Mozambique, St Helena	6 including St Helena
4	Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (AFM OF SA)	President Pastor George Mahlobo	The AFM has 1709 registered Assemblies in South Africa with +/- 1.4 million members.	Has 43 Geographic and Non-Geographic Regions	1
5	African Presbyterian Bafolisi Church	Bishop Shadrack Moloji	65 circuits, 15,000 members	8 presbyteries	1
6	Baptist Convention of South Africa	National President, Rev Sipiwe Ndebele	192 congregations, 65 000 members.	12 regions Member of Baptist World Alliance	1
7	Council of African Independent Churches	President, Bishop Shadrack Moloji	351 denominations = 245700 estimates 3 Minsters fraternal = 67000 denominations [estimates] =313200 congregants	nine provinces	1
8	Dutch Reformed Church	Rev Nelis Van Rensburg	1000 parishes, +- 1 million members	10 Regional synods	4
9	Ethopian Episcopal Church	Archbishop Dr.Nkosinathi Ngesi	150 congregations, 76 Mission Districts	13 Regions, 5 dioceses	1
10	Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Africa (Cape Church)	Bishop Gilbert Filter	21 parishes	2 circuits	1
11	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa	Bishop Molwane Ubane	1100 congregations	7 dioceses	3
12	Evangelical Presbyterian Church of South Africa/	Moderator, Rev. Gicks Moyane	56 parishes, 280 Congregations 25 000 members	8 Presbyteries	1
13	Grace Bible Church	Presiding Bishop Mosa Sono	9 regions and 69 congregations 40 000 members	9 Regions	1
14	International Fellowship of Christian Churches (Including Rhema Family Churches)	President, Pastor Ray McCauley	34 Member Church Formations		16
15	Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ	Rev Zenzele Oscar Madlala	65 Congregations, 11 Circuits	2 regions	1
16	Methodist Church of Southern Africa	Presiding Bishop Purity Malinga	350 circuits and 4,5 million members	15 Synods	6
17	Moravian Church in Southern Africa	Rev Godfrey Cunningham	90 congregations and 10 districts	3 Episcopalian areas	1
18	Northeastern Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (NELCSA)	Bishop Horst Müller	34 Congregations	4 Dioceses	1

19	Presbyterian Church of Africa	Moderator, Rev. Mongezi Mantlana	85 congregations, 9,540 members	6 presbyteries	3
20	Quakers in Southern Africa	Mr Tebogo Moteane	4 branches in South Africa		10
21	Roman Catholic Church – Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference	President, Bishop Sithembele Sipuka	3,163 congregations 7 million members in RSA	26 dioceses in RSA)	3
22	The Salvation Army	Colonel Daniel Kasuso	187 corps (congregations), 25 000 adult members	8 Divisions	6
23	The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa	Rev Dr. Esmé Bowers	20 member churches	All RSA provinces	1
24	United Congregational Church of Southern Africa	Rev Thulani Ndlazi - RSA Synod	310 local churches spread across 11 Regional Councils (equivalent of presbytery/diocese) within the South Africa Synod	11 Regional Councils (equivalent of presbytery/diocese)	5
25	Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa	Rev Dr Peter D Langerman	349 Congregations in RSA with 500 000 congregants.	15 in South Africa 1 in Zimbabwe, and 3 in Zambia	3
26	Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa	Prof Rev Leepo Modise	783 congregations, 1.1 million members	89 Presbyteries	3

### 3. Analysis of the submissions

Over and above the SACC Pastoral Plan, almost all the church head offices, bishops' offices and coordinating bodies had prior to lockdown read the signs of the times and issued some form of pastoral letter with guidelines on safety, worship and messages of hope. Almost all these pastoral letters and guidelines anticipated lockdown to be short-term. None except a few have revised these guidelines in the light of a prolonged lockdown and the introduction of different levels or a phased risk-oriented approach by the Government. Therefore, we need as a collective, to develop a framework – as the subcommittee suggested at its meetings – which covers best- to worst-case scenarios.

All the responses received to date have a best-case scenario in mind, the biblical concepts of the “return and post-exilic state “. The comments and lists of technical solutions deal with the pandemic as a statistical probability that relies on the history of viruses that lead to pandemics. This suggests that our questionnaires were completed by pastors/church leaders and that few of us consulted or delegated work to our lay leaders to get their perspectives. Perhaps this should be the next step, putting a single focused question, to the laity who run our churches.

#### 3.1 Criteria for reopening places of worship.

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’ responses were extremely helpful,



despite the focus on the best-case scenarios. The response rates were higher than expected (65 %), given the short time that leaders were given to complete the task.

### Responses can be categorized into 6 sections:

1. General theological statements about what is Church and a vision of a non-denominational movement.
2. Constitutional rights and our responsibilities: As can be expected when dealing with pandemics and questions of freedom of religion, movement, the behaviour of others – such as the police and the army – and Government messaging, there will be differences of opinion and the casting of blame for failures and inconsistencies. The legal case of a Muslim group which attempted to challenge regulations was also noted here, as well as a concern about a lack of prophetic leadership and the perception that we are too close to Government thinking and machinery, with nothing distinctly church in our interventions and a failure to feed the hungry.
3. Practical steps to how gathering will be structured and the numbers that may gather. This includes, the Appointment of Covid-19 personnel to train, advise, monitor and ensure compliance with rules in line with health and Government specifications.
4. The financial impact of lockdown on worship and the thousands who the churches employ, which is unknown to many. The challenges here are both at congregational level, involving places of worship, and at the level of church management and the statutory aspects fulfilled by church managers.
5. Communication and data.
6. General affirmations and questions

## 3.2 Excerpts from each section

### 3.2.1 Theological category

The expectation from the religious sector was that the necessary space would have been created for the Church in such a way that she can make her specific important contribution sustainably. During this pandemic, we have learned to focus on Jesus Christ's action in the world in general, we have encountered the activity of Jesus Christ outside and beyond the Church building – *Christus extra muros ecclesiae*. We have also learned to be grateful for the time outside of our Churches, as we recognise that we might just have seen the Christ in the most vulnerable in our society, in their hunger and homelessness. We have quite likely seen Christ in those in the frontline, as we have been brought to focus on them, as they sacrificially serve the rest of us<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, Christians have rediscovered the theology of community of belonging and of fellowship, especially as they have found themselves physically separated from

<sup>2</sup> The Revd. Courtney Sampson.





one another, and despite the hardships, they have sought ways to express their sense of belonging.

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.<sup>3,4</sup>

### 3.2.2 Legal category

Constitutionally speaking, the Church can ask the question if she has the right to come together to worship and practice her faith<sup>5</sup>. The Church has reason to ask, under the regulations of the “national state of disaster” in terms of the Disaster Management Act of 2002 and the measures of limiting fundamental rights as set out in s 37 of the Constitution, if the restrictions go further than what is necessary and are therefore a limitation of religious freedom – which includes the right to live one’s faith and to do so collectively, the right of freedom of association, with others.

Based on the above, arguments to persuade for the early opening of our Churches have now been tested in the Court and the decision by the State led by the President has been upheld. The task at hand now is to find good reasons to challenge this judgment and to mount new factors to persuade a change of judgement<sup>6</sup>. A Muslim group had also approached the Court on an urgent basis to declare that the regulations that placed a complete ban on gatherings, including religious gatherings, were unconstitutional as it infringed on the right to religious freedom and freedom of association.

These proposals can have an immense impact on the sustainability of congregations, the wellbeing of communities, and the role of the Church as a care-giver. The religious sector can

<sup>3</sup> IFCC Document.

<sup>4</sup> A list of many Tweeter, Facebook and individuals attest in their submissions.

<sup>5</sup> DRC Rev. Dr. Gustav Classen.

<sup>6</sup> Bishop Raphael Hess





put forward tangible proposals to what it could look like at each of the stages. It must be noted that the arguments put forward by the Catholic Church in Italy to challenge the Italian Government to open Churches have also failed. There is a partial closure of operations due to the physical premises not being available and physical Church services and meetings not being held. Church Council is in regular contact with congregational leadership to encourage and to keep up to date on the situation.

### 3.2.3 Practical category

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:

#### 3.2.3.1 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.

We have collectively lost the ability to see another world, another way, the real world, a better way. In observation of the current lockdown restrictions, social media and other creative ways to reach our penitents can be put into practice. These are effective ways to continue to 'meet' as a Church, and also spread the word of caring for others, especially the vulnerable, in the time of the pandemic. 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.

### 3.2.3.2 The following practical steps are required to be taken:<sup>7</sup>

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. Easter Holy Communion was celebrated live on social media. 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.

### 3.2.3.3 Home services of small gatherings

The Church has moved from the building, to homes, and into the hearts of people. The Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers reminds us that, in Christ and by the blood of Christ, we are worthy to serve in His name. As such, once lockdown restrictions permit small gatherings at home, we can, and we may celebrate Holy Communion as we gather in our homes. In doing so, practical steps can be drawn about social media gatherings as we demonstrate in the next sections.

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.

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.

<sup>7</sup> All submissions contributed to this section, which is an aggregation of elaborate pastoral plans. Rosalie Manning was in particular good in delineating these practical steps in her guidelines to the Anglican church for level 4 lockdown document.



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:

#### 3.2.3.4. Congregation Load-Shedding

Load-shedding<sup>8</sup> 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:
  - 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,
  - Where more than one service in a building is required per Sunday, time must be allowed for cleaning between services.
  - Weekday worship can be arranged on selected days or daily to accommodate numbers. A specific time should be allocated for daily worship. Lay Ministers can assist the ordained minister in conducting the worship service.

#### 3.2.3.5 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.

#### 3.2.3.6 Church buildings to be 'safe places'

<sup>8</sup> Bishop Gilbert Filters



- 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.

#### 3.2.3.7 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 hand-washing 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.

#### 3.2.3.8. 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 referred to a health facility for further assistance, and if nothing is immediately available, asked to return home for later attention.
- 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.

#### 3.2.3.9 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.



### 3.2.3.10 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.

### 3.2.3.11 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.

### 3.2.3.12 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 (wyksgemeentes).
- 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.



### 3.2.3.13 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, by the church, to demonstrate the seriousness and importance of ensuring that Churches too, are COVID-19 compliant.

### 3.2.3.14 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.

#### 3.2.3.15 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.

#### 3.2.3.16 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.

### 3.2.3.17 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.

### 3.2.3.18 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.

## 3.2.4 Financial category

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.

### 3.2.5 Communication and Data

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. 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.

To fill the gaps in communication created by the lockdown, we should consider:

- Again, 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,
  - 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, 060 058 2107, and a dedicated website, [www.churchinaction.org.za](http://www.churchinaction.org.za).

### 3.2.6 Questions or affirmations

First, we commiserate with all humanity that has been severely affected by COVID-19. 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.

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. There is a Local Government Election next year, and political parties can be expected to start posturing themselves and attempting early campaign attempts. It is possible that the restlessness, after more than a month of lockdown (and extended as such), will be exploited in these attempts. 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 and vice versa. The hermeneutical principle of where you stand is what you see, is palpably clear.

While one size does not fit all, for example the more urban a church, the more likely it is to be open to the wider world, owing to the nature of urban settlement and its social interaction with the world. The more rural a church is, the greater the possibility of being cut-off from the wider world. The safer it ought to be to start services at an earlier stage, certain areas require attention and clarity:

- Why is the religious sector not treated on the same terms as other important role players of civil society?
- Questioning why Church workers do not qualify for permits of any kind during the lockdown.
- In light of the ministry of presence being compromised, can Clergy return and stay at the designated church residences?
- While not enforced, it is important to discuss how to handle a possible guideline that people over 60 work from home after lockdown lifted. In our vocation that's not possible as we would lose the expertise of senior Clergy and bishops.
- Engagement of Church leaders to assist with the State in the crisis such as care for the poor and the destitute and addressing scenarios of family abuse
- Reaching to the elderly and vulnerable who do not have access to technology.
- Pastoral care to fragile and vulnerable congregants should be increased rather than decreased, with congregants supporting the minister of the Word and the Church Council. How can Ministers assist with Pastoral support to COVID-19 patients in hospitals?
- An approach to reopening Churches, to participate in the rituals of the Church, which would include to participate in the taking of the Holy Communion.
- preparations for the lifting of lockdown, for schools, long queues at malls, visibility of police and SANDF.



- Will solidarity fund assist in buying the temperature equipment for poor congregations?
- Big question: many who become positive are asymptomatic for weeks. How to (a) manage this reality? And (b) trace those with whom this person was in contact?

## 4. Conclusions

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.

South Africans, in general, are become increasingly restless. There is really no easy answer to this vexing question, but people need to see and experience something different, such as connecting more meaningfully with their faith traditions. This restlessness is resulting in an increase in all manner of anti-state statements, most often from anonymous sources. The restlessness makes people susceptible to rebellious behaviour and it is easy to whip up emotions when there is discontent. Local government elections are due next year. Political parties can be expected to start posturing and attempting to gain early campaign advantage. It is possible that extended lockdowns will lead to the restlessness being exploited. 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 in Category 3.2.3 above, and in negotiation with the Government. We want to look at these seriously at this time.

## 5. Request to the Government of the Republic.

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

## 6. Acknowledgements

The (Chair and Scribe) Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, (General Secretary), Bishop Dr. Thami Ngcana, Bishop Purity Malinga, Revd. Frank Chikane and Pastor Moss Ntlha, Bishop Mosa Sono, wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions, Prof Kurt April, Dr Babar Dharani of GSB, UCT for report on analysis of the submission, John Allen for editorial work, Staff at Bishops court, the SACC staff, all the individuals who responded via email or FACEBOOK, and church leaders, and their general secretaries – all for responding and helping in this project. In the table below, we attempt to capture some of those individuals. Thanks too to Nyakallo and Paballo for their patience in teaching me excel and Tables.



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