



Care in the time of CORONA

Media statement

SACC Cautiously Welcomes Reopening of Churches

27 May 2020

Issued by the office of the SACC General Secretary, Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana.

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) has cautiously welcomed, with humility, the reopening of churches under the Level 3 Lockdown regulations, having fully supported the lockdown period that saw church activity suspended in order to contain the rapid spread of COVID19. We receive the announcement not so much with a sense of euphoria, but as a moment that requires deep reflection about the enormous responsibility that we must now exercise.

The lifting of the ban on church gatherings, — under 50 people or less, compulsory wearing of masks, and other protocols that must be effected — is not saying all churches must open, but it means there is now the possibility to resume under the current guidelines and laws. We wish to remind South Africans that even before President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the official lockdown, our member churches began consultations around how best to use the wall-to-wall church infrastructure we have, for public education and liaison with the health system. Many of our churches began to put protocols in place already at that time and we even suspend services altogether, including voluntarily cancelling major gatherings such as Easter celebrations as our commitment to curbing the spread of the virus. This was at a time where a lot was still unknown and government regulations not yet in place.



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Collective Responsibility

We have been convening SACC National Church Leaders Weekly COVID Watch meetings since the beginning of the lockdown, where church leaders have been developing guidelines, norms and standards for member churches and affiliate groups of churches, to protect lives at worship during the COVID19 pandemic and beyond, and hold each other accountable.

We have reviewed the practice of the churches from the time of the requirement of 100 worshippers, as well as the conducting of funerals of 50 persons; and considered that with the detailed norms and standards that we have now developed, churches can prepare their local leaders to work with this and have a safe worship environment.

These norms and standards demand of each member church to have detailed planning for application, with due regard to the diverse contexts of our congregations and their resource capacities.

The first Sunday after the Level 3 date of June 1, is June 7. Ahead of that, beginning this week, churches are urged to conduct a COVID status analysis of their congregations; this in the same way that schools have to have a readiness plan that is verifiable by central administration. In adopting these norms and standards each church leader as member of the SACC National Church Leadership is assuming the responsibility to protect the lives of the worshipping congregations of the church s/he is elected to lead, as well as inform their congregants of their responsibility to keep themselves and others safe, and the options available to enjoy spiritual ministry safely. This burden of responsibility is shared between the leader of worship and the member of the congregation who comes to worship. This is made quite clear in the guidelines.



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Some Practical Considerations

We call for strict adherence to laws regarding COVID-19 at all times and all protocols as prescribed by the government must be observed. Some key practical considerations are that:

- Church leaders/ Bishops and other clergy should continue to make it clear that attending a Eucharist service in person, is a decision for people to make, without risking themselves and others; and that churches where possible, should continue with streaming live liturgies where possible.
- 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.

In our considerations we need to remind ourselves that none of us are immune from contracting the virus, including the ordained. The SACC draft guidelines, norms and standards, crafted by our member church leaders with a task team lead by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, are currently being workshopped through our churches and will soon be announced to the public so that both church leaders, the church community, and South Africa at large, are well informed about the efforts and measures that we all need to take, in line with the set-out government regulations, in order for all of us to act responsibly and be accountable.



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SACC Church In Action resources and information for Church and Communities

On 14 April 2020 SACC working with Heartlines launched of its new coronavirus website, www.churchinaction.org.za, and WhatsApp platform, as part of the roll-out of the SACC Coronavirus Pastoral Plan and a service to the church and community, to provide useful content that can be downloaded and shared via WhatsApp. To access the WhatsApp platform message **Hi** to [060 058 2107](tel:0600582107). The multimedia content is provided in as many of the official languages as possible.

Physical Distancing Animation: It's not easy to tell if you or someone else has the Coronavirus because not everyone experiences the symptoms. We have developed an animated friend, Sam, who is here to explain the importance of Physical Distancing. Share [Meet Sam's](#) video, available in all 11 languages.

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected everyone in South Africa. Many people have lost their jobs or earnings during the extended lockdown. Covid-19 has highlighted the inequality in our society.

Churches have a spiritual responsibility to do whatever they can to relieve the suffering around them