



Diocese of Johannesburg

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE ANGLICAN BISHOP DIOCESE OF JOHANNESBURG



Our Vision is: To Achieve the Practice of the Ministry of All Believers

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF JOHANNESBURG

COVID 19 - PASTORAL RESPONSE & COMPLIANCE MEASURES

1. Background & Context

The emergence of the new global pandemic known as Covid 19, late last year brought the world to a standstill due to its rapid spread. Many nations globally, including South Africa, began imposing various mitigation measures aimed at flattening the curve and thus minimise its devastating impact on the livelihood of its citizens.

In light of these developments, motivated by the spirit of love and care for the livelihood of its congregants, our Diocesan Chapter under the leadership of The Rt. Revd Dr Steve Moreo, following prayerful reflection and stakeholder consultation took a courageous and bold decision to suspend all worship services with effect from 16th March 2020 until Easter 2020. Soon after the Diocese of Natal followed suit whilst other dioceses within our Province and the Synod of Bishops were still in conversations about possible responses in this regard.

Subsequently, a national state of disaster was declared and announced by the President, Cyril Ramaphosa, in an effort to mobilise resources for mitigation responses. This was followed by the announcement of the 21-day national lockdown which imposed various restrictions to curb the spread of the virus. At present the lockdown is yet to be fully lifted, though we have moved from level 5 to 4 currently, which still has severe restrictions but allowed some economic activity to take place. The move to level 3 from 1st June will see a further easing of restrictions.

It also seems very clear from various experts, Government advisors, the World Health Organisation and our own Diocesan Task Team medics that this pandemic will globally be part of our lives for a while to come - perhaps for even five years or more. As such all the measures introduced to date were aimed at buying time for the health sector to be fully capacitated and equipped, to adequately respond for the peak which is probably yet to be seen in South Africa. As the restrictions are slowly lifted to allow various activities to resume operation, including now the possibility of churches reopening, the risk of rising infections remains a reality.

It is therefore precisely for this reason, and of critical importance and necessity, that faith communities including our own Diocese need to make intentional preparations aimed at protecting and safeguarding the lives of all its people - both laity and clergy. The church operations, practises, and norms, including its theology, as we know them currently may

need to be drastically and urgently transformed and adapted to a 'new normal' as we continue church, taking cognisance of the Covid 19 virus.

2. Challenges arising from the pandemic and mitigation measures

Whilst the various mitigation measures introduced by Government were aimed at protecting and safeguarding the lives of its citizens, in some cases these have had unintended and devastating consequences. The faith communities including the Anglican Communion, Province and her Dioceses have not been immune to these challenges and consequences which have brought serious strain in many aspects.

i. Worship & Fellowship

Theologically and as part of our practise, we are both the Church gathered and scattered. We gather for collective spiritual nourishment and growth through the Sacraments and Word but also for fellowship and the nurturing of relationships among the believers. The purpose is so that we may become as disciples the life-giving and living presence of Christ in our communities as they face the various social ills and challenges of our time. We therefore draw strength from both worship and fellowship for service and mission.

In an attempt to curb the spread of the virus we as faith communities have been unable to gather physically for worship and fellowship and this has put strain on our spiritual enrichment and empowerment, especially regarding the power of collective fellowship. Hence many are experiencing spiritual malnutrition and dehydration but the various creative efforts made by our priests and church leaders, since the emergence of this pandemic, to sustain the spirituality of our congregations needs to be commended and encouraged. However, across the Diocese as a whole the gap is still very wide, due to accessibility challenges in a number of our communities.

ii. Pastoral Care Ministry

Pastoral Care is one of the core and essential ministries in providing care and support to the vulnerable and weak within our communities. The pastoral model is strongly rooted in human contact and presence, hence the sick, bereaved, broken are visited by pastoral teams and clergy.

Since the lockdown and movement restrictions, clergy and pastoral teams have been unable to physically visit to provide pastoral counselling and support to those in need. However, there has been some creative measures introduced to provide pastoral support and bereavement journeying, though its reach is very limited depending on the socio-economic context of the community.

The restrictions on numbers and timing and place of funeral services have also had a very challenging emotional, psychological and relational impact for many families and communities including the parishes.

iii. Social Witness

The Church since its inception has been a very strong social witness agency through its prophetic witness but also through its practical social response initiatives. Many churches, as part of poverty alleviation mechanisms, have been running mission programs providing various social responsibility services including but not limited to

food gardens, feeding schemes, woman empowerment, entrepreneurship enrichment, youth development etc. These initiatives sadly, have all had to be suspended during the lockdown period.

The lockdown restrictions have brought to the fore what we all already knew – the devastating impact of poverty and unemployment in our country and within our communities. The great need of and distribution of food parcels by various entities have also been testimony to this, but more so the effects and impact of corruption and greed by government officials and business entities have been clearly visible even during this pandemic.

The practical social interventions by various non-governmental bodies and stakeholders including some government entities and the Church is commendable. Also, the establishment of various Covid 19 response funds, including the Solidarity Fund by the President, to mitigate the devastating impact of this pandemic for ordinary citizens has indeed been of significant importance and help.

iv. **Sustainability**

All faith communities, including the Church as a whole, rely heavily on the income and contributions from its members to sustain its mission and ministry activities including the three outlined above. These entail the weekly collections, monthly tithes and/or dedicated giving, donations and special offerings of various kinds. Very few parishes have additional external income streams such as endowments, investments and commercial entities of various kinds. However, these streams may now be impacted and limited due to the overall global and local economic effect as a result of this pandemic, especially as South Africa was recently downgraded by Moody's.

The emergence of the Covid 19 pandemic and the subsequent mitigation measures outlined in the lockdown restrictions, especially the suspension of all public gatherings including the religious sector, has had a serious and devastating impact for the financial sustainability for many faith communities including our own Diocese. The consequence of not gathering has substantially reduced income in a number of parishes and subsequently this has affected parish contribution to the Diocese in a number of cases. However, it has been noted that those parishes with a strong electronic banking system and processes of giving and contributing of congregants via EFT have had minimal impact.

The Diocesan Finance Board and the Diocesan Board of Trustees have been in engagements with various Diocesan and Provincial stakeholders to ascertain the local and collective Diocesan financial effect and to explore possible and feasible mitigation measures for our context. There are various proposals being considered or implemented to minimise the impact and so ensure the ongoing sustainability of our Diocese.

Nevertheless, in taking the livelihood and wellbeing of our members and congregants seriously, the Covid 19 compliance measures, introduced and aimed at managing the spread and impact of this pandemic in our communities, need to be strictly adhered to by our Diocese even as we shortly move to level 3. The implementation of safety

measures - especially as these need to be put in place before we can return to our worship spaces - come with a cost factor and sadly, the revised parish budgets have not realistically taken this into consideration.

In the ongoing reviewing process of parish and diocesan budgets for 2020 and beyond, these costs need to be prioritised and treated as mandatory and not optional. These may include, but are not limited to, equipment, communication and human resource activity.

3. Covid 19 Return to Church Compliance Measures and Recommendations

With level 3 allowing for a return to places of worship, albeit with restrictions, the fundamental question to ask is - are we ready to resume operations and implement compliance measures? It would seem, bearing in mind our experience of funeral services, much needed preparation is required by parishes to fully implement compliance measures.

Numbers & Time Limitations

Parishes need to reflect on potentially having more frequent and restructured services - possibly on Saturday and weekdays as well as Sundays to accommodate the 50 people allowed at any one time. This will affect revised times depending on the availability of members and clergy. Parish clergy and leadership teams need to plan accordingly in this regard as any 'new normal' will directly affect clergy, parish ministers, servers, choir, musicians and organists.

General & Overall Care - Health & Safety Measures *(incorporating the SACC reflections)*

Attendance Register & Contact Tracing

- A register of attendees per service with personal contactable details of attendees needs to be maintained and archived for contact tracing.

Building Cleanliness

- Cleaning with detergents of all buildings before and after services to thoroughly sanitise the Church for each congregation.
- Floors, 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 - bear in mind some churches limitations and the onset of our winter months.
- Safety bins to be provided with plastic liners to be easily and safely disposed of after each service.
- Recommended that services are reduced to a maximum of ONE hour to allow at least 30 minutes between services for cleaning and disinfecting. Ensure the correct number of staff to implement.

Ablutions

- Ensure adequate supply of 70% alcohol-based hand sanitisers.
- Soap, water, and paper towels (no cloth towels) must be provided. Hand towels to be disposed of in a bin with a lid.

- Even in the most remote congregations, sanitizing will be required. Ideally, running water and handwashing with liquid soap ought to be used in this process.

Church Entrances

- Door stewards must wear gloves, and wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- Provision of sanitisers at all entrances.
- Stewards to control the numbers entering based on social distancing requirements as per the regulations and assist with registering for tracing purposes.
- Advise forehead thermometer screening and manage process should someone have a temperature.

Controlling people-to-people transmission

- Sacristans 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 sanitizing must be strictly observed.
- Sacristans, 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.
- People need to be actively discouraged from attending if they have an illness or infection of any kind. No one with cold symptoms should attend services.
- Anyone with close contact with people who are showing such symptoms in the past 14 days should also be dissuaded from attending.
- Use of masks -everyone entering the Church must wear a face mask to cover the nose and mouth completely.

Social Distancing

- Social distancing must be maintained as per regulatory guidelines - the size of the church and social distancing requirements will determine the number in the congregation which may be lower than 50 people.
- Mark out pews for appropriate seating distancing.
- Only persons belonging to families (who live together currently without social distancing norms) may sit together.

Leading Worship

- All members of the parish need to be trained, educated and reminded about precautions and should be kept up to date with government regulations.
- Limit the number of people on duty and the recommendation is that those over 60 and most vulnerable should stay at home.
- All clergy and parish ministers on duty, must sanitize before the service, at the preparation of the elements for the Eucharist and after receiving Communion.
- The Presider/preacher should ideally be the same person.
- Limit contact with others as far as possible.
- After disrobing, clergy shall again wash their hands with soap under running water for at least 20 seconds or where this is not possible, a sanitizing liquid must be used.

Holy Communion

- Physical distances to be strictly observed, with no hand contact during the service, especially at the peace as was observed pre-lockdown.
- Communion in one kind should continue as was the case before the level 5 lockdown, with no kneeling at the altar rail, but instead standing in a single file observing a two-meter distance between each person. The clergy to administer the Sacrament at a safe distance, and only place the host on the hand of the recipient and NOT the tongue.
- Churchwardens/ushers/stewards must ensure the orderly approach to the distribution point and the safe return to the communicant's seat.
- The blessing of non-communicants should be without any physical contact with the person requesting a blessing.
- Preferably no wine is served except by the cleric who partakes on behalf of all.
- Possibly small individual distribution cups can be provided if regulations allow.
- No handshaking, hugging, or greeting by hand - use your feet if appropriate in your context.
- No elbow greeting, only waving of hands be done during the Giving of the Peace..

Offertory

- Preferably Dedicated/Planned Giving should be encouraged via EFT or debit order.
- Collections and dedicated giving envelopes to be offered at the sanctuary step into large containers.
- People taking and counting the offering should wear gloves and wash their hands as required.
- Care should be taken to observe protocols when banking funds which should continue to be done weekly if possible.

Worship Services Etiquette

- The recommendation is NO SINGING in services. Droplets are carried further when we sing and we also breathe in more deeply in singing. Instrumental music or solo singing can take the place of congregational participation.
- Similarly, liturgical responses need to be quieter 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 reduce the use touch.
- Children's ministry - the same measures would apply as for adults at this stage and thought should be applied as to how this would be possible in your context, as most children 7's ministry is carried out in small spaces.
- Confessions - these may be conducted, preferably outside the church in a suitable place in the grounds, to avoid having to sanitise any confessional furnishings. Social distancing applies with masks worn.

Fellowship & Socializing

- Socializing before or after service should be avoided and no refreshments served.
- After the dismissal, clergy must observe social distancing when speaking to persons outside the building.
- People attending Services should not walk to or from church in groups.
- Individuals and family groups to maintain social distancing in church parking lots.

4. Covid 19 Contextual Diocesan Mitigation Measures: Chapter Recommendations

- Prior to any church reopening - conduct a Covid 19 Impact Assessment with parish leadership to include pastoral, governance and administration as well as worship aspects.
- Continue with various creative virtual mechanisms to ensure continuation of worship, spiritual growth and pastoral care within our parishes until parishes can provided for the necessary requirements.
- Use opportunity to explore other creative means and mechanisms that may be of a more contemporary nature and less traditionally orientated.
- Explore the possible twinning and/or closure of some non-viable parishes, especially where there is close proximity to another parish, to share resources and costs.
- Review clergy capacity especially in the remote areas of the Diocese but also whereby the age of the clergy person falls within the high risk category.
- Continue to provide pastoral care and support to clergy and their families.
- Establishment of Parish Covid-19 pastoral response teams and facilitate information transfer between them and the Diocesan response team.
- Continue with the various Covid-19 social outreach response support initiatives within our parishes and the Diocese.
- Explore creative means of children's ministry continuation during and after the lockdown period.
- Intentional implementation of electronic contribution mechanisms for giving and payment of accounts by parishes.

I am indebted to The Venerable Revd Moses Thabethe & The Very Revd Xolani Dlwathi and members of Chapter for contributing to this document which, though long, is not exhaustive and will remain a work in progress as further measures and levels are adjusted over the next few weeks.

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Bishop of Johannesburg