



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

Wednesday, 25 March 2020

Dear Friends

So much has changed in the week and I thought I would write to you on the eve of at the lockdown in South Africa. We must congratulate the President and the COVID-19 Command Council for their brave decision to issue stringent quarantine restrictions, starting at midnight on Thursday 26th March and running until midnight on the 16th April. This will affect all of us, but its ultimate purpose is to slow the spread of this disease and, thereby, prevent the health system from becoming overloaded. There have been many questions about what the lockdown means for us as pastors, particularly in our pastoral role in caring for patients who are critically ill and facing death and for bereaved families. While we don't know the answers to all those questions, they were raised at a ZOOM online meeting of SACC church leaders yesterday.

We all agreed that pastoral care to the needs of the most vulnerable is an area of great concern. We must make use of every technological advantage (email, SMS, WhatsApp, social media) to keep in touch with the people, so as to link them with those who can provide services in their hour of need. This technology must be used also to provide emotional and spiritual support. What is not clear at this stage is:

1. How do we deal with those who are dying and the bereaved families in the context a national lockdown?
2. How do we deal with those who are elderly, lonely and vulnerable left on their own and might need regular attention?
3. How do we deal with those who might need material goods that the church has identified and collected to help them when we cannot be outside of our own homes?

The SACC will engage with government institutions on the possibility of the registration of people who provide support ranging from priests/pastors to other categories of people as essential services.

The SACC will explore these issues with government, noting the following:

- The solution can and must include cooperation with government institutions, so that those who are expected and equipped to do the work can do it whilst the church walks along with them in identifying those in need and alerting the government institutions and keeping track of whether the service was provided. This to be done electronically.
- Leaning on the Chaplaincy Services given by the churches to Government, to provide the important ministry of pastoral care in moments of grief. The limitation of the numbers of chaplains was noted, constraining this group from being the final answer.
- Make a request that in the next 21 days funerals are suspended and that mortuaries are asked to hold on to those who pass away, and a possible Government subsidy provided for them, so that there is no extra cost to ordinary people.

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PBO 18/11/13/1612
Moderator: Rt Rev Dr P Langerman BCom LLB BTh MTh DMin
General Secretary: The Rev L Mpetsheni PGDSS MTh
Clerk of Assembly: The Rev WV Mkhungo DipTh
General Treasurer: Mr R Johnson MCom (UP) MIRMSA

- To be aware of the dangers that exist in us asking for a blanket registration of priests/pastors in the context of the diversity and sometimes lack of accountability systems for such, and even the reality of rogue pastors.

If ever there was a time for churches to work together, this is just such a time. Since we can't have services in the church building or even in small groups, what provision are you making for your people to access material that they can use while at home? Realising that for many people data is expensive and difficult to access, what provisions are we making to ensure that people have some sort of internet access – for example, encouraging people to access public Wi-Fi when they go out to shop? For those with internet access, what provision are we making for people to worship online together, perhaps in collaboration with other Presbyterian churches or other denominations close to us?

For those with internet access, I remind you that I will be loading a full service with prayers, worship and sermon on the Durbanville Presbyterian YouTube page (<https://www.youtube.com/user/DurbanvillePresby>) and the full service goes up on the Durbanville Presbyterian Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/DurbanvillePresbyterianChurch/>) on a Sunday at 9.15 am (the time of our normal Sunday service). I will also post, on our YouTube channel an option with just the sermon each week. I will be posting a service for each week of the shutdown (22nd, 29th March 5th and 12th April) as well as a Tenebrae service and a Good Friday service. These will all be on our YouTube channel and our Facebook page. Please consider subscribing to the YouTube channel if you are planning to use these resources, so that you will be alerted as soon as the video is uploaded. If you have members who wish to make use of these resources, but have limited data, you can download the YouTube videos using an application like 4kvideodownloader (www.4kvideodownloader.com), a free application that allows you to download a video from YouTube and save it in any format you want to be able to watch or listen to later. Considering the amount of data people are using to download Netflix and other content, using a little of that to be able to engage in a worship experience seems reasonable.

For those who are concerned about offerings during the lockdown, consider signing up for Snapscan or Zapper where people can make donations directly from their cell phones. Also, banks will be open, so people can make direct deposits when they go out to the bank.

One of the lectionary texts this week Ezekiel 37, and we read in verses 11-14:

¹¹ Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' ¹² Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.'"

Let's hold on to that promise from God in the days that lie ahead.



Regards.
Peter

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