



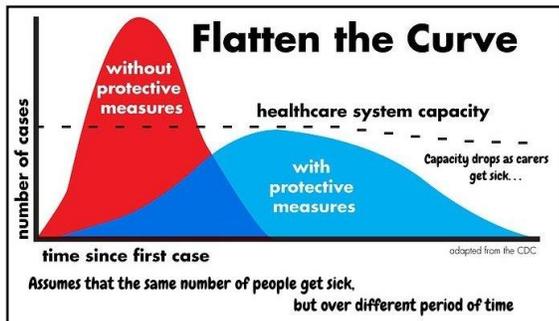
THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

Friday, 20 March 2020

Dear Friends

Robert Munthali and I were present at the President Cyril Ramaphosa's meeting with church leaders in Pretoria yesterday. A number of issues were raised, and questions were asked. My take homes from the meeting were as follows:

1. Yesterday, the number of infections in South Africa rose to 150. The President's measures to curb transmission are meant to slow down the spread of the disease. Government predicts that 60% - 70% of the population will contract the disease eventually and the measures that have been put into place are meant to ensure that a great number don't get infected or affected all at the same time. This is what it means to "flatten the curve".



According to this diagram, the same number of people get infected, but with protective measures the rate of infection doesn't overwhelm the health care system. The President was very clear that if these measures do not achieve this outcome, he will consider a total lockdown and a State of Emergency, which would be devastating for the South African economy.

2. In South Korea, the majority of the infections have come from people attending church events and the restrictions on worship are to prevent people from contracting this virus in a church or worship setting and then going on to infect others. **I would appeal to those who are planning to have services to think again – if just one person contracts this disease from attending a worship service, we are responsible. As pastors, our congregations are vulnerable, and we need to do everything we can to protect the sheep from danger.**

3. If you insist on having services despite the attendant risks during this time, please take note of the following from the Dept of Health:

- a. Attendance **must** be under 100 people;
- b. There **must** be a register of attendees at **each and every event / service**, giving

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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

- i. description of the event, date, time, place, contact details of organizer;
- ii. name surname date of birth, ID number / passport number; home tel number, alt tel number of **every attendee**;
- iii. Information to be forwarded to the provincial CDC team to facilitate contact tracing in the event of a confirmed COVID-19 case at the meeting

c. There **must** be appropriate waste management protocols in place

d. Hygiene and sanitation:

- i. There **must** be suitable facilities for hand washing – soap and water or hand sanitisers;
- ii. Tissues **must** be provided so that people don't cough or sneeze on their hands;
- iii. **Appropriate social distancing** must be maintained;
- iv. Provide proper **ventilation** – meet outdoors if possible

3. Anybody who distributes **fake news** could be liable to a fine and / or imprisonment. So, make very sure that the news you share on social media platforms is reliable and true and, if you are unsure of the course and can't confirm the source, do not share it. Please do, however, continue to share **positive news and helpful information**. It has been a shock to discover how many people don't have any idea of how dangerous this disease is, the risks it poses to vulnerable communities and who are not making lifestyle changes to protect themselves and others.

4. The President has suggested a **national day of prayer** at a date to be announced and the church leaders enthusiastically endorsed this. Some churches and congregations have set aside Sunday 22nd March as a date for prayer, but the national day of prayer and the arrangements around that will be announced in due course.

5. I uploaded to YouTube two videos this morning. One is a full worship service, with prayers, worship songs and sermon, the other is just a sermon. (Please note, for this week I did not consider the copyright issues with regard to the worship songs, so you might find one of the songs is muted when you run the video. This will be sorted out next week.) The full service video is 400 MB and the sermon video is 210 MB so they are not massive files and you are free to download them if you would like to do so. The YouTube link is https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CikNYc_0Ftk. I will do these videos for as long as we are unable to have worship services. You are free to use them for small groups, or in your home.

Let's remember these words from Ezekiel and take seriously our responsibility to care for the flock
Ezekiel 34: 1-6 (NIV)

The word of the Lord came to me: ²“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ³You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. ⁴You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost.



Regards
Peter

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