



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

20th March 2020

TO THE UPCSА FAMILY

UPCSА'S REACTION 2 TO THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID 19) PANDEMIC

Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security (Jeremiah 33:6 NIV).

Everyday, we witness the escalation of the numbers of people who are diagnosed with coronavirus. We need coordinated efforts to ensure that we combat the rapid spread of the virus. We are pleased to announce that, subsequent to the two epistles that were issued on Monday the 17th March 2020, we continue to receive encouraging responses from the Presbyterians, as they undertake to do everything humanly possible to overcome the effects of the virus and to curb the spread thereof.

Some have shared the measures they are putting in place, in response to a call to reconsider the holding of the services, including the Good Friday and Easter services. Those measures include, and not limited to the following:

1. Observing the ban of gatherings in excess of 100 people.
2. Limiting the number of people that will attend the services to that number or less.
3. Applying "stringent precautionary measures" to ensure that everyone attending the services will be safe, including fumigating the places of worship, maintaining a distance of not less than a meter between people in the service, washing of hands, having services without Holy Communion, making use of Miracle Meal products for Holy Communion (as used at the 2018 General Assembly and UPCSА 20 celebrations), no cooking at the services and others.
4. Where points 2 and 3 are impossible, to cancel the holding of the services.

Some have designed brochures and pamphlets to raise awareness and to empower their members to deal with the spread of the virus.

Some feel that the call to reconsider the holding of the services, including the Good Friday and Easter services is either not clear or not decisive enough. That call was made after the following statement had been clearly articulated and should therefore be implemented in the light of this statement:

The UPCSА commends the President of the Republic of South Africa for showing leadership to the nation at such a difficult time as this. We encourage everyone to adhere to the guidelines that have been prescribed by the President and many others who have expert knowledge on the management of the pandemic. We cannot afford to put lives of the people and our lives at stake.

We have recently learned the following from the Synod of Zambia: "The government of the Republic of Zambia is closely monitoring the situation and has issued a statement to alert the citizenry and preventive measures have since been put in place."

Once again, a call is made to all the UPCSAs to work together to bring the number of infections down to zero. If any Session feels that it will not be possible to adhere to the call to limit the number of attendees per service and that it will not be able to apply the “stringent precautionary measures”, that Session may consider cancelling the holding of the services. We reiterate that we cannot afford to put the lives of the people and our lives at stake.

We commend the UPCSAs, ministers and leaders who have undertaken to save the lives of many by adhering to the advices and those who are still planning to do the same. We encourage those who are still in doubt or adamant that they will continue in the normal way to reconsider their positions. Any infection is one too many. Everything should be done to maintain a balance between faith and reason. People’s lives should not be put at a high risk in the name of faith.

The Moderator of the General Assembly, the Rt Rev Dr Peter Langerman attended the meeting of Faith leaders with the President of the Republic of South Africa. He is going to issue a communiqué that covers the issues that transpired from that meeting. The South African Council of Churches is engaging the churches in measures to combat the spread of the virus and to help as it may be necessary and possible.

We will continue to apprise the Presbyterians about the developments, using all the media facilities at our disposal.

Let us work together to combat the spread of coronavirus.

Yours in Christ.



The Rev Lungile Mpetsheni
GENERAL SECRETARY