



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

17th March 2020

TO THE UPCSА FAMILY

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

"Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth." The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

The spread of the coronavirus (COVID 19) has called for reactions and responses from different sectors of our societies, including political, business, sport and church leaders. National leaders have taken drastic steps to arrest further spreading of the virus. Of the three countries in which the UPCSА exists, we have thus far, heard from the President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, who addressed the nation on the COVID 19 pandemic. That address is summarised in the following points:

1. State of emergency declared according to Disaster Management Act.
2. Travel ban for incoming visitors from high risk countries from Wednesday 18 March. This includes China, Iran, Korea, Germany, Italy and Spain (those mentioned in the speech)
3. Visas cancelled already for visitors from high and medium risk countries.
4. SA citizens returning from high risk countries will be tested with forced quarantine.
5. SA citizens returning from Medium risk countries will be subject to additional screening.
6. Several ports of entry will be closed across all modes of transport.
7. Non-essential international travel for Government banned.
8. Local travel for Government limited.
9. Gatherings of more than 100 people prohibited.
10. Mass celebrations and government functions will be cancelled.
11. Small gatherings will attract stringent precautionary measures by organisers.
12. Schools will be closed from 18 March until after Easter weekend. School holiday in June will be one week shorter.
13. All sectors to increase hygiene control, including malls and shopping centres.
14. Government testing and surveillance systems being reviewed.
15. Additional isolation and quarantine venues being sought.

16. Setting up national tracking and reporting system in collaboration with private sector.
17. Government to start campaign for general and ongoing hygiene.
18. Additional funding to be allocated to departments dealing with the pandemic.
19. Government command and control to be implemented and meet three times a week.
20. Acknowledgement for financial impacts with several financial packages being investigated.

The UPCSA 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.

The spread of coronavirus has resulted in the postponement of many ecumenical and ecclesiastical gatherings. The President has put a ban to meetings of more than 100 people and has ordered that stringent precautionary measures be put in place for small gatherings.

It is difficult to guarantee that we can provide for such stringent measures. The UPCSA continues to observe the developments around the pandemic. Many people have advised us that they are not allowed to travel, as that could present risks to the people they stay and work with. Some of our churches and presbyteries have already made announcements for the suspension of services and activities. As the UPCSA, we hereby announce as follows:

1. All the meetings of committees (General Assembly Committees and Task Teams and Councils/Central Committees of the Fellowships) that were scheduled to take place should be postponed indefinitely.
2. The holding of church services at congregational and Presbytery levels should be reviewed, as each structure determines the situation on the ground. Where it is possible, services that would attract large numbers of people should be postponed. Where Holy Communion is to be served, precautionary measures should be taken.

People may not drink from the same cup.

3. The holding of Good Friday and Easter services should be reconsidered.
4. We are still monitoring the developments and will, in due course, announce what will happen about the holding of the General Assembly in Pietermaritzburg in June 2020.

Please continue to promote good personal hygiene both in your home, work and church environments, and please make sure the toll-free number is easily displayed so that members and people in the community can call the necessary health authorities, if need be. There is a WhatsApp number for people to contact, and by sending a message you can go through several menus to get the information you require. Firstly, the number you want to save in your contacts is **060 012 3456**. All you need to do is message the contact by saying "Hi". Save it as Corona Support SA or something along those lines. Follow then the prompts that follow.

Should congregations not hold services, our members are urged to be faithful in prayer and in Bible reading, to join prayer chains as they become available and, in particular, to dedicate Sunday morning church service times to private prayer at home. Our members are encouraged to remain faithful in giving and financial stewardship, especially in view of the financial challenges faced in the wake of this crisis.

Please assist the elderly and anyone in your communities and congregations that require any form of assistance.

Let us continue to pray that the pandemic is overcome. We commend you to the Lord in prayer. May God protect, heal and guide you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Please contact your local Minister directly should you be facing a pastoral or prayer need with regards to the above.

Yours in Christ.



The Rev Lungile Mpetsheni
GENERAL SECRETARY