



12th September 2020

MESSAGE TO ALL IN THE UPCSA ON OPENING FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP IN COVID-19 TIMES

The young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with bounty," declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 31: 13-14 NIV)

This message comes at a time when many congregations are contemplating to open the building for public worship, while some have started already, and others are still postponing. The decisions of all the Sessions are respected, as it is considered that they are taken after careful analyses of the situations and circumstances of each congregation. We encourage that the environmental analyses should always be the bases for the making of such decisions. In every situation, care should be given to adhere to the protocols and regulations that have been given by the respective governments and the health of the people should not be compromised.

We commend the ministers and leaderships who, against all the odds, provided ministry to the members of the UPCSA and the members of the church catholic, through the messages on social media, the conducting of virtual services, the conducting of funeral services, the conducting of visitations, the provision of pastoral care and counselling. Please convey the message of support to the entire membership of the UPCSA and assure those many congregants who found themselves mourning after the deaths of their loved ones, after the loss of jobs and income, due to gender based violence, due to victimization in their societies and churches, due to deterioration of health and living standards, etc., that God has promised to "turn mourning into gladness " and to "give comfort and joy instead of sorrow". Assure the members that we are still committed "to be a reconciled community of Christians exercising a prophetic witness to Christ". We invite them to continue to journey with us towards this ideal.

The UPCSA leadership and the Clerks of Presbyteries (at their virtual consultation that was held on 5 September 2020) identified key areas that should be prioritised, as congregations open for public worship. Those areas have been informed by the desire to pursue the mission of the UPCSA:

We will proclaim our Triune God in Southern Africa through

- *Bearing witness to the saving love of Jesus Christ;*
- *Building vital, reforming congregations for worship, ministry and discipleship; and*
- *Visibly proclaiming the Kingdom of God through unity, justice, peace and love.*

PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL SUPPORT

There is a need to, intentionally, provide psycho-social and spiritual support to the members. This should be done in consideration of various factors, including, but not limited to the following:

- The congregations could not hold their Good Friday/Easter services and many other important services thereafter. The prohibition of the holding of public worship took away the sense of belonging and fellowship. Many congregants did not get Holy Communion since the lockdown. Many suffered spiritually over the period.