



The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

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To all Methodist People

COVID- 19 Communique –June 2021

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic – direct and indirect – are grave, widespread and unprecedented. Very few people in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa Connexion have remained untouched by the disease itself or the death of loved ones, unemployment and loss of livelihoods. With the impending third wave at our doorsteps, we as the church are called to demonstrate that we are taking the pandemic seriously and keeping the best interests of the community in mind.

We are therefore called to model a COVID- 19 response that is faithful, caring and wise; one that extends compassion and prayer to those who are infected and affected through strict and exemplary adherence to all COVID- 19 protocols and public health guidelines.

Churches have been re-opened for a while now and based on some social media reports of events in the MCSA, we have noted a relaxation in the implementation of COVID- 19 regulations and protocols. This communique therefore serves as a reminder to all of us that the corona virus is still with us and continues to ravage our communities. Our public health systems are under immense pressure and we as a church cannot afford to be seen to be careless or lax in our adherence.

The coronavirus mainly spreads from person to person through droplets, contact and airborne spread among others. Because of these methods of spreading the virus we are reminded that:

1. Every person, when attending a gathering and in order to limit exposure to COVID-19, must-
 - (a) wear a face mask to cover *both* the nose and mouth and not sit around ones chin even during singing.
 - (b) adhere to all health protocols;
 - (c) maintain a distance of at least one and a half metres from each other;
 - (d) adhere to the curfew hours
 - (e) adhere to any other health protocols and social distancing measures
2. **The Choir and Singing**- social distancing and proper wearing of masks is mandatory even for the choir and during all communal singing. Remember that :
 - Droplets are carried further when we sing.
 - We breathe in more deeply when we sing.

A Christ-healed Africa for the Healing of Nations

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- A person may feel tempted to remove their mask for better or more spirited singing.
3. Cleaning all surfaces and providing hand sanitisers and running water and soap will reduce the risk of the virus spreading in our places of worship.
 4. **In South Africa** : Religious gatherings are permitted but limited to 100 persons or less for indoor venues and 250 persons or less for outdoor venues and if the venue is too small to hold the prescribed number of persons observing a distance of at least one and a half metres from each other, then not more than 50 percent of the capacity of the venue may be used, subject to strict adherence to all health protocols and social distancing measures
In Swaziland: Church gatherings of 250 people are allowed indoors if the size of the building allows with social distancing, masks and sanitising,(500 outside) for services lasting up to two and half hours.
In Namibia: Religious gatherings are permitted but limited to 50 persons only with strict adherence to social distancing, sanitising and wearing of masks.
In Lesotho: Indoor gatherings are limited to 50 people and outdoor gatherings to 100 people with social distancing, masks and sanitising.
In Mozambique: Religious services, conferences, and meetings may resume with a maximum of 75 people for indoor venues and 150 people for outdoor venues plus adherence to distancing, sanitising and the wearing of masks.
In Botswana: In addition to mask wearing, distancing and hygiene protocols, church services are allowed for 50 people only and limited to a 2 hour duration and only two services a week.
 5. **Marquees and tents** are regarded as indoor and therefore the indoor number of person's rules should apply when these are used. Outdoor means out in the open with no cover/ shelter except maybe umbrellas.
 6. We remind all organisations that conventions, triennials, biennials etc. should also adhere to all COVID- 19 protocols and where possible that they move some aspects of the meeting online to reduce the number of days with physical contact. We rely on the leaders of organisations and Synod leadership to ensure compliance in these events.
 7. Attendance of a funeral should also follow the guidelines as provided per country in our Connexion (For some its 100 persons or less and others 50 or less and restricted to 2hours). Check if night vigils are allowed in your specific country- they and 'after tears' gatherings are not allowed in South Africa for instance. During a funeral, a person must wear a face mask and adhere to all health protocols and social distancing measures.
 8. We encourage as many as are able to, to get vaccinated and remind everyone that vaccination does not prevent one from getting COVID-19 and as such all preventative measures such as wearing a mask, social distancing and sanitising should continue.

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We commend our governments for the vaccine roll out even as we urge them to speed it up so that the most vulnerable in our communities can be vaccinated. Throughout this pandemic, churches have continued to serve their communities and to accompany and support those in need to overcome the challenges they face. Through it all, our hope and trust remains in God.

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Isaiah 41:10

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