



The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

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24 June 2021

UPDATE FROM COVID ADVISORY TEAM

Dear Ministers, Leaders, Organizations and Members of the Cape of Good Hope Synod

Greetings to you all in this cold wintry season in the Cape.

Following my June Pastoral letter in which comment was made on the present Covid situation, the Synod Covid Advisory Team, under the leadership of the Synod Vice Chairperson, met with me on Monday 21 June. The purpose of this meeting was to assess the impact of the resurgence of Covid-19 infections and assess the "Third Wave" particularly as it pertains to the Western Cape and parts of the Northern Cape where the Namaqualand Circuit is located.

Following a reflection on the updated statistics as released by the Health Department as of 20 June 2021, the Advisory Team noted the indicators pointing to a significant increase in Covid cases which include:

- The test positivity rate. Ideally <5%. Was 6% in May. Now 20%
- The reproductive number (R). Ideally <1. Now 1.3
- Increasing numbers of hospitalizations in Public and Private sector
- Predominance of the Delta variant in Gauteng will likely affect Western Cape
- Percentage increases are following the trend of the second wave but the actual number of infections is still significantly less than in December when the Task Team advised closure of churches for in-person worship

The Covid Advisory Team further noted and commended the efforts of most Circuits, Societies and Organizations to adhere to the Covid-19 protocols and prevention strategies as set out in the various training sessions. It does nevertheless observe that in some instances, there appears a relaxation in high levels of vigilance and accountability, indicating that some "fatigue" may be creeping up, especially as it becomes difficult to ensure Covid Teams are always available and on duty. Circuits, Societies and Organizations are cautioned to remain vigilant in their observance of all protocols at all times, paying special attention not only to what happens in Church services, but also on areas such as rest rooms, kitchens, halls and the arrival and departure of members from premises. Other vital areas to pay attention to is ventilation, particularly in winter cold weather when all windows and doors must remain open, and the length of time that people gather which should ideally never be more than 2 hours at a time without having breaks for added ventilation and sanitation. *(Every 15 minutes together adds additional risk when people are gathered.)*

The Covid Advisory Team highlighted the legal Regulations of the present Lockdown level 3, which includes the requirement of gatherings of no more than 50 people indoors (provided there is the required social distancing) and no more than 100 people outdoors.

A Christ-healed Africa for the Healing of Nations

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Funerals are governed by the same regulations, with no socializing or meals before or afterwards. Curfew times must also be observed, especially if meetings are being held in the evenings. The Advisory Team noted the need to continue support for the vaccination rollout programme, but cautioned against the misconception that those who are vaccinated do not need to observe the basic protocols of mask wearing, washing of hands and socially distancing. It reminds us that the vaccine is protective against severe disease and death but **does not** prevent the vaccinated person from getting Covid-19 or from transmitting the virus. All people must continue to observe all protocols regardless of having been vaccinated or not.

Given the above observations and comments, the Synod Covid Advisory Team has therefore advised the Synod as follows:

1. The role of Covid Officers, local ministers and Circuit Superintendents remains of vital importance, noting that these are the accountable and responsible people in all instances. Their accountability extends both to the legal requirements as well as the expectations of the Synod as a whole. They are reminded to notify the Synod Office of any outbreaks, closures of Churches/Circuits and any serious incidents that might have occurred for information purposes.
2. Whilst noting the rise in Covid-19 infections in the community and the designation of the “third wave” in South Africa, the Advisory Team **does not** recommend blanket closure of all Societies and Circuits in the Synod at this time. Nevertheless, it does recommend judicious attention to local / regional / areas statistics of cluster outbreaks and spread of the virus. These are easily accessible on the Western Cape Government dashboard (<https://coronavirus.westerncape.gov.za>). To this end, Circuits and Societies are encouraged to enter into discussion around their own specific contexts, and to take responsibility for implementation of local recommendations, including closures if deemed necessary or advisable.
3. Synod Organizations are advised to follow the same recommendations, and to consider whether to encourage branches to go into recess or close for a determined time, should that be considered wise, especially when considering vulnerability of members, transport to and from meetings, etc. Organizations are also reminded that all legal requirements must be adhered to in terms of numbers, and that the decisions of Circuits/Societies must be adhered to, including any restrictions or closures within Circuits and Organizations.
4. All protocols must be observed and enforced at all times i.e. good ventilation, social distancing, mask wearing, sanitizing and restriction of numbers – even for those who have been vaccinated.

Ongoing Work:

- I. The Covid Advisory Team has undertaken to meet every two weeks to update the Synod on any changes and recommendations, particularly as the present situation worsens.
- II. A conversation will be conducted in the next fortnight using the Cape Methodist Facebook live platform in order to share information, particularly regarding vaccines and protocols.
- III. The Synod Covid Advisory Team is committed to further engagement with Covid Officers and ministers to ensure that a constant flow of information and training is offered.

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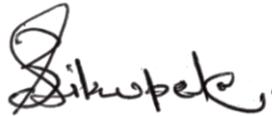
I am satisfied with the recommendations of the Synod Covid Advisory Team, and commend them for their ongoing work. I am deeply conscious that it is our desire to rebuild our communal life of worship, service, care and fellowship with one another, as well as our financial resources. However, we must understand that we hold the power of life and death in our hands should we act irresponsibly or carelessly in this time, so we dare not let our guard down.

The Covid virus has robbed us of too many loved ones, and cost us dearly in so many ways. Our love for Christ and one another should be the motivating factors in all our decisions and responses at all times. Let us also commit ourselves daily to prayer, as we seek God's wisdom, grace and mercy in this extremely challenging time.

Yours in Christ's Service



Rev Yvette Moses
Synod Bishop



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