



# The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

*A Christ healed Africa for the healing of nations*

## THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA – LIMPOPO SYNOD PROCEDURE FOR OPENING OF CHURCH BUILDINGS FOR WORSHIP

9 June 2020

### A. NOTE: THIS DOCUMENT SHOULD BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE FOLLOWING:

1. **Government Gazette:** Regulation No.609 of 28 May 2020. This stipulates government regulations regarding religious gatherings. Should subsequent gazettes be published which amend regulations for religious gatherings, the new regulations should be applied [http://www.gpwonline.co.za/Gazettes/Gazettes/43365\\_28-5\\_Cogta.pdf](http://www.gpwonline.co.za/Gazettes/Gazettes/43365_28-5_Cogta.pdf)
2. **SACC Document 'Guidelines, Norms & Standards... during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond'**, published on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2020 <https://www.stoswalds.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SACC-Guidelines-Norms-Standards-to-Self-Regulate-For-COVID-Compliance.pdf> Minor details in our document differ from the SACC document, as we have translated the SACC document into a Methodist context.
3. SACC website [www.churchinaction.org.za](http://www.churchinaction.org.za) This site has updates and resources for local congregations.
4. Limpopo Synod COVID-19 Pastoral Letter 5, 4<sup>th</sup> June 2020

### B. TIME FRAMES

1. The Limpopo Synod Exec has unanimously decided that Circuits and Societies should use the next 12 weeks, starting 2 June 2020, to prepare for opening our buildings for worship.
2. Synod Gathering on 17 July 2020 will assess both:
  - a. progress made by Circuits towards readiness for opening (internal readiness), and
  - b. The risk posed by external factors such as rates of infection, diversity, hotspot areas, imminent winter season and the expected peak in determining the date at which Circuits/Sections/Societies may open for worship.

3. Whilst Circuits, Sections and Societies should do all they can, to be ready for on-site worship by late August 2020, it is important not to raise expectations that worship **will** open at this time. The ever shifting and unpredictable nature of and impact of the pandemic may mean that the opening date for on-site worship will be pushed out further.

### C. MAKING A START: ESTABLISH A COVID-19 TASK TEAM

1. Establish who is responsible for implementation of COVID-19 readiness in your Circuit/Section/Society. It may be a dedicated task team, Circuit or Society Exec, or staff member. Wherever possible, it should include medical personnel. Areas of responsibility that could be allocated to team members include:
  - a. Preparation of a Return to Worship Place Plan (RWPP) (Template of this document to follow)
  - b. Procurement of Equipment. The Synod Task Team will work on this.
  - c. Communication with the congregation during preparation time and during the worship service itself
  - d. Preparation and oversight of sign-in and screening area
  - e. Cleaning of buildings before and after worship services
  - f. Compliance Stewards to serve before, during and after worship services
  - g. Response to worshipper presenting with symptoms and oversight of isolation area (if possible, this should be a health professional)
2. Establish clear accountability structures. Ultimate responsibility for COVID-19 readiness rests with the Circuit Quarterly Meeting and the Superintendent. Each Circuit should determine its own structure of accountability and oversight.
3. A Compliance Steward or a Compliance Team should be appointed **for each service**, with responsibility to tactfully, lovingly, without embarrassment, and yet firmly enforce compliance by all present of the regulations in this document.
4. Every service should have a designated person who will assume the role of Religious Leader in terms of the legislation ((Reg No.609, (4)(1)(a))
5. The designated Religious Leader must liaise with the preacher before the service.
6. The Task Team is responsible for ensuring that preachers who will preach under these regulations have been trained in the requirements thereof and are informed of the person/people responsible for ensuring compliance in the service. The preacher must commit

too co-operation with the religious leader in ensuring that all regulations and guidelines are complied with.

7. The Task Team should establish contextually appropriate strategies to avoid more than 50 people in any worship service. Criteria for who is admitted into worship should be applied consistently and without favour. These could include use of Class Meetings where they exist.

#### **D. COMMUNICATION WITH AND EMPOWERMENT OF MEMBERS**

1. It is important that members understand not just *what* the regulations for on-site worship are, but *why* those regulations are in place. Such understanding will assist with buy-in and compliance.
2. Circuits should use the 12-week preparation period for thorough communication with and education of members, using communication channels (oral, written, social media) that have been established since lockdown began. This education should include explaining the risks of the virus to the elderly and those with co-morbidities.
3. Communication should include explanation of criteria that will be applied for admission to services, taking care that those excluded do not feel shunned, marginalised or uncared for.
4. Communication should include a clear explanation before the first worship service of the ways in which worship protocols and practices will differ from those practiced prior to lockdown.
5. Communication should emphasise that the church is called by Christ to be a bringer of Life, not death. We are called to love our neighbour by doing all we can, with commitment and sacrifice, to flatten the curve, slow the spread of the virus, and protect the vulnerable.

#### **E. CLARIFYING WHAT ON-SITE WORSHIP WILL LOOK LIKE**

It is helpful to have a clear picture of what on-site worship will look like when it does begin:

1. On-site worship must be based on a **RWPP** outlining protocols, which incorporate the measures set out in Reg No.609, (4)(1)(b)
2. The religious leader will be **responsible for ensuring compliance** with government regulations (Reg No.609, (4)(1)(a)) Each Circuit should stipulate what level of authority will be recognised for this purpose in their context (Superintendent/Minister/Circuit Steward/ Society Steward/Local Preacher).
3. Congregants should be **informed beforehand of the regulations** that will be followed in the worship service.

4. Congregants should be asked to **arrive for worship 30-60 minutes** before the service begins, depending on the size of the congregation and the number of screening stations in operation (allow 7 minutes per screening). Those waiting for the service to begin will maintain a minimum distance of 1.5 metres from each other.
5. On arrival at worship and before entering the worship space, congregants will
  - a. **Sanitise their hands with hand-sanitiser** that has at least 70% alcohol content
  - b. **Fill in a declaration** of that they do not exhibit any of the symptoms listed in the regulations. (Reg No.609, (4)(2)(a)(b))
  - c. **Be informed** that should they experience any of the symptoms listed in (3b) above, they should immediately inform the designated Religious Leader. Circuits should ensure that the religious leader is trained in how to respond in the event of a congregation member reports exhibiting such symptoms
  - d. **Have their temperature taken** with a forehead thermometer.
  - e. **Fill in a register** listing full name, residential address, cell number/telephone number/email address, contact details of persons living with them (Reg No.609, (8)(2))
6. The congregation will be **no larger than 50 people** but may need to be less depending on the size of the worship space (Reg No.609, (3)(1)(b)). To accommodate 50 people, the **seating** area (excluding the altar/stage area) should be 100m<sup>2</sup>. Calculate the amount of people you can accommodate by dividing the seating area of your worship space by 2. Eg. 70m<sup>2</sup> = max 35 people; 50m<sup>2</sup> = max 25 people.
7. The congregation should ideally consist of people **under 60 years of age with no co-morbidities** (Reg No.609, (8)(7)).
8. Worship services will have a **time limit**. The legal limit is 2 hours (Reg No.609, (3)(3)), but the SACC recommendation is 1 hour ((SACC 2020:5(8)). Given that congregants will have 30 – 60 minutes of waiting for the service to begin (see (3) above), the SACC recommendation of a one-hour service is recommended.
9. There will be **no congregational singing** (Reg No.609, (5)(1)(d)). One soloist per service may sing.
10. The **preacher and soloist may remove their mask** to preach or sing, but only if there is nobody closer than 2.5 metres from them (Reg No.609, (5)(2)) whilst they are without a mask. Where possible, this distance should be even greater, as singing and projecting one's voice greatly increases viral shedding.

11. Every person present must **wear a mask** covering mouth and nose (Reg No.609, (6)(1)) (Door Stewards or Compliance Stewards will be responsible for ensuring compliance or providing masks)
12. There will be **no physical contact** between those present during the service (Reg No.609, (6)(1)(a)). No baptisms (Reg No.609(6)(1)(2)), hugs, handshakes, elbow or fist bumps, laying on of hands during prayer, holding hands during vestry prayers etc.
13. People will be **seated a minimum of 1.5 metres** apart from each other (Reg No.609, (5)(1)(b) & (8)(1)) If using pews, seating places should be marked with tape or stickers at 1.5 metre intervals along the pew and every second row should be left vacant. If using chairs, excess chairs should be stacked away, and chairs should be spread out at least 1.5 metres from each other.
14. Regardless of the weather, **windows and doors will be left open** to ensure good ventilation (forewarn the congregation to dress warmly if necessary)
15. **Those counting the offering** will sanitise their hands before, during and after the handling of money and will wear gloves. They will not touch their face whilst counting (Reg No.609, (6)(3))
16. **Pew bibles and hymnals will be removed.** Data projectors, handouts for single use or personal bibles and hymnals may be used. Liturgies could also be distributed via WhatsApp
17. At the start of each service **the congregation will be informed of the dangers of COVID-19** and how to prevent spreading or contracting it in a worship setting (Reg No.609, (8)(3)). This must be done every time in-case there is just one person who is new and to ensure behavioural change.
18. The congregation will be instructed to proceed home within 15 minutes of the service ending. **They will not socialise outside for a lengthy period after the service** (Reg No.609, (8)(4) and (SACC 2020:8(16))). They will always maintain a minimum distance of 1.5 metres from each other.
19. No refreshments will be served.
20. Where water is provided for the congregation to drink, **glasses and cups should not be shared.** Disposable cups (no plastic bottles as per church policy) should be used. Congregants to be encouraged to carry their own water bottles.
21. If the service includes **Holy Communion** ((SACC 2020:7(13))
  - a. Only the celebrant will touch and drink from the chalice (Reg No.609, (8)(6))
  - b. The congregation will not kneel at the communion rail (unless the entire congregation can be accommodated in one 'sitting' remaining 1.5 metres from each other, which is unlikely), but will receive the sacrament standing

- c. When queuing to receive the sacrament, the congregation will maintain a minimum distance of 1.5 metres from each other.
  - d. The congregation will only receive the host (bread or wafer), not grape juice.
  - e. Communion will be distributed by those wearing sterile gloves which are put on at the start of Holy Communion and removed and discarded into a bin at the end of Holy Communion.
22. **Offering** plates or bags will not be passed around:
- a. The offering will either be a retiring offering, or worshippers will approach offering bowls placed at the front, always maintaining a 1.5 metre distance from each other as they do so. ((SACC 2020:7(14))
23. If more than one service is to be held, there must be a gap of at least 30 minutes, but ideally one hour, between each service. During this time, chairs must be sanitised (SACC 2020:5(8)).
24. A **cleaner** should be on hand to sanitise toilets after each use

#### **F. EQUIPMENT, DOCUMENTATION AND SITE PREPARATION:**

1. RWPP
2. Hand-sanitiser with at least 70% alcohol content for the church entrance, toilets, and in the vestry or where the offering will be counted
3. Visor for use by the person conducting screening
4. Sanitiser with which to clean all toilets, surfaces, chairs, equipment, door handles and common areas before and after worship services (Reg No.609, (7)(2))
5. Facilities for the washing of hands with water and soap (Reg No.609, (7)(2)(b)). Such facilities should enable washing under running water, not in a bowl.
6. Paper towels. Hand towels should not be used (SACC 2020:5(6))
7. Bins for used paper towels Hand towels should not be used (SACC 2020:5(6))
8. Disposable gloves for those counting the offering and distributing communion
9. Forehead thermometer(s). Test them before the service begins
10. Rubbish bins lined with plastic bags that can be sealed and discarded after the service
11. Declaration of Health Forms
12. Registration of Personal Details Forms/ Attendance Register
13. Tape or stickers to mark seating areas and queue markers for Holy Communion and the offering.
14. Isolation area in the event that a worshipper presents with symptoms

## **G. WHAT TO DO IF SYMPTOMS ARE IDENTIFIED AT SCREENING OR REPORTED DURING THE WORSHIP SERVICE (GG4.3)**

1. Care should be taken to avoid stigmatisation, humiliation or blaming in the event of a person presenting with symptoms. Such a person will feel extremely vulnerable and should at all times be treated with grace and compassion.
2. If a congregant presents with symptoms on arrival, they should not enter the place of worship (Reg No.609, (4)(3)(a))
3. If a congregant presents with symptoms either on arrival or during the worship service, they should be ushered with neither panic nor blame to the isolation area (Reg No.609, (4)(3)(b))
4. The person should be transported in a manner that does not place others at risk, to a place where they can undergo a medical examination and test (Reg No.609, (4)(3)(b))
5. The Religious Leader should assess the risk and make a decision about whether or not to continue with the worship service, and arrange for the area to be disinfected afterwards (Reg No.609, (4)(3)(c))
6. The Religious Leader should obtain from the person who is being isolated the names of those they have been in contact with since entering the place of worship. Their address and contact details can be obtained from the register (Reg No.609, (4)(3)(d))
7. The person should be instructed that, on receiving the result of their COVID-19 test, they must immediately inform the Religious Leader of the result. They must also inform the Religious Leader of attendance at any religious activity in the 14 days prior to the test (Reg No.609, (4)(3)(e))
8. The Religious Leader should inform the NICD of the information they have received in (7) above. (COVID-19 Hotline Number 0800 029 999; COVID-19 WhatsApp Number 0600 123 456)

## **H. CLERGY OLDER THAN 60 AND WITH COMORBIDITIES**

1. Clergy or Lay leaders who are over 60 and with co-morbidities should be discouraged from participation in on-site worship services.

## **I. CRITERIA FOR DECIDING WHEN ON-SITE WORSHIP SERVICES CAN TAKE PLACE**

Synod needs to agree on what criteria will be applied in deciding whether on-site worship services can take place. These criteria will be:

1. **Internal:** Have all the guidelines and regulations outlined above been adhered to?
2. **External:** What is the rate of infection (confirmed cases per million population) in a Province/Magisterial District?

#### **J. LIMPOPO WORK STREAM ON RE-OPENING**

1. Rev Ian France (Convenor)
2. Rev Prof Stephen Hendricks [Public Health Expert]
3. Deacon Patricia Nyandoro (a Nurse Manager)
4. Rev Sydney Kutu.
5. Ms Lorraine Nkoane [a Nursing Academic]



**R Sidwell Mokgothu**

**SYNOD BISHOP**