



The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

A Christ healed Africa for the healing of nations

LIMPOPO SYNOD GUIDELINES FOR ACTIVE WAITING DURING LOCKDOWN

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INTRODUCTION

At the Extended Limpopo Synod Executive of 15 July 2020, the decision was taken that, effective 1 September 2020, Circuits will be permitted to decide when they wish to re-open for on-site worship. The Updated document 'Procedures for Opening Church Buildings' provides criteria which Circuits should apply in making this decision. Correctly applied, many if not most Circuits in our Synod will choose to delay opening for on-site worship until the last few months of 2020, or even sometime in the first half of 2021.

This sobering reality reminds us how critical it is that Circuits, Sections and Societies find innovative ways of proclaiming the Gospel and witnessing to the Kingdom of God even when they are unable to meet together physically. This document seeks to do two things:

1. Provide a framework of key areas of church life which each Circuit can use to develop contextually relevant expressions of ministry (SECTION ONE)
2. Provide ideas and guidelines for how to celebrate Holy Communion (SECTION TWO)

SECTION ONE : CONGREGATIONAL LIFE DURING A PANDEMIC

Synod clergy were invited to share those expressions of ministry that are working well in their contexts, which could serve as resources to other colleagues in the Synod. Input was received from two Societies. One Society is suburban, the other is township. The township Society has re-engineered their ministry for lockdown using the existing Class system. This is a living document, and further inputs and ideas received will be incorporated into periodic updated versions of this document.

This document takes as its starting point the affirmation that closed buildings do not mean closed churches. On the contrary, the creative God in whose image we are formed invites us to find creative ways of being the Body of Christ. Acknowledging the many different contexts, limitations and opportunities within the different Circuits, Sections and Societies of the Limpopo Synod, this document serves to act as a catalyst for creative expressions of Christian community during the COVID-19 lockdown.

The intention is not that a Circuit/Section/Society should action all these suggestions. However, the hope is that each Circuit/Society/Section choose one or two ideas under each heading that fits their context.

PEOPLE NEED PASTORAL CARE

This is especially true during the anxiety and uncertainty produced by the pandemic and lockdown:

1. Encourage Class leaders and Sunday School teachers to phone or WhatsApp their class members individually at least once a month to see how they are doing and ask if they have any prayer needs
2. Where there is a prayer need, the request can, with the permission of the member, be shared with the class.
3. Encourage a 'phone tree' or 'phone chain', whereby classes contact each other and stay in touch with each other at least once a month
4. Involve Society Stewards in a phone through of your membership database. Don't forget to include children in Sunday School and their parents amongst those contacted.

5. Establish vestry hours whereby people can meet you by appointment at the church for counselling and pastoral care. Remind people to wear masks, and meet in a well ventilated, sanitised venue where you can sit at least 2 metres away from each other.

PEOPLE NEED TO CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER

1. Encourage classes and cell groups to meet for a 15 minute "Coffee & Kuier" before your online worship service begins. Each class/cell can decide on their own platform (eg. WhatsApp chat; Whatsapp phone calls; Zoom meeting). These meetings can also be held at other times of the day or week.
2. Encourage all Class Leaders to set up whatsapp groups for their respective classes. Continue with the Zoom meetings as a platform to share information and engage with members.

PEOPLE NEED TO BE DISCIPLED

1. Conduct a weekly Bible Study, Confirmation Class, or Youth Group Discussion via Zoom (Zoom meetings less than 40 minutes long are free, a basic Zoom subscription will enable you to have meetings longer than 40 minutes). Here is a link to a video explaining to people how to download Zoom on their smartphones: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKilHp4KPhE&list=PL5FajEonbNcOTPuBarKAYTMpceNN9ztws>
2. Forward the daily devotions shared on the Synod Clergy WhatsApp Group to your Leaders, encouraging them to forward them on to their own classes
3. Record a daily or weekly five-minute devotion on your cellphone, and circulate it via your church's Facebook Page or via WhatsApp.
4. Share the weekly e-sermons with members. The class leader may know who is able to receive the message or not, especially audio then they can decide on other alternatives with the member e.g. sending to one of their children's phone.

PEOPLE NEED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

1. Organise a Food Pack.
2. Invite people to join you in one of the marches against GBV
3. Invite people to knit blankets, beanies, gloves or jerseys, or sew face masks, to be distributed to the poor.
4. Include a giving moment in your online worship, where you invite people to make an eft or scan a Snapscan QR code
5. Ask members to donate food parcels for distribution to a family in need.
6. Members can also be encouraged to adopt, make and/or share a meal with a poor family once or twice a week.
7. Encourage organizations to embark on projects such as knitting of blankets and sewing of face masks.

PEOPLE NEED TO WORSHIP

1. Circulate the transcript, voice note or video of sermons via WhatsApp, Facebook or Youtube. Whilst people can watch many other sermons online, they need to hear from their own minister and Local Preachers during lockdown
2. Try to include prayers, links to songs on Youtube, or the text of hymns in your messages, so that what you circulate includes elements of prayer and worship, not just a sermon.
3. If your Society consists of members who own cars and your property has a large parking area, hold a Drive-In Church Service (get your tech-savvy youth to make it happen). There are different suggestions for Drive-In church on the internet, but the cheapest is to buy a Bluetooth FM Transmitter from Takealot (+R150), plug it into your sound desk (you may need to dangle the transmitter from a pole or tree branch to get coverage) and then congregation members will be able to listen to the service on their car radios. You can broadcast the service on Facebook Live for those worshipping from home. (Note: the legality of using the FM frequency

is a grey area, but ICASA is unlikely to act against a small local broadcast for an hour each week) NB: Only one household per car!

PEOPLE NEED TO BE INFORMED

Lockdown means that the formal and informal ways in which communication normally happens at church gatherings are not happening. Leaders need to up the level of communication to compensate for this

1. Write a weekly, fortnightly or monthly newsletter to your congregation. Keep them informed of what is happening at Society, Circuit, Synod and Connexional level. Anticipate the questions people might be asking about when and how church activities will resume, and seek to respond to them
2. Record a short video or voice note in which you inform people about developments and activities taking place.
3. The use of WhatsApp Business is highly recommended. This will involve getting a dedicated SIM Card and setting it up. Members (or anyone actually) subscribe to receive whatsapps like this:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06gOOEEb6J0&list=PL5FajEonbNcOTPuBarKAYTMpceNN9ztws&index=4> Somebody will need to be appointed as the administrator of the number.
4. Keep the congregation informed of the financial situation of your Circuit/Section/Society. This will give them a sense of ownership over the financial needs of the community
5. Ensure that church notices (e.g. prayer requests; death notices; etc.) are properly coordinated and are sent to a central point where they will be shared with the Leaders who will then share with their class members, using whatsapp/sms.
6. Class leaders can again be used here, at least once a month, stewards should communicate with congregants e.g. after the Leaders meeting, the current plans regarding the opening of the church, etc. Such a platform can also be used to encourage members to continue to pay their dues despite the current Covid challenges.
7. The Elderly Class leaders sometimes have challenges e.g. data issues; technology. The deputy/assistant class leaders must step in to help, in order for all church members to know what is happening in our church.
8. Societies where members own cars and which have a large parking lot may wish to try drive in church.

SECTION TWO: HOLY COMMUNION DURING THE PANDEMIC

It is possible, whilst churches remain closed to weekly onsite worship services, for opportunities to be created for congregants to share in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Arguments in favour of this are:

1. Congregants will only attend once a month or once per quarter, and are therefore at lower risk than in the case of weekly worship
2. A Communion Service requires a Presbyterian (as opposed to a Local Preacher) to be present. This will assist in rigorous implementation of the Return to Worship Place Plan (RWPP).
3. A spoken liturgy with Holy Communion is a short, yet powerful act of worship and means of grace even in the absence of singing and preaching. Limiting the amount of time gathered limits the risk of spread of the virus.
4. Gathering for Holy Communion is in keeping with Wesleyan Spirituality's emphasis on attending the Means of Grace.

Noting the Presiding Bishop's instruction against online Holy Communion, the following are possibilities for Holy Communion Services:

1. A week could be set aside for several Holy Communion Services to be held (midweek and weekend). This would enable many to participate, whilst still observing the limit of 50 people present per service.
2. The service should follow all the guidelines in the document "*Procedure for Opening of Church Buildings for Worship*" (Appendix), especially (E(21)).
3. The service could be held outside, as outdoor meetings are far safer than indoor meetings. Where outdoor meetings are held, the same regulations as for indoor services apply.

4. The regulations at (E(21)) of the *“Procedure for Opening of Church Buildings for Worship”* apply. Alternatively, Pre-filled Communion cups can be sourced from the following or other sources:
 - a. 010 492 0530
 - b. Living Products, Jet Park, Kempton Park, 082 412 4005 livingproducts@absamail.co.za
www.livingproducts.co.za for online orders. (R3.90)
 - c. Catholic Shop in Lyttelton, Pretoria, Beverley 082 829 9938 bknox@catholicshop.co.za
5. Given that home communion is typically administered to the elderly and the sick, and carries a high risk of spreading the virus, home communion should be avoided except where infection levels in a given community are low. As only essential workers are legally permitted to pay home visits, presbyters and deacons alone can distribute home communion. Where possible and depending on the rate of infection in a community at a given time, home communion should be shared outdoors rather than indoors. Extreme caution should be applied in the sanitising of hands and of elements between visits to prevent spreading from presbyter to congregant or from one congregant to congregant.
6. Drive-In and/or Drive-Thru Communion Services have been held successfully in some Circuits.