



# The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

*A Christ healed Africa for the healing of nations*

## LIMPOPO DISTRICT COVID TASK TEAM

### UPDATED GUIDELINES FOR ADJUSTED ALERT LEVEL ONE – MARCH 2022

25 March 2022

**TO: SUPERINTENDENTS, MINISTERS, CIRCUIT AND SOCIETY STEWARDS IN THE LIMPOPO SYNOD**

Dear friends and fellow labourers in God's vineyard:

We greet you in Jesus' name. This letter contains details of the latest government regulations regarding COVID-19 as well as protocols and recommendations from us on matters which may not be legislated, but provide guidance for this stage of the pandemic.

It is predicted that the next COVID-19 wave will begin late April and peak late May. The best way of ensuring the safety of our people is to ensure that as many people as possible are fully vaccinated before the wave begins, and then to ensure that correct protocols are implemented at our gatherings.

#### **IMPLICATIONS OF THE LATEST GOVERNMENT GAZETTE ON RELIGIOUS GATHERINGS**

The new regulations, effective 23 March 2022, which relate to gatherings and other aspects of church life are as follows:

#### **1. GENERAL:**

- a. Strict adherence to health protocols (sanitising, regular washing of hands) must be observed at all indoor and outdoor gathering.
- b. Social distancing protocols must be observed at all indoor gatherings. This means a 1 metre spacing between persons and the wearing of masks for all persons over 6 years of age
- c. Attendance is limited to 50% of the capacity of the venue at all indoor gatherings. We recommend that gatherings in tents be regarded as indoor gatherings.

#### **2. FUNERALS**

- a. Funerals and Cremations are restricted to a maximum of 200 people or 50% of seating capacity, whichever is less.
- b. Funerals may not exceed 2 hours.
- c. Night vigils and post-funeral gatherings (including after-tears) are not allowed.

#### **3. GATHERINGS OF MORE THAN 1000 PEOPLE**

- a. Those attending must, on entry, produce either
  - i. a vaccination certificate proving that they are fully vaccinated, or
  - ii. proof of a negative COVID-19 test not more than 72 hours old.
- b. Attendance should not exceed 50% of the capacity of the venue

#### **4. GATHERINGS OF LESS THAN 1000 PEOPLE INDOORS OR 2000 PEOPLE OUTDOORS**

- a. Attendance should not exceed 50% of the capacity of the venue

#### **5. CERTIFICATES OF OCCUPANCY**

- a. Societies/Circuits are required to display a Certificate of Occupancy which stipulates the maximum occupancy of the venue. Societies should contact their local authority as a matter of urgency to obtain their Certificate of Occupancy. Such contact should at least be in writing so that, should it take time to obtain such certificate, there is proof of intent to obtain the certificate.

### **PROTOCOLS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OVER AND ABOVE GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION**

In addition to the legal requirements outlined above, please note the following protocols and recommendations from this committee:

### **PROTOCOLS FOR SERVING OF REFRESHMENTS AT RELIGIOUS GATHERINGS**

Serving of refreshments at religious gatherings may take place under the following conditions:

1. Those preparing or setting up refreshments should observe strict COVID-19 hygiene protocols.
2. Hand Sanitizer, ideally sprayed on by an usher/steward but at least available at the serving station, should be used at serving stations before people touch urns, teaspoons, milk jugs etc.
3. Refreshments should be served and consumed outdoors wherever possible.
4. Those standing in queues should stand at least 1 metre apart from each other.
5. When people are invited to share in refreshments, they should be reminded to stand or sit at least 1.5 metres away from each other as they talk and drink/eat. The additional half metre is to accommodate the fact that masks are removed whilst eating and drinking.

### **ENCOURAGING FULL VACCINATION OF OUR MEMBERS**

Lay and ordained leaders in our District should encourage all members to become fully vaccinated and to have their boosters when they become eligible to do so. Circuits may wish to use classes, manyanos, and other structures to gather statistics on how many members are fully vaccinated and to educate members both on the importance of remaining fully vaccinated and on the dangers of conspiracy theories which discourage vaccination.

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

#### **1. How is the 1 metre distancing measured?**

The one metre distance includes the space occupied by the person. For example, in the spacing of chairs, a 1 metre gap should exist between the right front leg of one chair and the right front leg of the chairs to the side, behind and in front of that chair.

**2. Can speakers (Preachers, those bringing notices or tributes etc.) remove their mask when speaking?**

Yes, but the pulpit or podium should be 2m away from the nearest person and masks must be put on again when the person has finished speaking.

**3. Can masks be removed for singing?**

No. The Compliance officer and preachers/worship leaders must remind the congregation to keep masks over mouth and nose whilst singing and politely call the congregation to order when this requirement is flouted.

**4. Is it still necessary for those attending our gatherings to fill in wellness declarations, have their temperature taken, and sign COVID registers?**

A COVID register includes the contact details of the attendee. This is no longer necessary, as contact tracing is not longer government policy. A wellness declaration declares that the person does not have any COVID symptoms. This should still be completed before people are admitted to a gathering. Where a person declares that they do have COVID symptoms, they should not be admitted to the gathering and assisted with transport home or to a testing site. Temperature screening has been shown to be an ineffective method of screening for COVID and is no longer required.

**5. Are compliance officers still required for gatherings?**

All gatherings should have a designated compliance officer who is granted authority to ensure compliance throughout the gathering.

**6. What are the recommended protocols for children's ministry?**

Children under 6 years of age are not required to wear masks. Children over 6 years of age should wear masks when indoors but may remove them when outdoors. The regulations regarding 1 metre physical distancing and 50% of capacity for indoor venues are the same for children as for adults.

In the service of Christ

**The Limpopo District Covid-19 Task Team:**

Dr. Lorraine Nkoane

Deacon Patricia Nyandoro

Rev. Prof Stephen Hendricks

Rev. Sydney Kutu

Rev. Ian France (Convenor)