



Diocese of Johannesburg

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE ANGLICAN BISHOP DIOCESE OF JOHANNESBURG



Our Vision is: To Achieve the Practice of the Ministry of All Believers

PASTORAL LETTER

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Dear Saints

I greet you in the name of the Child of Bethlehem, born at an austere time in the history of the world. Yet, it is this Child whose ministry showed us the power of love, respect and faith. He healed the sick, embraced the outcast and showed us that even in the sombre violence of death on the Cross, we shall live anew as confident Christians in a responsible and loving way.

Normally at this time of the year, we would be looking forward to the positive opportunities that present themselves in the new year. But the grim reality is that we are faced with the frightening prospect of a spike in the Covid-19 virus and its mutation known as SARS-CoV-2. All of us will know of people who have lost loved ones, and may have lost loved ones ourselves, as a result of Covid-19 and its complications. I extend my sincere condolences to you. Be assured on my ongoing prayers for you in your loss.

Each one of us needs to have a renewed understanding of our individual and collective responsibility to fight this deadly disease with all our might and with all our resolve. Last night, the President announced stricter lockdown measures which impact on us as a Church. So let me first deal with the implications, so that we are clear about what we are required to do.

- With immediate effect, in person Church services are suspended until further notice. In terms of the regulations, all social gatherings, including faith-based gatherings, are prohibited for two weeks, after which this provision will be reviewed. (This does obviously not apply to digital gatherings, such as online services with just the priest present in person and bible studies).

- Funerals shall not have more than 50 people present and strict social distancing of one and a half meters from each other shall be observed. If the venue is too small to hold 50 persons at such a distance, then not more than 50 percent of capacity of the venue may be used. The entire funeral service shall not be longer than two hours.
- Night vigils, after-funeral gatherings, and “after-tears” gatherings are not allowed under any circumstances.

The above are the critical new restrictions that apply to us as a Church with immediate effect. There are obviously many other restrictions that apply to us in our daily lives, and you are urged to make yourself aware of them. It is our Christian responsibility, if we are to be co-creators of a Covid-free society, to follow these restrictions to the letter.

Perhaps the most important one is that you shall wear a mask in public places at all times. Failure to do so will in fact now be a crime.

There has not been a more sombre moment in our history since 1994. Covid-19 is a deadly and evil disease. That we have coped to an extent to this point in time is due to the selfless and tireless ministry of medical and para medical professionals and others working in that environment. If ever one needed a contemporary illustration of walking the extra mile, these medical and para medical professionals provide the example. We thank them all, and assure them of our prayers.

Now, however, is the time for us to walk the other mile for all who live in this land. The requirements have been simple since the outset and it is astonishing that so many still ignore them. Please preach this message that these are the requirements:

- Wear a cloth mask at all times in public **that covers both mouth and nose;**
- Sanitize hands and premises regularly;
- Wash hands at least seven times a day for 20 seconds at a time;
- Maintain social distancing of at least one and a half meters.

I also want to thank every one of you that has complied and contributed to the country’s campaign against Covid-19 and to the Diocesan determination to keep ministry faithful and active. I have been impressed with those priests and lay leaders who have taken the initiative in this

respect. Now is the time for new initiatives that will keep our Church vibrant and make our country safe.

The importance of online ministry in all its facets cannot be overemphasized. This applies both to online services (with no congregation present), as well as to other outreaches such as pastoral care, which should be done both online and by telephone to everyone on a parish role. It is not enough to simply send blanket WhatsApp's or emails; they have a role, but it is critical to do as Christ did, and that is to engage people and minister to them one-on-one by phone or other digital means of communication. At this time of renewed lockdown and stress, such pastoral care should occupy a major part of every day of a priest's and lay leader's ministry. It's time to get organized in a new way. Draw on the resources of people to assist you.

In our preparation for this new era of outreach, I call for a day of prayer and fasting on New Year's Day, 1 January 2021, in our Diocese. Let each saint participate as felt led by God and as permitted by health. Such a commitment can be for the whole day, or for a few hours, between 06h00 and 18h00. We are people called by the name of Christ, and we are reminded of this in 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." To prepare for this day of prayer and fasting, I also call on you to light a candle on the eve of New Year. Place this candle safely in a window if you are able as the light of Christ. I shall be doing so.

Please feel free to share this message, not only with fellow Anglicans, but with all your loved ones and friends. It is our responsibility to get the message out to as many people as possible!

Through the grace of God, this time will pass. We can look forward to that, but the immediate path ahead is rocky. Let us hold one another by the hand and overcome, just as the early Church did. I pray that you may have grace, peace and stay safe as you do so.

Peace and light

The Rt Revd Dr Steve Moreo
Bishop of Johannesburg