

Statement from the Chapter of the Diocese of St. Mark the Evangelist

We the Chapter of the Diocese of St. Mark the Evangelist, meeting on the Feast Day of Patrick, Bishop and Missionary in Ireland, 461, the 17th March 2020, met to discuss our response to COVID-19 and the address from the President of South Africa, the Honourable Cyril Ramaphosa, on Sunday 15th March and the guidelines issued by our Archbishop, the Most Reverend Thabo Makgoba, issued today the 17th March.

Chapter were of one mind that the situation before us is serious and that drastic action is required. We agreed to err on the side of over-reaction rather than under-reacting. We agreed the lives and well-being of our people are of paramount importance and that all decision and recommendations made were to benefit our people.

The following are to be read in conjunction with the guidelines issued by Archbishop Thabo.

The following decisions and recommendations were made. Please discuss these fully with your Parish leadership and decide appropriately how you will implement them:

1. All non-urgent meetings will be postponed. This will include:

- a. DSC planned for the end of March is postponed until further notice
- b. Archdeaconry Meetings - May is cancelled. For the August meeting we will communicate nearer the time
- c. The Archdeacon's and the Diocesan Lekgotla in May are cancelled
- d. Should your normal Sunday service exceed 100 people we request the introduction of extra services of no more than 100 people in each, as well as using your mid-week services
- e. Chapter has prohibited all combined services
- f. It is permitted to temporarily halt the celebration of the Eucharist and use Morning Prayer instead
- g. Other Diocesan, Parish & Organisational meetings, including youth gatherings are to be halted. Only Exco, if required, may meet with the proviso that this involve very few people., This will include suspending all weekly youth groups and Parish Council meetings

We strongly recommend where possible you use technology to communicate

- h. Clergy School (4-7 May) is Postponed until further notice
- i. Fraternal; consider stopping your attendance for now

2. We have recommended with regard our church services that:

(We will take further advice from the Archbishop after he publishes additional guidelines)

- a. Confirmations Services are postponed until after Easter, after which we will evaluate the situation. The reason for this is because Confirmation Services are always greater than 100 people, and this is followed by celebratory meals
- b. Chapter have advised the Bishop not to visit and preach in Parishes because numbers increase at that service as people from the surrounding chapelries come in order to see the Bishop. We will also suspend all Confirmation classes
- c. Baptisms may only be done in emergencies. No combined or other baptisms are permitted until after Easter. Should the Baptism be held then the parents must hold the child and anoint with water. Baptism classes are to be suspended
- d. Funerals are to be keep very small with only immediate family present
- e. Palm Sunday Services are not to be combined and may only to be held in each Chapelry. There will be merit in not holding a public procession
- f. Maundy Thursday. We prohibit foot washing, and remind you that Holy Communion is in one kind only
- g. Good Friday. We recommend you limit your service to an hour. Repeat if the numbers require
- h. Holy Saturday. We recommend you limit the duration of this service. We prohibit all vigils
- i. Easter Services. We prohibit combined services. Chapelries must do their own service and keep it short. Repeat if necessary
- j. Chapter discussed the possibility of cancelling all services, but chose not to advocate this yet
- k. Sunday School. Chapter agreed parents must decide if they wish their children to attend, but we recommend stopping Sunday School. However, if Sunday School is held it is imperative the church increases hygiene measures and try to minimise physical contact amongst the children

3. We will educate and treat our staff as follows:

- a. We strongly recommend churches permit sick leave and self-isolation on full pay. But this must be accompanied by a Doctor's note. Such time off is not to be deducted from normal sick leave or annual leave
- b. We recommend all staff receive the Flu Injection, and possibly for free with the church meeting the costs
- c. We recommend the daily consumption of multivitamins to increase people's immunity
- d. Chapter discussed the means of transport used by so many of our staff in getting to work. We recommended the wearing of a shawl or mask for the journey. Wash hands and face when at work and once back home
- e. Possibly consider reducing their work hours/days - but not their salary

4. Our Theological basis for making these decisions is as follows:

This is not the time to suggest that this is God's punishment on the world or predicting the end times. It is all part of the logical onward movement of the world towards the coming of Christ. Sin is in the world already. The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life (Romans 6: 23). How do we get eternal life? Through faith in Jesus (John 3: 16 and Romans 10:9). COVID-19 presents us an opportunity to lead people into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ

5. We believe prayer is fundamental and recommend the following:

Chapter recommends every Parish use every Sunday to say prayers for safety and the end of COVID-19

There will be no Diocesan Prayer Day until such time as we can meet in large groups again

6. We acknowledge the economic impact of COVID-19 will be felt predominantly by the poorest amongst us and for many years to come

Chapter recommended we offer practical help for the elderly and house-bound by for example – shopping for them, fetching water, taking them to the doctor, etc.

We encourage people to make regular contact with the elderly and house-bound – use the telephone if they are self-isolating or ill – and encourage them through your conversation and prayers

In Conclusion

Chapter have undertaken to share this important message, including the guidelines from the Archbishop, with our respective clergy and leaders.

Chapter will meet again, using technology, to monitor and reassess our response as and when required.

**Signed: Feast Day of Patrick, Bishop and Missionary in Ireland, 461
2020**

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Bishop Luke

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