

MEDIA - RELEASE STATEMENT ON THE RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE BY THE BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF GRAHAMSTOWN

The Bishop of the Diocese of Grahamstown, the Rt. Rev. Ebenezer St Mark Ntlali, recently summoned an Extraordinary Meeting of his Chapter at Holy Trinity, King Williamstown, on the 18th March 2020, whereat was collectively considered the formulation of Guidelines for the Management of Worship Practices and the format of liturgies - custom made – to resonate with the stipulations as pronounced by the State President of the Country, His Excellency Mr Cyril Ramaphosa

These Guidelines have been informed by recommendations by the Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa [ACSA], and Metropolitan of Cape Town, the Most Reverend Dr Thabo Cecil Makgoba, and the rest of the Anglican Community within the ACSA. The Bishop and the flock of the people of God in the Diocese, align themselves with the need for extra precautionary measures to be taken for curbing new infections and arresting the morbidity and mortality associated with the novel Coronavirus Disease -COVID 19. To this end the guidelines are for circulation in all the parishes of the Diocese with recommendation for implementation with immediate effect so as to assist the clergy and parishioners not only to be on the alert but also to respond and conduct themselves appropriately in the circumstances

As the Diocese of Grahamstown, and being inseparably in communion with the ACSA, and the rest of the world-wide Anglican community, we align ourselves with these guidelines as we deem it of absolute and critical importance, that all should comply and constructively contribute to curbing further spread of the infection and arrest this killer disease.

Acutely aware of the fact that contexts are different, the Bishop in Chapter, has at a recent Special Chapter Meeting, also formulated guidelines intended for guiding the shepherds and flock under their care in the Diocese - in our efforts to meaningfully contribute, whilst ensuring our acting within the prescribed Statutory Framework and Infection Prevention and Control Measures

Our Christian conscience and actions are always guided by Scriptural instruction, and we are inspired by the Apostolic guidance of the Brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, St James: *“Is there anyone amongst you, suffering ? Is anyone amongst you, sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him.... The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” – James 5: 13, 14,15,16*

In synoptic version, the scope covered, and concrete actions recommended in said guidelines specifically gives direction as regards:

1. Intensifying of our efforts in penitence, prayer and fasting for the remaining Lententide period
2. Heightened awareness and enhanced rigorous adherence to Infection Prevention and Control Measures at our places of worship.
 - a. To this end, Sanitizer Sprays are recommended to spray the worshippers at the doors as they enter the church
 - b. Social Distancing – Congregants are to sit at least a meter apart on the Pews
 - c. Encouraging people who are not feeling well to rather stay at home. For such people, rather, to have ministrations brought to them in their home environments
 - d. Suspension of the practice of hugging or any form of physical contact during Peace; recommending waving as sufficient

- e. Spraying Hands again just as worshippers are to receive Holy Communion, recommending receiving standing rather than kneeling to avoid having to touch the communion rail. In environments where sprays are not affordable, washing hands with soap and water and drying with disposable hand towels
- 3. To comply with the 100 people threshold at any gathering, more services will need be scheduled. To this end abridged Liturgical Formats are to be provided
- 4. Big Services and Diocesan Events have been suspended, temporarily. Specifically, the Maundy Thursday Service is postponed to Corpus Christi and will be in three sessions

We are encouraged by the updates from the National Department of Health, that no deaths have occurred amongst those tested positive as well as that none have required intensive care management, with home quarantine, social distancing and isolation having worked well.

Even more encouraging and fining a bright ray of hope, is the recovery rate both in China and at home; particularly that at the source country remarkable gains are being realized – with extra temporary facilities being closed as well as marked curtailment in new infections

We will remain in fervent prayer, knowing fully well our God is with us and will never forsake us, whilst also remaining eternally vigilant. His Grace is ever sufficient for those who place their hope in the Lord!

To God be the Glory, Honour and Majesty. For ever and ever. Amen!!

Statement issued by the Bishop of Grahamstown, the Rt. Rev Ebenezer St Mark Ntlali

Dated: 19th March 2020