

The Bishop of False Bay The Rt Revd Margaret B Vertue

Diocese of False Bay Bisdóm Van Valsbaai Idayosisi False Bay

P O Box 2804
Somerset West
7129 RSA

Tel: + 27 021 852 5243
Fax: + 27 021 852 9430
Email: bishopm@falsebaydiocese.org.za



BISHOP'S LETTER TO CLERGY AND LAITY OF THE DIOCESE OF FALSE BAY ON RE-OPENING OF CHURCHES IN LEVEL 3 OF LOCKDOWN 29 MAY 2020

My dear Clergy and Members of the Diocese of False Bay,

Diocesan Chapter, following President Cyril Ramaphosa's address to the nation about the opening of places of worship met urgently *via* a virtual meeting on Thursday 28 May. All Members of Chapter were present. Bishop also invited the Diocesan Secretary, the Revd. Pieter Lourens, to be present for the entire meeting.

Even though we may open our Churches for congregational worship as from 1 June 2020, we came to the conclusion that, as we are going into winter and what has been predicted as the peak of the infections of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa, we will **not** be opening. We will review the situation towards the end of June. In the meantime, we have teams working on details at local levels. It is the Holy Spirit of God who governs the Church. We need not be afraid.

The regulations regarding funerals remain unchanged. Funerals are allowed with the restrictions of fifty (50) people in Church and at cemeteries, as per the directives of the government.

Inasmuch as we, the leadership of the Diocese of False Bay within the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, received the news of the opening of places of worship, Chapter deemed it utterly important to ensure that the Diocese as a whole would be ready to open all our churches simultaneously on a date yet to be determined.

Chapter carefully studied the notes compiled by the South African Council of Churches presented to President Ramaphosa, together with the notes compiled by Bishop Raphael Hess and other information made available recently *iro* the opening of places of worship.

Very serious discussion ensued on the stringent guidelines/regulations for the preparation of places of worship as presented by the SACC.

The following matters, after critical discussion and deep reflection, were resolved:

1. That all Parishes in the Diocese of False Bay open their doors to Worship Services on the same day. The date will be announced by Bishop Margaret in due course.

2. Concern was expressed that if we do not employ a careful, risk-assessed approach and just blindly rush into opening our Churches, we could see a spike in infections with the real possibility that the province might revert to Level 4, particularly taking into consideration the fact that the Western Cape has by far the highest number of COVID-19 infections (which incidentally fall within regions within the Diocese of False Bay), and that we are entering the cold and influenza season.
3. Chapter discussed the issue of 'deep cleansing' of Churches, Church halls, crèches, rectories and adjacent Church buildings as outlined in the SACC notes. The following became apparent:
 - a) A professional company would need to be employed to deep cleanse/sanitise every Church building, even those buildings which have been unused during Lockdown. Most of our Churches hosted funerals during the Lockdown.
 - b) Deep, thorough cleansing/sanitising means a complete washdown of the interior of the Church building, together with vestries, sacristies, choir loft, passages, vestibules, entrances etc.
 - c) It was further resolved that if it becomes evident that someone at a service tested positive, the process of cleansing/sanitising must be repeated.
 - d) Chapter realised that these cleansing/sanitising processes have cost implications and noted that at least one company, thus far, has given the Diocese a quotation for such processes, irrespective of the size of the space – the amount quoted was R1750 per church.
 - e) Every church, after deep cleansing/sanitising will be issued with a certificate. The certificate becomes null and void should it be found that someone who attended a service tested positive for COVID-19. Then the process of deep cleansing/sanitising would have to be repeated. This is not optional.
 - f) Chapter also took cognisance of the fact that after every service or gathering one or more persons would need to be responsible for the sanitising (not deep cleansing) of the church - meaning that pews, doors and handles, floors and passages, pulpits and lecterns, credence tables, toilets, bathrooms and other surfaces generally used and touched during services would have to be wiped down.
 - g) All gloves, papers, tissues, disposable masks etc. must be disposed of in a proper manner, as these items may be considered medical waste, and may not be placed into the usual refuse bins. After more research, parishes will be informed about this matter.
4. It was also resolved that every Parish needs a COVID Team and COVID Chief Co-ordinator or Compliance Officer. The task of this Team will be to ensure the proper cleansing/sanitising of the Church and related spaces before and after every worship service, and the COVID Compliance Officer will need to inspect that the work has been done in a well and proper fashion.

It was further resolved that the Diocese will insist that people in such roles receive at least one morning's training. The Diocesan Secretary has details *iro* training of a COVID Team.

5. Chapter also expressed deep concern for both active and non-active Clergy who have underlying health issues and suggested that we proceed with extreme caution so as not to compromise their health.
6. Bishop invited the Diocesan Secretary with the view of giving Chapter an overview of the general financial situation of the Diocese and its parishes since Lockdown. It is apparent that every parish in the Diocese has suffered steep financial losses for obvious reasons during the closure of our Churches.

Inasmuch as it is vital that we open our Churches as soon as possible, all of what is listed above helped Chapter to decide that we are not to rush into opening our Churches and to proceed with extreme caution.

7. Chapter further requested Bishop to write to every parishioner *via* their local parish saying the following:
 - a) Thanking every parishioner for the many sacrifices made during this time of Lockdown and thanking them for their willingness to embrace the virtual/remote style of Worship and Pastoral Care.
 - b) Thanking every parishioner for their faithfulness to the ongoing work and ministry in their parish *via* soup kitchens, clothing drives, making their facilities available for testing for COVID-19 and even in some instances their willingness to offer Church halls as additional bed space for COVID-19 patients.
 - c) Bishop to humbly request those parishioners who can afford it to continue the financial support of their local parish *via* pledges, tithes and offerings so that the local parish does not end up in a bankrupt state.
8. It was further noted that our Churches are more than just places of worship, in that they serve the community in many other ways, and that although we have decided to delay the opening of our Churches, the daily outreach ministries will continue.
9. Chapter also felt that the stringent protocols, inasmuch as they are necessary and mandatory, interfere with our Anglican understanding of worship, especially noting the importance of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the Passing of the Peace, the Greeting before and after services at the door, the use of Choirs and Liturgical Dancers, Offertory Processions etc. For the foreseeable future we need to sacrifice all these aspects within our Worship to comply with the stringent regulations.
10. Therefore, related to notes in No. 9, Chapter will give further details about the Sacraments of Holy Matrimony, Baptism and Confirmation after more detailed discussion. For now, these Sacraments are still "on hold".

11. VERY IMPORTANT:

Having taken all the above into account, Bishop and Chapter have resolved that **WE WILL NOT BE READY TO OPEN OUR CHURCHES FOR SERVICES ON 1 JUNE** as suggested by President Ramaphosa on the advice of the SACC. The Dioceses of Saldanha Bay and Table Bay have reached the same conclusion.

Chapter will continue to meet regularly to assess our readiness for the opening our Churches and will make a next recommendation at the end of June. Bishop and Chapter recognise the great importance, for obvious reasons, that we resume our physical corporate life together, and understand the serious financial implications of delayed opening. We have decided on this approach for the **HEALTH AND SAFETY OF OUR PARISHIONERS.**

Bishop and Chapter invite God's People spread throughout the length and breadth of the Diocese to continue to make the much-needed sacrifices in the interest of the greater good of everyone.

Bishop and Chapter call on every parishioner in the Diocese of False Bay to exercise extreme caution with their health and to observe the basic hygiene practices of frequent hand-washing, the wearing of cloth face-masks, social distancing and just employing common sense, in the attempt to curb the spread of the virus here in the Western Cape.

Lastly, Bishop and Chapter invite every parishioner into deep prayer for the end to this pandemic and to remain hopeful at all times and to trust that God will make a way for us so that soon we may resume our life as a Church Eucharistic Community.

Abundant blessings on the celebration of Pentecost, Pinkster, Ipentekosti.

Love, Joy, Peace and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Margaret", with a small cross symbol to the left. The signature is written over a horizontal line.

BISHOP MARGARET B VERTUE