

To: Leaders of Christian Communities and Formations in South Africa
From: Rt. Rev. Malusi Mpumlwana, SACC General Secretary
Date: June 13, 2020
Subject: On The Church's Drive to Drive Down COVID Infection.

*"For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers."
(Proverbs 11:14)*

Dear leaders,

- Greeting:** Grace and peace to you and yours in COVID time! Dear sisters and brothers, we have not communicated in this way before; but the situation in our country instructs us at this time, to together, collectively, to look "to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2 NRSV). Allow us, in these unusual COVID times, to say with Apostle Peter: "May grace and peace be yours in abundance."
- Purpose of Communication:** The purpose of this communication is to propose a collaborative platform in a **Drive to Drive Down the rate of COVID infection** in South Africa. That can only happen if we ALL agree to work together for this objective. As we do that we shall be a blessing for our country in COVID time. The SACC church leaders have authorised me to write to all leaders of religious formations, beginning with the Christian leaders, to please consider collaborating on this single matter, so that we can collectively be a blessing to our nation.
- Why this and why now?** This proposal comes in the wake of the beginning of the limited opening of some churches for public worship. Here is some of the thinking behind this, as pointed out in the SACC discussion. The outcry from some quarters against the opening churches has been driven by fear and a serious concern that churches will trigger an unmanageable increase in the number of Coronavirus infections and deaths. This is an understandable. Part of the informed background to these concerns is the projection that by November 2020, some 40,000 to 45,000 people may have lost their lives. This is an unthinkable number of deaths in a matter of months, from a virus that can be slowed down and stopped in its tracks by collective action of society. While understandable, this is a narrative of fear and anxiety, which often results in mistrust, conflict, the blame game, and a paralysis that undermines positive action. This anxiety narrative misses four important points about how the church is best placed to change South Africa's infection projections:
 - The Numbers of Religious People:* If all or just half of the religious South Africans can be persuaded to actively fight COVID we would reverse the threat of 45,000 deaths by November. Close to 80% of South Africa's population is attributed to Christianity - about 48 million people, of which the SACC churches account for no more than 37% of



the total population, at 22 million, excluding the numbers of the block affiliates of TEASA, CAIC and IFCC, the individual members of whose various congregations are not directly listed. Maybe only half or less, of the persons belonging to SACC member churches, would care to actively join the COVID Combat. That would be just about 11 million South Africans. This would be great, but if we can have half of the other 43% of Christian followers to commit - a whole 13 million people, we would collectively bring into COVID Combat a good 24 million COVID Combatants in the name of their faith. We shall be making a similar appeal to other sister faiths - Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Baha'i, etc., to all bring their numbers to the joint campaign.

- b. *The Christian Faith Negates Fear:* We believe that our faith conditions us away from fear and anxiety, “for God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV). And therefore we act, not out of fear and anxiety, but out of love and a sound mind that reasons positively for the common good. This is the strength of our faith. With this we are equipped to gear against the spread of COVID infection.
- c. *The Duty of Love:* Because God is Love, and Christ, the revelation of God has given us the pattern of self giving love, we have the duty of love as a way of being his disciples. We are duty bound to live the act of love and save lives. Out of love, we have the duty of solidarity with the neighbour and protect them from infection.
- d. *The Fuel of Prayer:* The Church of Jesus Christ has the inexhaustible fuel of prayer for all seasons, in good times and in bad times; well instructed by St Paul: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NRSV) With this fuel we shall pray without stopping, praying for grace to be faithful to our commitment to save lives; and pray for our people to heed the life saving messaging to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

In humility, the church must counter the fear and anxiety narrative in favour of the narrative of faith and active love that saves lives. For our faith without works is dead, writes James (2:17). Allow me to now share the action proposal for our collaboration, that we may be a collective blessing for South Africa.

4. **The Church to Drive Down Infection Rate - To Love to Save Lives:** As a blessing to South Africa, the church must collectively go on a campaign to drive down the infection rate; to go out on a drive to love in order to save lives. Let us give the COVID Combat our evangelical fervour - let us “go and make disciples” of the “Stop Corona” message and habit. We now all know what it takes to stop the spread of the virus - the Big Seven:

- **Wear a mask when getting out (Mask)**
- **Keep physical distance (Distance)**
- **No handshakes or hugs (Handshake)**
- **Wash hands thoroughly with soap & water for at least 20 seconds (Wash)**
- **Don't touch face with unwashed hands (Face)**

- **Clean cell phone with cloth and hot soapy water or sanitiser (Phone)**
- **Pray for grace and strength to remain faithful in all circumstances (Prayer)**

We all know this; what we now need to do in order to save the nation is to go on a massive demonstration of living what we know must be done, and preach it as church. Let us say to each other, love your neighbour and preach this basic life-saving lifestyle! Let us love and save lives; **“Love and Save Lives!”**

Let us use our communications, our Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, posters, in the Spirit, to fire up everyone, to save lives with this evangelical campaign - and maybe begin and end our sermons and church notices with the charge that all listeners must go out and recruit for **The Drive to Drive Down Infection — the drive to drive down the infection rate in our homes and our neighbourhoods; the drive to drive down the infection rate in our communities and our schools; the drive to drive down the infection rate in our churches and our workplaces.** Let us use every means to persuade our church people to live out these **Drive Down Deeds - with Mask, Distance, no Handshake, Washing hands, not touching Face, cleaning cell Phone, and Pray.**

5. **The Call for United Action:** In the first week of June, with opening of churches granted, the SACC church leaders were looking at how to extend the third element of our COVID pastoral plan - which is, “Pastoral Care” for people in distress; and how churches can become the agency for the saving of thousands of lives that would otherwise have been lost. I received a call from Prophet Mboro. Among the points he raised with me was the concern that churches will be blamed for the increase in the numbers of infected people, whereas many infections will be because of the way people out there in our communities are not social distancing, and wear no masks, etc. That is the case at taverns, at the taxi ranks, at the SASSA queues, and at the open markets where people sell and buy any and everything. He called for a broader conversation of leaders of the various church formations on these issues. I told him that the SACC leaders will want to also share some ideas of things we can work on. Prophet Mboro’s call when we were working on what we can do to bring down the virus spread, became a confirmation that indeed this is something we can do together. Our united action can become a reality, for all who call upon the name of Jesus, to use their areas of influence in the drive to drive down the infection rate. That will be the blessing of our presence, regardless of our institutional affiliations.
6. **It is now in our blessed hands:** The Government has done what a government can and should do to arrest COVID. It is now up to all of us to throw in all we have, it is up to the hands we use for blessing; in our faith; in our culture and the demands of ubuntu-botho. It is in our blessed hands to build a wall of mutual protection in knowledge, information, and lifestyle change. There is ample evidence everywhere in the townships and rural villages that the message of these habits of COVID compliance, is not sinking out there. In no time the virus will sweep whole communities like wild fire. This reality requires us to humbly extend our hands to all around us, for a common movement of behaviour change, beginning with ourselves. By setting a living example of these habits, we shall be known for this message and



practice. We shall spread love by sustaining life. For Christ came “that they may have life, and have it abundantly” - Corona-free!

This, sisters and brothers, is our proposal for the sake of our country. We have the collective numbers; we have the faith that counters fear and anxiety; we have the duty of love; and we have the fuel of prayer. “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20-21 NRSV)

Yours in Christ, for a COVID-free society!

Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana

