



Bishop of the Diocese of George

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Diocese of George

My dear Clergy and people,

Greetings in the powerful name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We greet you at this difficult time secure in the hope that God can and will rescue His creation from the present scourge of Covid-19. Our first duty as Christians is to pray for those who have caught the virus and those who are seeking their return to full health. We also pray for the scientists and doctors seeking a vaccine to combat the Corona virus effectively. Our prayers must include asking for guidance for each one of us as we live responsible lives within the new world order all of us are finding ourselves called to.

We enclose with this letter a number of steps that ought to be taken by all members of the Diocese in particular and all those with whom you come into contact. Please employ patience and courtesy as, together, we face the threat posed by Covid-19. We take this opportunity of thanking those congregations which have supplied us with their views and advice on the current situation and congratulate them on their initiative in seeking solutions.

May we, together, fight the good fight of faith as we act responsibly.

Your father in God and Servant in Christ,

+ Brian George

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PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

You are the source of life and health:

We give you thanks and praise for our creation and preservation
and for all the good things of this life.

Deliver us and your world from the Corona virus pandemic.

Keep us in health of body and spirit

ever rejoicing in your loving care;

through Jesus Christ our Lord

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Personal Advice

The most practical and effective method to protect yourself is to be responsible. The State President has advised us that groups of more than 100 persons are prohibited from meeting together. This will prove to be a challenge in some of our parishes. Taking personal responsibility for our decisions and actions ought to include most of the following:

1. If you feel ill and display the following symptoms immediately visit your doctor. But tell them beforehand your symptoms so they can also take the necessary precautions. The symptoms include

a. Low-grade fever of higher than 37,3 deg C.

b. Persistent Cough

c. Shortness of breath

d. Contact or travel history with an infected person or place

e. The following flu-like symptoms may also present: runny nose, headache, sore throat, feeling unwell

2. Practise strict hygiene by washing your hands frequently with soap and water. This is the single most important thing you can do to protect yourself.

3. Place hand sanitiser in strategic places and encourage its use. However, hand sanitisers do not on their own kill the virus, unless the sanitiser is especially strong. Remember it is good practise to use, as a secondary act after washing your hands, a hand sanitiser or if you do not have access to soap and water to use one.

4. Communicate the message about COVID-19 regularly to your staff and congregation. Get visiting healthcare practitioners to speak and display posters in the workplace.

5. Respect those around you by not coughing or sneezing when close to them. If you must cough or sneeze do so into the inside of your elbow and not into your hands, or use a tissue.

6. Keep the surfaces at home and where you work clean by using a detergent and/or disinfectant. This will kill any virus which may be sitting on the surface.

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7. Teach yourself not to let your fingers touch your mouth or eyes unless you wash your hands properly beforehand.
8. Keep your distance from people, especially if you are not feeling well. However, do not over-do this as it can look as if you do not like them.
9. If you feel ill with flu-like symptoms, even if you doubt you have SARS COV-2, rather stay at home and do not potentially place your friends or colleagues at risk. Please do not abuse this privilege by using the opportunity to get out of work! You must report your symptoms to your doctor and follow his/her advice.
10. Minimise your travel and attending any large gatherings unless you are prepared and know how to protect yourself. Attending Church is important, but minimise shaking hands and encourage your ministry team to minimise any shared chalice, etc. We suggest best-practice on this subject below.
11. Remain informed of the disease and share your knowledge. Do not spread fake-news and rumour.
12. The wearing of a mask will not stop you becoming infected! Those who are infected are asked to wear a mask in order to minimise the spread of their saliva droplets. However, if you feel more comfortable wearing a mask there is nothing wrong in doing so, especially if you are going to be in a large crowd.
13. Take advice before travelling to meetings outside your area. It may also become necessary for Church council meetings, etc. to be temporarily halted until this pandemic is over.
14. Do not share eating utensils or cups, mugs, glasses/tumblers and plates.
15. Consider taking the annual flu vaccine from your local health-care provider. Go to work and church only if you are well. If you think you are displaying the symptoms noted (in 1. above) then you ought to isolate yourself, visit your doctor and not go to work or attend church until some certainty has been obtained. Otherwise, whilst being responsible, continue with your daily routine.

The contact number for the Coronavirus Hotline is: +27 80 002 9999.

Conducting Pastoral Visits

All those doing pastoral visits should take every precaution to protect themselves and the people being visited. Pastoral visits ought not to take place to those who are self-quarantined or have the virus. Telephonic contact with these persons ought to be maintained.

Wash your hands thoroughly before and after a visit. Use hand sanitiser during the visit.

Try not to touch anyone's hands.

Offer Holy Communion in one kind only. Use the opportunity to explain what you are doing and why.

Suggested best practice for worship and church gatherings

We do not recommend you miss church unless you are not well, have been exposed to or diagnosed with COVID-19. These recommendations are principally for when COVID-19 has been diagnosed in your area or if you would feel more comfortable in preparing yourself now. We ask that each Church Council meets to discuss and plan how they wish to proceed in the light of these recommendations and with advice from qualified medical personnel.

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Congregations need to be limited to 100 persons attending. This number includes sacred ministers and servers. More service times may need to be arranged in order to accommodate the needs of a parish. We rely on the ingenuity of clergy and church/chapelry councils in this regard.

With emptier church buildings congregants should sit further apart – at least one metre – and when moving in and around the church a similar distance ought to be maintained between persons.

We recommend you minimise handshaking and touching one another. We also recommend for the passing of the peace that you look at the person on either side of you or in front and behind you and smile/nod your head in acknowledgement.

Do not cough or sneeze without covering your mouth with the inside of your elbow or by using a tissue. After every single use of a tissue dispose of it properly by placing it into a plastic bag and when convenient throwing it away into a rubbish bin.

We recommend the entire ministry team wash their hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water before and after distributing Holy Communion. The use of hand sanitisers is helpful but is nowhere near as effective as soap and water. Have a bowl of water with soap in the Sanctuary.

Encourage congregants to not touch the communion rail. It may be best if people are encouraged to receive the host in their hands whilst standing to do so.

The celebrant ought to be the only one to consume from the chalice.

Clergy ought to sanitize their hands before distributing the elements.

We recommend the ministry team offers Holy Communion in one-form only. This should be the Bread because the Wine is usually drunk with a shared Chalice. Suspend all physical contact with the pronouncing of a blessing or other forms of prayer, but to extend the hand above the head of the recipient. Home Communion should continue to be available to the sick in one kind only.

Ensure that all communion vessels and plate are washed thoroughly and properly dried. It is permissible to use disposable gloves and masks when distributing the bread.

We do not recommend shaking hands at the door after the service.

Suspend all catering after services where cups/mugs may be used.

Ensure the cleaning of surfaces commonly used by persons entering the church plant such as table and counter tops, door handles and cupboards.

All these recommendations must be discussed and adapted to fit your circumstance and environment. They will last until the Coronavirus outbreak has passed. Do not force people to do something they do not wish to do. Empower them to decide for themselves, with your wise advice and counsel, what they want to do. Church Councils should begin now to develop a plan of action should an outbreak occur in your area. This will include for example who will conduct visits and pastoral care, the holding of meetings (rather not) and church services (only for the healthy, and with full precautions), and who to contact for advice and assistance should someone take seriously ill in the church.

The collection/offertory is an area of concern. Both taking the collection and counting the proceeds are areas of high risk. Develop a method of collection which allows for least contact between people. Electronic transfer of funds (ETF) is probably the safest option but this is difficult for rural parishioners. All those involved need to remember that washing hands with soap and water before and after is essential.

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Below is the link where you can read the updated guidelines of the Archbishop.

<https://anglicanchurchsa.org/coronavirus-updated-guidelines-from-the-archbishop/>

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