

To: Leaders of South African Churches  
From: Rt. Rev. Malusi Mpumlwana, SACC General Secretary  
Date: April 3, 2020  
Subject: On The SACC Coronavirus Pastoral Plan

Dear leaders of the people of God,

**1. Greeting:** We greet you in the name of Him who came that we may have life in abundance; in the name of Him who died that we may have life eternal. And Christ makes us His, as we live in the abundance of His love, and die into His eternal presence. To this, Apostle Paul rhymes: "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's". (Romans 14:8)

**2. Introduction:** The main purpose of this communication is to present to the churches, the SACC Corona Pastoral Plan (see below), which is both for the immediacy of the crisis, and as springboard for rebuilding for a new and long term reality of greater social cohesion and economic vibrancy at community levels beyond the COVID-19 onslaught.

**3. SACC COVID Pastoral Plan:** The SACC Pastoral Plan is based on the assumption that an effective COVID response will be driven and championed at local level by a well informed and coordinated leadership that is deeply connected to the realities of the community that the leadership serves. This is also the way the church works in all circumstances - through local leadership. The situation facing the country, and the world, is so unprecedented, and evolving so quickly, that centralised planning and action to be deployed locally will not work.

In this regard, the core focus of the SACC Coronavirus pastoral plan is self-organised action networks, Local Ecumenical Action Networks (LEAN) operating at congregational and neighbourhood level. They are to be formed through a minimum of 10 congregations and their leaders creating a mutual support collaboration. A number of these in various municipal areas of a District or Metro are coordinated by an SACC District Coordination Centre, to facilitate expeditious articulation of communication and responses, enabling a feed into the SACC National Coordination Centre that liaises with the Government Joint Operations Centre (JOC) during the national COVID-19 situation. The work of district and national structure will be to assist with guidance, collaboration, sharing and resource provision with action largely be initiated by local community groups.

**The SACC Plan has the following 4 pillars:**

- a. *Systems and Structures for Local Organisation and Bulk Communication:* Ten or more local churches will form a Local Ecumenical Action Network; each with WhatsApp network for its members; all LEANs in a district with a District Coordination Centre that relates to the SACC National Coordination Centre that relates to the State JOC and daily issues bulk WhatsApp communication for authentic information.



- b. *Crisis Relief*: For the destitute, as identified by local church structures (LEANs), and in concert with Government, using a voucher system for basic needs purchases.
- c. *Pastoral Care*: Focusing on the needs of the vulnerable; on support for victims of domestic abuse & violence; support for frontline health workers who are in our communities; and capacitating for peace management in case of conflictual protests.
- d. *Advocacy & Support for Rebuilding Lives, including*: This includes focus on the economically vulnerable who may be left out and most marginalised. It also includes a rebuilding focus that ensures that post-corona, people can build up their lives to better than before - through education and livelihoods development.

All of this is undergirded by constant prayer and spiritual anchoring. Expanding on this for clarity:

1. **Communication**: This is to make sure that people in their various pockets of living, are well informed and have a high level of awareness of the crisis at hand. This requires continuous communication that amplifies what comes from Government, packaged in the language of faith with appropriate reflections as people will be without the regular public worship that nourishes their faith in such a time of crisis. We are creating a WhatsApp communication platform that allows for local congregations that have a WhatsApp group that includes all their families in the community, to link in and access the communication. Likewise, local communities will be encouraged to create their locality WhatsApp groups - a neighbourhood block group, a street, a burial society, a stokvel group; any community organised WhatsApp groups that wish to link with the SACC established communication platform will be able to do so, and access the information system, at the invitation of the LEAN. How this will work is unpacked in detail in a separate document. But in the main it entails amplifying Government health communication, and will therefore be in close collaboration with Government communications and other social partners in society. In addition, there will be prayers and exhortation messages availed for people on their phones and on public radio. There will be a programme of having various church leaders and representatives offering snippets of video spiritual reflections for the reassurance and edification of the people. All this, will, as much as possible, be offered in the 11 South African languages. The communication system will have a local coordinator in the LEAN of each local community of churches. The same will also have an upward communication channel that gathers information and concerns from the people. With people shut in their homes, there will be need for people to be able to communicate their needs and concerns. This is the upward communication system that must be accessible from every remote part of the country. Therefore, we intend a functional two-way communication platform that all communities can access through their groups of congregations, or any other local community group that can join the platform. And the church network will channel needs as they come to various support systems of church and Government. The tools of the communication system include:

- a. The SACC WhatsApp Platform for daily Coronavirus messages, and spiritual messages, in most South African languages.
- b. A dedicated website, [coronachurch.org.za](http://coronachurch.org.za), with four columns: Covid-19, all you need to know; Church communities, what you and your community can do; Church leaders, how your church can help; thought for the day, prayers, inspirations and stories.
- c. A question and answer recorded clip featuring our resident doctor, Dr J of Heartlines - famous for his strategic public education on HIV/AIDS through the Soul City drama.



- d. The SACC toll-free number, 0800 111 114, that we previously used for people to report on corruption, now reactivated for people to report things to do with the lockdown:
- i. Gender Based Violence and domestic abuse;
  - ii. Abuse of power by security forces in their enforcement of the lockdown regulations - the Police or Soldiers.
  - iii. Traders and business inflating prices of goods for extra profit out of the Coronavirus situation.
  - iv. Service providers and government officials in corrupt relationships to defraud the State.

The SACC National Coordination Centre, which partners with the Government Joint Operations Centre, will liaise with the appropriate government office in regard to each of the above, and see to it that justice is done and seen to be done.

2. **Care:** With the multiplication of infected persons in the spread of the virus, there will be need for church care services. This may include opening of church infrastructure for testing sites in health services. There may be communities and families that will not be able to cope with the lockdown - people who live on what opportunities they can get from day to day, families of casual workers who are not paid when not working, day workers, street vendors, beggars, and many other categories of people whose source of living is in the daily opportunities and with that live from hand to mouth. The church communication platform will be used to surface these families at local level, and Government and aid organisations will be linked to, for emergency help. There will be very sick, and possibly dying people, and the church care ministry will need activation in ways that take the lockdown into account. In addition, mechanisms have to be found for the needy school children who have been sent home following closure of schools (their care, meals they got at school, education whilst at home, etc.), this in collaboration with the Dept. of Basic Education and of Social Development.
3. **Relief:** Churches in care and acts of mercy will be available to serve as relief centres for distribution and support for those in need - food, water, sanitisers, etc., whatever relief in support of government services during this time of need. Using church and community networks of communication, identify the most vulnerable and activate relief support for them.
4. **Support and advocacy:** This builds on the previous work and amplify any gap in support that needs to be given especially emotional and counselling services that might be needed by our health workers, security personnel and volunteers who are in the front lines of this fight against the pandemic. Linked to this is the work of advocacy for all who are involved especially the most vulnerable. The churches will advocate for those who may fall between the cracks of Government aid in these difficult times for all. Beyond the corona crisis, the church will need to have factored the need for support in ensuring the rebuilding of communities. And here we look to, among other things, promote and get underway programmes of community support for education and for aggressive economic and livelihoods development that ensures that communities contribute to inclusive growth. All this is facilitated through the creation of the Local Ecumenical Action Network by local churches.
5. **Local Ecumenical Action Networks (LEANs):** The LEAN, the most important feature of the SACC Corona Pastoral Plan, has its emphasis on ACTION, the "A" of the LEAN. The 10 or more congregations and their leaderships commit to be an active participant in the



ecumenical network, for the good of their area, which might be a ward, a village or a section of a township or suburb. Local ministers in many communities have an inter-denominational “Ministers Fraternal” of ministers of all churches of all traditions in that community, others have the old organisation of over 100 years, called IDAMASA (InterDenominational African Ministers Association of South Africa). These already create a foundation for the Local Ecumenical Action Network - LEAN.

There is a separate information sheet on creating the LEAN, which will be issued independently for its own special attention. But among the things we encourage to be done through the local network in this time of the corona crisis include:

- a. Identifying the most vulnerable families and persons - elderly, the destitute, people who live on casual or day work, homeless and beggars, people who have lost incomes as a result of the present situation, some of them vendors who sell in the street; all such people in the locality who need urgent support - food, blankets and warm clothing as we get to colder weeks (especially if lockdown is extended). These lists and their situations need to be collated and communicated to the SACC District Coordination of which the LEAN will be advised as soon as it is registered.
- b. Using the SACC WhatsApp Platform to communicate issues, concerns and challenges observed, raised and experienced by local communities.
- c. Setting up crisis relief mechanism that are appropriate for their area, in consultation with the District and National Coordination Centres.
- d. Setting up care centres that can be used by Health Authorities against the Coronavirus - tracking, testing, isolation and treatment of people.
- e. Setting up a Family Support Unit that includes people who can be trusted with internal family challenges, especially domestic abuse and violence. We anticipate an escalation of this scourge that has already defined South Africa in negative terms globally.
- f. Identifying and facilitating support for frontline workers on the coronavirus fight - such as health workers, police and military personnel living in the locality.
- g. Facilitating the capacitation for peace management in case of conflictual protests in the community.
- h. Invite other organised groups in the locality - stokvels, burial association, clubs, neighbourhood group, and any other social groups that wish to connect to the information system for this period.
- i. Setting up a matric student support system, and an ongoing Youth Educational Resource Centre, which the covenanting local churches in the LEAN, must pledge to support. This is described more fully further below.
- j. Facilitating and supporting economic and livelihoods development programmes.

Indeed, the lockdown of the country makes it impossible for the Church to worship in the manner it is used to do. It will force the Church to find new ways of worshipping God in the homes of the believers, as the early Church did. Those days the church was closed in by the fear of persecution, as much as today we are closed in by the fear of the spread of the virus. The state of persecution in the early church, gave the church a strong spirituality from which we continue to benefit. Likewise, it is the responsibility of our time to renew the spirituality of worshipping



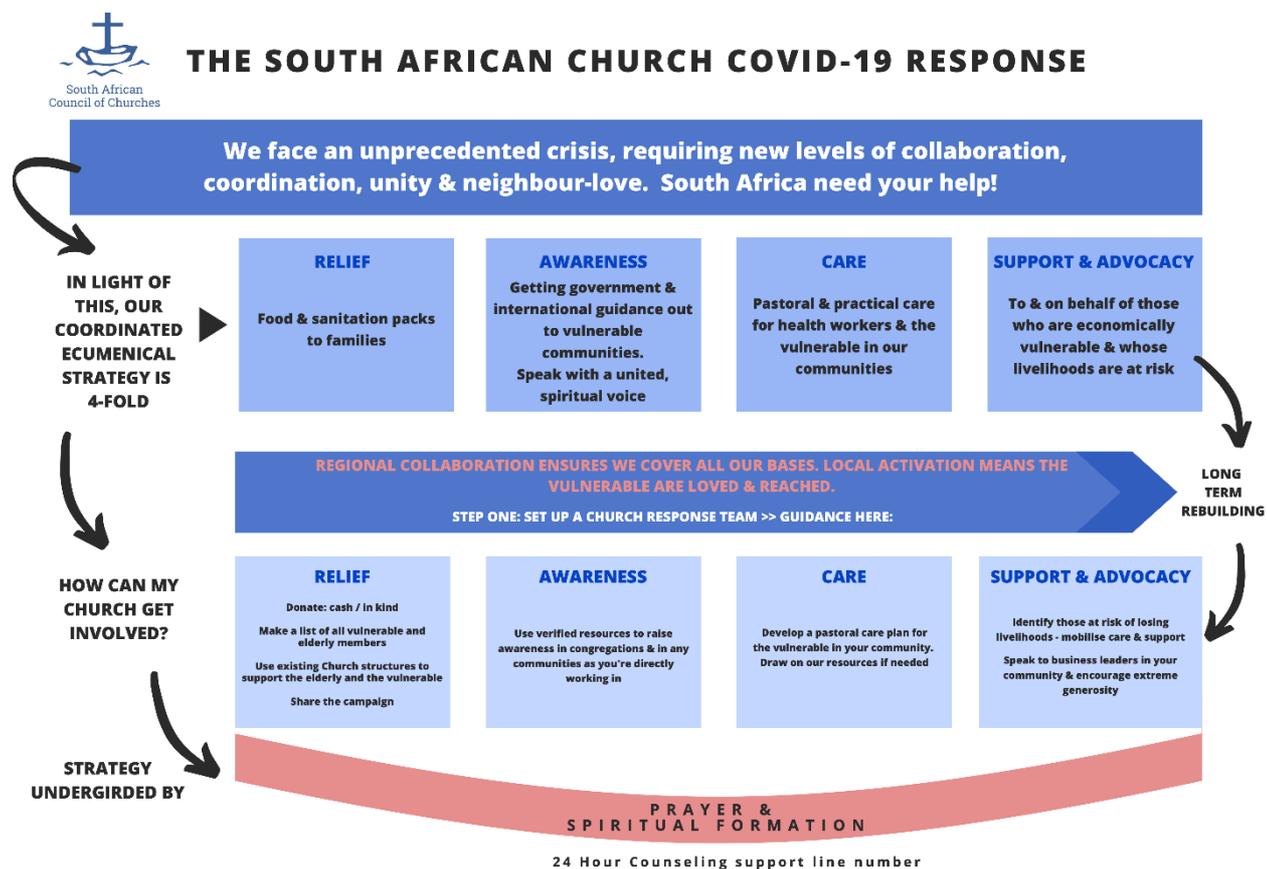
God where the people are, in their fear and anxiety; by sharing in their pain, and ministering to the faithful people of God, and their neighbours, in their homes and neighbourhoods.

6. **Take Action:** We seek to make request for the urgent things that we need the churches to help with, for this pastoral plan to best function for the benefit of our congregations and the people of the communities in which we live and worship. These include:
- a. That each congregation of our churches urgently creates a WhatsApp Group of all its members in the congregation, and to please include even those who are no longer active or participating in regular worship, and those who used to be in your church but are no longer even tithing. This communication is essentially to ensure that as many people in society, however remotely associated with us, are reached, in order to save lives. These WhatsApp Groups, with either directly, or through an administrator designated by the leadership of the congregation, will be linked to an SACC WhatsApp Platform to be used for daily health and Coronavirus updates, and messages from church leaders. **This we expect to launch by Monday April 6; and churches should aim to sign up from Tuesday April 7, in order for their communities to be attended.** Ready congregations should inform the **Secretariat, SACC National Coordination Centre, on support@sacc.org.za.**
  - b. That each member church sends to the SACC a list of its clergy with communication details - physical area, phone number and email address. These will be used for speedy communication that may have to do with any emergencies in the areas where they minister. Should there be, for example, an urgent need for a care centre in a particular area, where a sudden rise of infections is detected, we shall need to work with the known local church ministers as we partner with the health systems to address the emergency where testing sites may be required. Some local churches may have facilities that can serve as isolation sites when people who live in dense populations need isolation spaces, etc. We appeal to the church administrations to avail these **clergy data to the SACC by Wednesday April 8. Please, this must be sent to the the Secretariat, SACC National Coordination Centre, on support@sacc.org.za.**
  - c. A request for churches to participate in a 24/7 prayer chain that will be managed for the SACC. On this there will be further communication. We assume in the meantime, that Christians are continuously holding up the country, Africa and the world in your prayers; the frontline workers who risk their lives ministering to the needs of all of us, the government leaders who are constantly reviewing and deliberating on the national and global crisis. For, no doubt, this has a huge toll on all their lives as individuals and families. We request people in the various parts of the country who have the vocation of prayer and intercession, including convents and monasteries, to take up this prayer campaign for grace upon our country. That our people may have

the grace to unite behind the necessary practices that keep the virus at bay and keep people out of harm's way. **Those who wish to register as a part of the SACC Corona Prayer Brigade, please register with the Secretariat, SACC National Coordination Centre, on support@sacc.org.za.**

An important part of the plan is in the daily messages that church leaders and pastors will be giving to South Africans, including the abbreviated Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter messages next week. These will be on SABC 2, and on various SABC radio stations. Please urge the congregations to look out for them.

The graphic below is an abridged summary of the SACC pastoral plan:



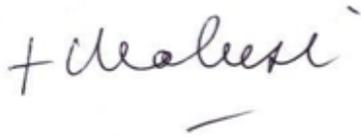
The SACC Corona Pastoral Plan invites us to serve our society through the communication and information platform; through the crisis relief; the pastoral care and support for rebuilding for a future beyond the virus attack. This is a tall order; but with St Paul we each can say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13) Indeed we are strengthened even more in the knowledge that Christ, who was the strength of Apostle Paul in all his travails, is with us today in the same through the coronavirus. The Lord's promise in Matthew is for us,



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for every member of every congregation of our churches: “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20b)

In Christ, for a Coronavirus-free society!



Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana  
General-Secretary, SACC.

