



ACSA COVID ADVISORY GUIDELINES

ADJUSTED LEVEL 3 - FEBRUARY 2021



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ACSA COVID ADVISORY TEAM - UPDATED 3 February 2021

THESE GUIDELINES TO REMAIN IN FORCE UNTIL REVISED

A. GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. The President of the Republic of South Africa announced that with effect from midnight on the 1st of February 2021, SA would move to adjusted Level 3 restrictions.
2. Our daily levels of new infections is the lowest since December 2020 and we seem to have passed the peak of the second wave. This is evidenced by the fact that hospital admissions have come down from 2300 per day and fallen to 295. This was based on information as at 29 January 2021. This indicates that we are effectively heading in right direction.
3. The shift in the high rates of infection is as a result of a combination of factors, not least of which is the voluntarily adherence to the health protocols by some of our members and wider society as well as a stricter enforcement regime being imposed by government.
4. These **MUST NOT** be relaxed or ignored as until we have obtained herd immunity, (when 67% of population vaccinated and our first batch of vaccines only arrived on the 1st of February 2021) we **MUST REMAIN VIGILANT**. We can still contract the virus should we fail to take care and follow protocols. We will provide further updates and information on the vaccination process and options to assist our members in making informed decisions.
5. The COVID virus and its mutations is part of the reality we have to contend with now and possibly for the next five to ten years.
6. There is also an ever-present danger of resurgence. The responsible behavior of every citizen, and in our case **every Anglican**, in respecting life by adhering to protocols and behaving responsibly in the use of alcohol and in avoiding circumstances that lead to spread of the virus, cannot be emphasized enough.
7. We are aware of families incurring crippling medical bills as a result of family holidays or get-togethers in hotspot areas, resulting in the entire family contracting COVID followed by multiple deaths. Even our clergy have not been exempted from this tragedy and this has added to the immense amount of grief currently being experienced. We have information that ACSA has lost 60 stipendiary clergy and the knock-on effect of loss of breadwinners, the burdens of funerals, have added to the hardship in society and a greater need for psychosocial support. The church is being looked at to step up in this regard.

8. While the prevention of certain activities and restricted freedoms are inconvenient, they are temporary and crippling, we need to remember that the loss of lifestyles and restrictions are temporary, the loss of life permanent
9. The negative impact on jobs not to continue beyond what is necessary and Government is committed to work with business and labour to restore jobs both immediately and in the long term.
10. In addition, the President also announced the plan and process for the roll-out of vaccines. We will provide a fuller and comprehensive document for reflection and engagement shortly, taking into account the various activities and positions presented to us to date.
11. **We must remember that the virus and its spread and impact is informed as events unfold. We need to remain agile in our response and try to keep updated with developments as they emerge. We are aware that these can appear confusing and contradictory, so we ask you to please bear with us and ensure you are using latest guidelines by referring to the website.**
12. While we had previously announced that churches are closed until further notice, the change in regulations and the advice of our COVID Advisory team, this position has been reviewed.
13. All places of worship and faith-based gathering are allowed **BUT**
 - a. Any and all faith-based gatherings are restricted to 50 persons inside, or 100 people outdoors (or 50% of what the venue can accommodate, whichever is smaller) with adherence to ALL protocols ALL the time. This number to include the altar parties.
 - i. Masks **MUST** be worn by all at all times and must cover, mouth chin and nose. Masks are not to be removed for any purpose.
 - ii. No singing is allowed, especially not by choirs.
 - iii. Surfaces must be sanitized during the service as needed. This includes microphones as well as lecterns or pulpits.
 - iv. If more than one service is to be held, the venue needs to be cleaned and sanitized before the next service.
 - v. In the event that a venue has not been used for at least 72 (seventy-two) consecutive hours, then a good clean is all that is needed.
 - vi. Screening of attendees to be done at the door or entrance. Any person coughing or showing signs of fever or difficulty breathing **MUST** be denied entry and either taken to an isolation room, returned home or sent to hospital. The same principal to be applied to people who answer any of screening questions in the positive and compliance officers to be vigilant in this regard.
 - vii. At least two compliance officers must be appointed in writing for each service.

- viii. The name of the officers and the maximum capacity of the gathering to be attached to outside of building and prominently displayed.
 - ix. The maximum number of attendees is 50, if building large enough to accommodate the 50 people with a social distance of 1,5 meters between them.
 - x. The number of persons gathered is 50 on the property and not 50 in the church and another 50 in the hall.
 - xi. All attendees to be seated at least 1,5m apart. This requirement even applies to family members as well as those living together. it is for everyone's safety and, difficult as it may be, applied at funerals too.
 - xii. If the building is too small to accommodate 50 persons with the requisite social distance, then the number is restricted to 50% of capacity, with a distance of 1,5 meters between parties.
 - xiii. Buildings must be well ventilated, and the time spent at the gathering to be limited. **Our standard, is a maximum of 1 hour.** The longer the time gathered, the higher the chance and likelihood of infection.
- b. Places of worship may be opened from Sunday the 7th of February 2021, **BUT**: only if the parish is able to comply with the safety requirements and health protocols in the available time.
 - c. Rectors or priests in charge, in consultation with the Archdeacon who must provide reasons to the Bishop, do not have to open if the area has had an outbreak or seen as a hotspot and the conditions on the ground, motivated of course, require that gatherings do not take place.
 - d. A change in curfew hours from 23:00 until 04:00 was announced.

B. IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCH AND WORSHIP

While we are not suspending the application of the Canons or Constitution of the Church, we are using a rather broad application of Article II to deal with issues as they arise.

We must appreciate that unusual circumstances prevail, and it will require that we respond practically and as responsibly with the available knowledge at our disposal, to make decisions which may require ratification at next PSC or Provincial Synod, and we need to ensure that they are properly tabled there, and adequately motivated.

The questions on everybody's mind are what happens for Vestry, Ash Wednesday, Bible Studies during Lent, Marriages, Baptisms, Confirmations, Ordinations and Licensing, Elective Assemblies and Funerals. We will deal

with each of these individually but again here are provisions that apply throughout.

- All health protocols to be adhered to at all times.
- No touching of priest to worshippers or worshippers to each other. The exceptions and requirements for each of these are detailed in each section.
- Compliance officers to be appointed for each gathering and must be able to enforce the rules.
- Admission to persons with fever, coughing etc. **must** be denied.
- Venues must be well ventilated despite the cold - ask people who attend to dress warmly.
- Time of gathering to be kept to shortest possible period. One hour max. (preach the good news in 8 minutes is what I was taught. CR Fathers, just saying).
- Spending time in closed spaces and crowded places increases the risk of spread - it is 20 times higher indoor rather than outdoors
- We may therefore want to seriously consider having services outdoors if our set up and logistics make it possible.
- Sunday Eucharist still only to have communion in one form.
- Celebrant to sanitize before communication and each parishioner to sanitize before receiving.
- **No singing** is permitted, although a soloist may perform, observing social distance and health protocols.
- Recorded music may be played
- Where possible, options for live streaming need to be explored. Each Diocese has been provided with a technological hub and creative ways of using this has to be explored.

C. VESTRY MEETINGS

- A. The Canons require that all vestry meetings must be held by no later than the 15th of March each year. (Canon 27)
- B. Most dioceses have rules that set out the quorum for a vestry which on average is about 10 persons, it is therefore possible for Vestry to be held. There are some logistical challenges with notice periods and times, and so in order to be practical and responsible, the following principles have been agreed to:
 - a. The need for an annual vestry meeting has been suspended for 2021.
 - b. In its place are the following requirements:
 - i. The Annual Parish Accounts and returns must be completed.
 - ii. The Wardens report also has to be prepared.

- iii. The Rector or Priest in Charge statement of needs also has to be prepared.
 - iv. As far as possible, these documents are to be either emailed or shared with the Parish through publications etc., but copies must be available on the notice boards.
 - v. All members of the Parish who are in leadership, either as priest, warden, councilor, worship leader etc., also need to complete the Safe and Inclusive Church Declaration. (Found on website under Safe and Inclusive Church heading.)
 - vi. All of the documents must be submitted to the Diocesan Office by no later than 15 March 2021.
- c. Parish Councils, including wardens, are to be retained en bloc, unless sound reason exists for this not to be the case.
 - d. Any person whose term of office is up and who wishes to continue serving, may do so with Bishop or Archdeacon approval.
 - e. Any vacancy on the Parish Council to be filled by co-option by the executive. Under these extraordinary circumstances, such co-opted members will have the right to speak and vote in order to see to the effective functioning and management of the Council.
 - f. Please check general notes on protocols and safety set out above.

D. ASH WEDNESDAY

- i) In most parishes, Ash Wednesday is usually the service that has the highest attendance.
- ii) This year, any service we have is reduced to maximum 50 or 50% of building size whichever is smaller. This number to include the altar party.
- iii) So, parish councils will have to decide how best this can be done given the curfew that is in place.
- iv) For 2021, Ash Wednesday will only have the distribution of the Ashes in the APB liturgy for administration of the Ashes outside of a Eucharist.
- v) Service must be limited to one hour.
- vi) No communion will be served.
- vii) No hymns will be sung but recorded music may be played.
- viii) The priest or minister will bless the ashes at the beginning of the service and then say to congregation “turn away from sin

and receive the good news or remember oh man that dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return”:

- ix) The priest or minister then to sanitize their hands and with no words being spoken, administer the ashes to the people through one of the following methods:
 - a. The faithful come in silence stand before the minister who without words, sprinkle a little Ash upon the head of the congregant who then returns to their seat.
 - b. Alternatively, to use **biodegradable** ear buds to ash the forehead, again with no words to be spoken.
- x) In instances where more than one service is not possible, we need to look at live streaming or online services and liturgy for home use to be made available.
- xi) Families may then symbolically mark their foreheads with a cross, or where tradition is very strong on ashes, families to be asked to prepare for the service by burning a piece of paper in dish or other receptacle, using care while burning and then using the cooled-down ashes to mark their foreheads.
- xii) Directives or guidance in this regard to be given by the Diocesan Bishop within the parameters outlined above.
- xiii) Regard must also be had to the legal provisions in other jurisdictions, as these may be more or less onerous in places.

E. BIBLE STUDIES, RETREATS AND LENT COURSES

- a) In-person courses and retreats are possible provided we stick to the numbers and health protocols and guidelines.
- b) Technology may also make it possible for councils to be innovative and groups can be organized on-line. Free zoom and team sessions are for 40 minutes so team leaders can be assigned and helped to plan within this time. This may make at home retreats or quiet mornings also possible.
- c) Every Diocese has been provided with a technical hub and trained operators. Consideration has to be given as to how these can be optimally used for Diocesan and other joint services. Imagine being able to attend morning and evening prayer led by the Bishop of even having a joint Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday and Easter service led by the Bishop and Dean.
- d) Doing things this way will also make it possible for people who don't come out at night or have family responsibilities, or those who have never been to a quiet morning or a retreat, to participate.

- e) Just requires some planning and creativity on part of parish leadership.
- f) Events can even be planned across archdeaconries and so increase the participation of more in the mission and ministry of the church.

E. MARRIAGES

- a) Marriages may be conducted in church under the strict guidelines and protocols as set out.
- b) Given the close proximity between priest and couple, a negative Covid test result not older than 48 hours must be produced by both officiant and the bridal couple.
- c) The bridal couple to do all the rites/symbols that require touching, the joining of hands with the stole, the lighting of candles etc., under direction of the priest.
- d) The rest of the bridal party to be positioned at least one-and-a-half metres apart.
- e) The couple may not remove their masks during the service as this is not recommended in terms of the health protocols for church.
- f) Witnesses who need to complete the register as well as other parties need to sanitize before and after signing and the pen used to be sanitized after each use. Register also to be wiped down - please don't erase other ink!
- g) The photo of the bridal couple immediately after the exchange of vows may be taken without masks with the priest and all other parties to be positioned at least two metres apart.
- h) Blessing of newly-married couple to be done with all parties masked and priest's hands to not touch the couple's heads.
- i) All other photos **MUST** have masks on when taken. Especially on church premises.
- j) Given the restrictions we have had, bishops to please consider having weddings during Lent and to also discuss the holding of weddings during Holy Week if necessary.
- k) Marriages to be conducted at venues other than churches require Bishop's permission and guidance as venues may not always be fully observant of regulations and this poses a risk to us as church and so it ought to be discouraged.
- l) Given the possibility of resurgence, this may be a short window to conduct them.

F. BAPTISMS

- a) Baptism may be conducted under the adjusted level 3.
- b) The number of persons to be baptized has to be reduced in order to keep attendees below 50 including altar party.
- c) The parents to hold the child being presented for baptism.
- d) The water of baptism to be blessed once and a special receptacle be used to catch the water that flows from the baby's (generally) head into the receptacle, so it does not return to font.
- e) Priest to sanitize hands before and after anointing each child.
- f) Candles to be set out individually for each child so no additional touching or handing out. Parent or godparent to take assigned candle and light it from the Easter candle.
- g) Parents to bring paper towels for use after baptism, which will be destroyed after use so special receptacle to be made available for this.
- h) Certificates to follow usual practice.
- i) Photographs not to be permitted as they make maintaining of social distance impossible.
- j) Church to appoint a single photographer with correct equipment to take pics at required social distance for close-ups.
- k) Again, priest to stand back and only parents to remove masks for single photo in church. Other photos to take place outside.
- l) No clergy to be seen in photos without masks being worn by all parties in picture.

G. CONFIRMATIONS , ORDINATIONS AND LICENCING

- a) Confirmation and Ordination services are permitted under the strictest guidelines and observances as prescribed for the rite of Baptism.
- b) Ordination to take place following the particular culture and practice of the Diocese concerned in terms of some of its customs, but the ordination itself has to follow the rites as prescribe in the Anglican Prayer Book and as part of our apostolic succession.
- c) Care however needs to be taken in terms of the prevailing Disaster Management Act Provisions and under the current alert level, indoor services are restricted to a maximum of 50 or 50% of the venue capacity whichever is smaller.
- d) Conditions and circumstances for the retreats of ordination candidates have been set out above.
- e) A negative COVID result, not older than 48 hours would need to be provided by all ordinands and retreat conductors prior to the start of the retreat. Venue to be big enough to be able to adhere to social distance and all other health protocols.

- f) The number of ordinands that can be present at any service is limited to the above restrictions in c) above and are further restricted by the fact that the Bishop, together with Chaplain, legal officers and the minimum number of priests needed for the ordination to be legal, also have to be included in the number present.
- g) Ordinations may also not be held in secret or discreetly as the Canons make provision for an objection to be raised to the ordination by any person who has cause to do so and who then needs to leave the room and be taken aside to hear the objection and follow necessary process as required.
- h) The ordinand is required to prostrate him or herself before the altar and so space needs to be made available for the necessary social distance during this rite too.
- i) All these requirements would strongly militate against ordinations taking place outdoors.
- j) The same provisions would apply to Confirmation and the same considerations have to be applied.
- k) It is suggested that a dropper is used for the oil and kneeling candidates hold outstretched hands. Three drops are posited with the words, "...in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit".
- l) There is therefore to be no "laying on of hands" under any circumstances.
- m) It is advisable that the Confirmation and Ordination Service is held on a Saturday and not a Sunday due to the restriction on numbers attending worship services.
- n) Careful planning and logistics is needed to ensure that we do not exceed the maximum number of attendees.
- o) Licensing of clergy and other ministers of the church need to follow the same protocols and we may need to have more than one service in order to accommodate the numbers and do due justice to this rite.

H. ELECTIVE ASSEMBLIES

The team is mindful of the hardship and challenges these present and a special meeting is being convened on the 5th of February to provide further guidelines and updates.

I. FUNERALS

- a. Funerals must be held in full compliance of all health protocols.
- b. A designated compliance officer must be appointed in writing.
- c. Attendance at funerals restricted to **50** if venue can accommodate 50 while maintaining a social distance of 1.5 m between all attendees.

- d. Smaller venues are restricted to 50% of capacity of the venue.
- e. These numbers to include ministers and altar parties.
- f. Masks **must** be worn at all times.
- g. **No singing** is permitted, although a soloist may perform, observing social distance and health protocols.
- h. Recorded music may be played.
- i. Funerals to be completed within **two hours**. One hour for the actual service and the next hour for the committal or cremation service.
- j. No night vigils or prayer meetings, or other services normally held before the funeral are allowed.
- k. When going to sympathize or express condolences to the family, please keep visit short, observe social distance, sanitize and wear a mask. These are hard asks of us all, but it is needed to save lives.
- l. No social gatherings to be held in the homes too.
- m. No after tears gatherings, including lunch or tea etc.
- n. Undertakers may have specific rules but the latest agreement with undertakers will be published on the website to assist all.
- o. The body of the deceased may/must enter the church unless good cause not to.
- p. This applies to all causes of death, including Covid.
- q. No special PPE needs to be worn to carry the coffin into the church and normal pall bearers may be used. Need to sanitize before and after.
- r. The face of the deceased may be viewed if precautions of a viewing window is available, - so a plastic or glass covering is needed to avoid any touching of the body of the deceased.
- s. Compliance officers need to be strict on this.
- t. At graveside, if at all possible, the last respects in terms of petals or handful of sand also needs sanitizer before and after.
- u. If burial, then if possible, get a grader to complete the filling of the grave.
- v. If going to use mourners to do so, then spade handles, and the hands of the diggers need to be sanitized before and after digging and filling.
- w. The same number who attended the funeral needs to attend the burial or cremation. Crematoria are often smaller than churches so this needs to be taken into account when planning.
- x. Police stations in some areas are requiring the affidavit we completed before again for their records, so please just check this out.
- y. In order to reduce pressure on mortuaries, every effort to be made to conduct **funeral within five days**.

J. CONCLUDING REMARKS

All the protocols and guidelines set out above apply to any faith-based gathering including farewell or welcoming services and we need to lead by example in following the guidelines.

Issued by ACSA COVID-19 ADVISORY TEAM

MEMBERS: Dr Arthur Manning, Dr Ashley Peterson, Canon Delene Mark, Judge Ian Farlam, Mr JJ Thabane, Dr Pampata Mbekeni. Bishop Raphael Hess, Ms Rosalie Manning

Additional guidance received from Chairperson of the Liturgical Committee, Bishop Eddie Daniels

3 February 2021