



ACSA COVID ADVISORY TEAM

Update 21 November 2021

Dear All

We trust that you are well and keeping safe and sane. Following Synod in September 2021, and the shift to adjusted level 1 with effect from the 1st of October 2021, we have had a number of requests re singing, the administration of the sacraments as well as the number of attendees at worship.

A. What do we know?

1. COVID is an airborne disease which means it is spread from our mouths (and noses) into the air and that is the manner in which others are infected.
2. The present variant in circulation has a high viral load- meaning more easily infected as a higher concentration of the virus in a droplet.
3. Singing and talking loudly means we project our voices so we also, if infected, will spread the virus across a wider area and infect a higher number of people.
4. The COVID protocols hence set out the wearing of face masks which cover the nose and mouth by all persons in public places, except those under the age of 6.
5. It also requires regular sanitizing of hands and surfaces, by either washing with soap and water or sanitizing with a substance that has an alcohol content of at least 70%. This action breaks down the fatty cover surrounding the virus and hence causes it to break down.
6. We also need to maintain a social distance of at least 1.5m from each other in public spaces at all times.
7. So, when we are seated in church, even as family members, we need to sit 1.5m from each other so that the distance between us and other worshippers is maintained.
8. Vaccination remains one of our best and strongest defenses against the virus.

9. At present, eighty nine thousand, five hundred and seventy four (89 574) people have died from COVID.¹ (FNB stadium has a capacity of 94 746 and Moses Mabida has a capacity of 55 500.)

10. The **Excess** death rate, which is a term used in epidemiology and public health that refers to the number of deaths from all causes during a crisis above and beyond what we would have expected to see under 'normal' conditions.¹ In this case, we're interested in how the number of deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic compares to the deaths we would have expected had the pandemic not occurred — a crucial quantity that cannot be known but can be estimated in several ways. **Excess deaths**

3 May 2020 - 23 Oct 2021- two hundred and sixty seven thousand, four hundred and twenty six. **(267 426)**²

11. The fourth wave of COVID infections is expected and while exact date not known, we need to do all we can to prevent it or at least limit its impact. As of today 21 November 2021, we have already seen an increase in the average 7 day infection rate. We are all feeling the fatigue of this pandemic and need to hear anew, as we heard sung for All Souls:

*"And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave, again, and arms are strong.
Alleluia, Alleluia!"*

B. What does all this mean for us?

- a) We must not become complacent and let down our guard. We are not out of the woods as yet.
- b) Only 23.1% of the population is vaccinated.
- c) All our clergy **MUST** be vaccinated if they wish to offer ministry. Final date for this is by 31 December 2021.
- d) We must do all we can to encourage our members to also be vaccinated.
- e) We must continue to follow the protocols and most importantly, obey the law.
- f) Our primary purpose remains to preach the love of Christ and care for our neighbours as we would for ourselves and do all we are able to do to save lives.

C. So what must we continue to do?

- a. Appoint two COVID officers per service
- b. Observe the protocols set out in the event that a parish wishes to sing.
- c. Set out the maximum venue capacity maintaining a distance of **3m**

¹ Covid updates Namola Dr Mpho 21 November 2021

² Statistics are from SAMRC and extracted on 2 November 2021.

<https://www.samrc.ac.za/reports/report-weekly-deaths-south-africa>

- d. Add in additional services to accommodate this.
- e. Follow and continue to practice the agreed protocols for COVID 19.
- f. Follow and obey the law.

D. What does the law require that we do?

- a. Each person responsible for a faith based or religious gathering is responsible for ensuring that the law and protocols are observed.
- b. Social distance of 1,5m to be observed if no singing taking place. 3m if going to sing- additional services will have to be considered.
- c. All members including family members to be seated at least 1,5m apart. 3m if singing.
- d. Venue maximum capacity to be determined and the number present at a gathering must not exceed this number.
- e. A register of attendees to be kept and may only be destroyed once the National State of Disaster has been lifted and must be securely protected and then safely destroyed once told to do so. The ACSA Advisory team will send out guidelines in this regard.

E. So what about singing?

A special note on how singing can be done responsibly has been prepared and is available on the website.- Final Guidelines on Singing

- a. Places of worship have been opened since Sunday the 7th of February 2021, and remain open **BUT**: only if the parish is able to comply with the safety requirements and health protocols in the available time.
- b. 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.
- c. A change in curfew hours from 00:00 until 04:00 was announced- this has an impact for Midnight Mass and other events we normally start to prepare for at the start of our liturgical year.
- d. Infection rates in Europe and USA have started to climb and with travel being opened, likely to see climb in infection rates here too.

A. 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 is what happens for Advent, Christmas, 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 (temperature above 37,5 degrees), coughing etc. **must** be denied.
- Venues must be well ventilated despite the weather- ask people who attend to dress appropriately.
- 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 sanitise before communication and each parishioner to sanitise before receiving.
- **Singing guidelines** to be observed or .
- Recorded music may be played

I. 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, appropriate measures to be put in place to ensure safety of all. Minister to be fully vaccinated.
- 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,
- d) The rest of the bridal party to be positioned at least one and a half meters apart.
- e) If the couple wish to remove their masks for the exchanging of vows, the cleric to stand at least two meters away from them.
- f) Please keep this distance when “you may kiss the bride” happens!
- g) Witnesses who need to complete 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!
- h) The photo immediately after the exchange of vows may be taken without masks with the priest and all other parties two meters apart.
- i) Blessing of newly married couple to be done with all parties masked and priests hands to not touch the couples heads.
- j) All other photos MUST have masks on when taken. Especially on church premises.
- 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 at church and so it ought to be discouraged.

IV BAPTISMS

- a) Baptism may be conducted.
- b) The number of persons to be baptized has to be reduced in order to keep attendees to maximum capacity, 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 babies(generally) head into the receptacle so it does not return to font.
- e) Priest to sanitise 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 god parent 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 to please be kept to a minimum and to observe all health protocols.
- j) Church to appoint 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.

V. CONFIRMATIONS , ORDINATIONS AND LICENCING

These are to be conducted following accepted protocols and guidelines. Bishop and ordained must be fully vaccinated. Those to be ordained also required to vaccinate.

VI ELECTIVE ASSEMBLIES

These will continue to be held as per the established guidelines.

VII FUNERALS

- I. Funerals must be held in full compliance of all health protocols.
- II. A designated compliance officer must be appointed in writing.
- III. Attendance at funerals restricted to **100** if venue can accommodate 100 while maintaining a social distance of 1.5 m between all attendees.
- IV. Smaller venues are restricted to 50% of capacity of the venue.
- V. These numbers to include ministers and altar parties.
- VI. Masks **must** be worn at all times.
- VII. **No singing** is permitted, although a soloist may perform, observing social distance and health protocols. Should singing be required, then the guidelines for singing to be observed which would reduce the permitted number of attendees by 50%!
- VIII. Recorded music may be played.
- IX. Funerals to be completed within **two hours**. One hour for the actual service and the next hour for the committal or cremation service.
- X. No night vigils or prayer meetings, or other services normally held before the funeral are allowed.
- XI. 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.
- XII. No social gatherings to be held in the homes too.
- XIII. No after tears gatherings, including lunch or tea etc.
- XIV. Undertakers may have specific rules but the latest agreement with undertakers will be published on the website to assist all.

- XV. The body of the deceased may/must enter the church unless good cause not to.
- XVI. This applies to all causes of death, including Covid.
- XVII. No special PPE needs to be worn to carry the coffin into the church and normal pall bearers may be used. Need to sanitise before and after.
- XVIII. The face of the deceased may be viewed so a plastic or glass covering is needed to avoid any touching of the body of the deceased.
- XIX. Compliance officers need to be strict on this.
- XX. At graveside, if at all possible, the last respects in terms of petals or handful of sand also needs sanitizer before and after.
- XXI. If burial, then if possible, get a grader to complete the filling of the grave.
- XXII. 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.
- XXIII. 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.
- XXIV. Police stations in some areas are requiring the affidavit we completed before again for their records, so please just check this out.
- XXV. In order to reduce pressure on mortuaries, every effort to be made to conduct **funeral within five days**.

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