

Diocese of Pretoria



237 Francis Baard Street
Pretoria, 0002
PO Box 1032, Pretoria 0001
Website:
<http://www.dioceseofpretoria.org>

Tel: (012) 430 2345
Fax: 086 273 4297
E-mail:
ptabish@dioceseofpretoria.org

Anglican Church of Southern Africa

The Right Reverend Allan John Kannemeyer, Bishop

19 March 2020

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

A PASTORAL LETTER on COVID-19

Lenten Greetings to you all

We find ourselves in a time of great anxiety as a result of the Corona Virus. I write to extend a reassuring word, to appeal for calm, and to announce the decisions we were led to make to help us navigate these difficult times. Remember firstly, that through our Baptism we have become children of God the Father, and we must be mindful of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Remember, I am with you, always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). St Paul, who lived through a great deal of trial and tribulation, was convinced that God is faithful, and that God will not test us beyond what we can endure. This time calls for us to be blessed with a faith that can endure.

Remember also, that we have had global pandemics before. We're still recovering from the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the Spanish Flu pandemic wrought havoc amongst South Africans in 1918. I was reminded in a social media post about the words of the great Reformer Martin Luther during the Bubonic Plague: *"I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated or inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence."* Almost 60% of the population of Europe died during the Bubonic Plague. Martin Luther was not one of them. He died of a stroke.

Prevention is better than cure. Martin Luther did what he could to avoid contamination. We are called upon to do the same. We advise therefore that the protocols which President Ramaphosa and Archbishop Makgoba announced should be observed. They are meant to preserve life. Our own protocols, given below, seek to build on this and to spell out how our common life is affected. A meeting of the Diocesan Executive Committee, including all the Archdeacons, decided upon the measures below. These measures address our church life and are in addition to the attached measures.

You are encouraged to find creative ways of getting this information to our members before the assemblies of the faithful on Sunday.

1. The Cancellation of all non-essential meetings. This will include:

- (a) No Cluster or combined services are to be held.
- (b) Consideration should be given to Morning Prayer in the place of the usual Eucharist.
- (b) All Diocesan, Parish & Organisational meetings, including youth gatherings are cancelled. Only the Parish Executive Committee (Exco), if required, may meet with the proviso that this involve very few people. This measure includes suspending Vestry, Parish Council, and Guild meetings at branch or diocesan level.

We will drink from these wells.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42)



- (d) We recommend the use of social media to make sermons available where possible.
- (e) The installation services of Fr Duncan (Garsfontein) and Fr Caesar (Lynnwood) are postponed until further notice.
- (f) The Lady Day celebrations of the Mothers' Union is cancelled.
- (g) The special Maundy Thursday service to which the Widows and Widowers of the clergy of the Diocese have been invited by the Bishop is cancelled. The Awarding of the Order of St Alban the Martyr was going to be made to Mrs Lucy Motloi on the same day. This event is also postponed until further notice.
- (g) Confirmation and Baptism Classes are suspended.

2. Church Services

- (a) All services of worship should last for an hour or less.
- (b) Reduce the number of people in the vestry and in the sanctuary to a maximum of two, i.e. a priest and one lay minister or two lay ministers. This means the usual procession, incense, acolytes, etc. are not used until further notice.
- (c) We are asked to keep our numbers in any service down to 100. This is going to be challenging but not impossible. Should your normal Sunday service exceed 100 people we request the introduction of extra services of no more than 100 people in each, as well as encouraging parishioners to attend mid-week services. A card system should be developed to ensure that we do not exceed the 100 total and to make sure that we practice safe social distancing. Parish Executive Committees must apply themselves to this measure to determine what would work best in their particular circumstances. It is best to keep the children at home.
- (d) Confirmation and Baptism Services are postponed until after Easter. Emergency Baptism is allowed.
- (e) The Bishop's visitations to parishes will cease. Instead the Bishop may arrive unannounced to take a service where it is needed.
- (f) The 100 limit applies to funerals as well. Again, Parish Executive Committees must apply themselves to this measure to determine what would work best in their particular circumstances.
- (g) Holy Week: Cancel the Palm Sunday procession this year. Cancel the traditional foot washing on Maundy Thursday. Limit the Good Friday Devotion to one hour, and have the same service every hour for three hours. Cancel the traditional all night Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday evening. Do multiple Easter services so that parishioners are spread.

3. Communication

Communication and quick access to credible information is key. Parishes are encouraged to set up e-mail groups, WhatsApp Groups, Facebook pages, and other means to distribute communications from the Diocese and elsewhere quickly and efficiently. We cannot wait for Sundays to give notices. Do appoint a communication officer to see to this.

People who have flu-like symptoms must stay at home and are encouraged to self-quarantine. Take care not to fall for 'fake news'. Verify the claims made on social media platforms. Make sure your snippets are true before you press the forward button.

4. Conclusion

The above measures will be in place until further notice. The time that we are in should bring the best in us to surface. Have a heart for those who are less fortunate than yourself. Self-centred-ness may make this pandemic much worse than it actually is. Exercise the compassion of Christ.

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York, in a pastoral letter to the Church of England, wrote that it was now necessary to put public services on hold in England. But they said that far from having to 'shut up shop', the Church of England must face the challenge (of COVID-19) by becoming a radically different kind of church rooted in prayer and serving others. We are not in total lockdown (yet), but we are deeply affected, and we will do well to begin to explore ways of exercising our faith in ways other than the usual trip to church on a Sunday.

Please note that if we fail to adhere to the basic precautionary measures herein, we may see rapid contamination and will be forced to live in total lockdown or a state of emergency.
Keep up the prayers.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

In the love of Christ and with much compassion

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Allan Pretoria". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name.

The Rt Revd AJ Kannemeyer
Bishop of Pretoria