



Dear Southern Africa Union Conference (SAU)
Constituency

INTRODUCTION

The impact of and the threat posed by COVID-19 has become a reality for members within the SAU territory (eSwatini, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa). That which was once a foreign health issue has now, unfortunately, become our dilemma too. The impact and risk are real, not only from a public health but also an economic perspective. Countries like the United States of America, China, Italy and many others are battling to contain the spread of the virus and to reduce its impact. However, notwithstanding their efforts the virus is continuing to find its way into unaffected areas and it is having a negative impact on the lives of thousands of people. As a church, we cannot ignore our duty of care and responsibility to our countries and community. We must do our part in combatting COVID-19. In the circumstances like these, health and life are dependent on responsible and prudent preventative measures implemented by all for all. We want to echo the sentiments raised by the South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa, that as a people we need to stand together to protect and care for one another. As a Church we realise and confirm that we are indeed our brother's keeper and that we cannot neglect our God-given responsibilities. It is our hope that as a religious community the Seventh-day Adventist Church will make use of this unfortunate circumstance to lift up the name of our Saviour not only through our care for those in need of help and assistance but also through the responsible manner in which we give effect to the mechanisms imposed by our governments to contain the spread of COVID-19.

On March 15, 2020, a national state of disaster was declared in South Africa, and certain mechanisms imposed in order to address the issue at hand. As a Church, we confirm our support for these mechanisms and humbly request all of our members, churches and sub-organisations to adhere and give effect to these mechanisms. It is of utmost importance that our organisation is not seen as being indifferent to the directives given and that we regard the matter with the seriousness that it deserves.

Weekly our organisation is engaged in public events, meetings, outreach and educational programmes which draw a number of people together from various directions. Factually, we know that COVID-19 is spread through human to human contact and the only way, at this point in time, to reduce the infection rate is to limit human to human contact as far as possible. In order to assist our organisation in its various branches to implement the directives relevant to the activities of our organisation the following directives are issued and it is again humbly requested that these directives be adhered to in order to comply with the governmental



mechanisms which are relevant to the Church. Our directives will only deal with the most relevant mechanisms which impact our organisation but we want to remind our members that compliance with all of the mechanisms given by government are important and those mechanisms that are not specifically addressed in this letter must not be regarded or construed as unimportant or unnecessary.

RELEVANT PREVENTATIVE MEASURES OR MECHANISMS

The most relevant mechanisms and the SAU directives relating thereto are captured below. The list of directives and recommendations are not exhaustive and conferences, local churches and other organizations are allowed to adapt the list to meet their specific circumstances as long as the mechanisms of government are given effect to thereby. It is realised that the SAU operates within four territories namely, Namibia, Lesotho, eSwatini and South Africa. The directives and recommendations below are based on the South African model. Organisations and churches operating outside of South Africa must therefore and at all times adhere to the mechanisms imposed by their respective governments.

1. Gatherings of a 100 people or more prohibited

No gatherings of churches with an attendance of more than 100 people are allowed. If the relevant churches want to continue worshiping on Sabbath it is recommended that these churches make use of cell groups or other alternative measures to achieve this goal. For example, provide two or three time slots for services (morning, noon and afternoon) and divide the church membership into groups and designate a worship time slot to each group. Please remember that after each service care should be taken to properly sanitize the church venue.

When applying the above alternative measures for worship, care should be taken and proper measures be put in place by all churches for the collection of tithe and offerings to ensure that these funds are properly accounted for. It is recommended that where possible, members make use of bank electronic fund transfers.

Further, and with immediate effect, all camp meetings and other big gatherings planned to be held within the next 2 months will need to be cancelled.

Please be reminded that the above directives should not be construed as a bar or restriction on evangelistic outreach programmes where the groups are small in



number. Our churches are encouraged to continue with these programmes and other forms of evangelism like leaflet distribution, personal Bible studies, and so forth.

2. All visits to correctional services suspended for 30 days until further notice

All church or individual member outreach programmes relating to Correctional Services are hereby required to be suspended until further notice. Local church pastors should ensure that their members are reminded of this regulation and be encouraged to abide by the restriction.

3. Church schools should be closed temporarily

All South African SDA Schools should be closed as of 18 March 2020 until after the Easter weekend. Therefore, there will be no school activities until the re-opening of the schools. This includes aftercare programmes, after-school classes, sports activities, and so forth. Local pastors must please ensure that their members are made aware of this restriction and directive must also be shared with all SDA school principals. Schools in other territories should follow their government directives.

4. Domestic travel discouraged

Travel relating to church activities within the SDA church is strongly discouraged. Church choirs and members who have been requested to present programmes in other churches should be discouraged from doing so until further notice.

5. Organisational gatherings and departmental activities

Please note that all SAU departmental activities/programmes that involve the travel of the participants by air, rail, bus or taxi have been postponed until further notice. You will be informed by the relevant SAU departmental directors as to whether the specific activities or programmes will be held by way of some electronic format. We recommend that our conferences and other sub-organisations follow the action of the SAU in regard to their planned departmental and other activities.



COVID-19 guidelines are subject to change as the circumstances within the SAU territory change.

In general all churches, notwithstanding the size of the church membership, must take steps to intensify hygiene control by providing hand sanitizer, soap and washing facilities to their members. All church buildings must also at all times be properly ventilated in order to reduce the risk of infection. During church services personal contact should be avoided as far as possible and seating arrangements be of such a nature that a proper distance between members are kept in order to minimise or prevent the spread of the disease. We realise that there are many more steps that can be taken to prevent infection and we leave it to the judgement of the various role players to decide what additional steps they will implement to protect their members. The recommendations provided in this letter should thus be seen as the bare minimum requirements.

Members who are experiencing flu-like symptoms should refrain from attending any church activities until they have fully recovered from their illness.

In order to avoid incorrect information being spread it is recommended that our members make use of credible sources when seeking to update themselves on the latest developments, like the World Health Organisation and governmental circulars and announcements.

CONCLUSION

During this unprecedented time of COVID-19, let us appeal to our loving Heavenly Father to guide us and help us. May we be the hands of Jesus to help our neighbours who are struggling. May we have faith and trust in Jesus to carry us through any difficulties. As we near the end of time, we know that more and more difficulties will arise. This is a time to come close to God -- He will carry us through!

Ps David Spencer
SAU President