



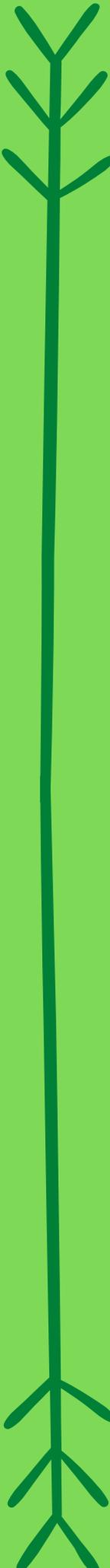
URCSA CAPE REGIONAL SYNOD

*From: MINISTERS IN SYNODICAL SERVICE (MSS)
COORDINATION FORUM*



**To: CHURCH COUNCILS AND
MINISTERS OF URCSA CAPE
CONGREGATIONS**





Dearly Beloved

We greet you in the name of our tri-une God.

We are writing this circular to you in times that pose a context and challenges that were unthinkable two months ago. The vital question for the church and for our Regional Synod and its congregations in particular is, how we will respond and organise ourselves to ensure that we all stay focused and keep on with our indispensable service and witness as congregations?

Let us be clear, beloved, it will get worse before it will get better. The next curve will be growing with a (third) wave of (internal) infections. Because of this, it is expected that mass pressure on the health services profession, trauma and bereavement counselling and rituals to lay the loved ones to rest, will become key issues to address.

This week the Ministers in Synodical Services and the chairpersons of core and supportive ministries of Synod met to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic and its challenges and to agree on a coordinated synodical response to support our congregations and ministers in your local task, service, and witness.

The following action plans have been put in place:



1. Food security

Food security is one of the biggest challenges facing our congregations and communities. From the “Ramphulpfonds” of the DRCA and URCSA, which we will also strengthen via our Central Fund, we will make money available for congregations who have projects in place to help feed the hungry.

Click [HERE](#) for **the applicable form**, complete and send to Rev. Sean Esterhuizen at the office of Diaconia (sean@kaapkerk.co.za).

We call on ministers and congregations to follow the guidelines of Diaconia's COVID-19 Disaster Strategy, click [HERE](#). It is based on the Local Ecumenical Action Network (LEAN) Starter pack of the South African Council of Churches (SACC). With these synodical guidelines we encourage our congregations to form networks with other denominations, businesses, farmers, NGOs like BADISA on local level to address the humanitarian needs collectively, effectively, transparently, and urgently. We advise that these Local Ecumenical Action Network should, where practically possible, rather give vouchers to buy food instead of food parcels.

2. Roll out and strengthening of the Central Fund

Our Regional Synod decided that the core ministries and SMFA should set up a fund to assist congregations who call a proponent and to investigate the establishment of a central fund to broaden the scope of the assistance and the support of the salaries of our ministers.

We agree that now is the time that we should continue with the establishment and strengthening of this fund.

Diaconia and Witness Ministry have contributed to the fund. We are aware that a number of congregations may not be able to pay their ministers at the end of May. The fund will be able to contribute to the salaries of 30 to 40 ministers in this regard. Click [HERE](#) for the document for congregations to apply to this fund.

To strengthen the Central Fund further and to **make it sustainable**, we are also officially informing all congregations of the **1 000-member project**.

The 1 000-member project calls upon at least 3 members of all our 320 congregations to give between R100 and R500 for 3, 6 or 12 months.

Click [HERE](#) for the **official form that the member must complete and send to the CEO at our Synodical office, Rev. Godfrey Baartman (ceo@vgksa.org.za), where the Central Fund will be administered.**

A monthly report will be sent to all members who make contributions to the fund. The Ministers in Synodical Service (MSSs) will take the lead by pledging R300,00 each for 6 months. We also call upon the members of our church who are from the business sector to donate into the Central Fund. Apart from the 1 000-member project, ministers and members may also make a once off offering/donation to the Central Fund.

The details of the fund are

Bank: Absa

Name of Account: VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland

Account Number: 340581393

Reference: "COVID-19 Central Fund" and your name.



This project will also enable us to contribute to the "Ramphulpfonds" of Diaconia that supports congregations in addressing the humanitarian needs within their communities.

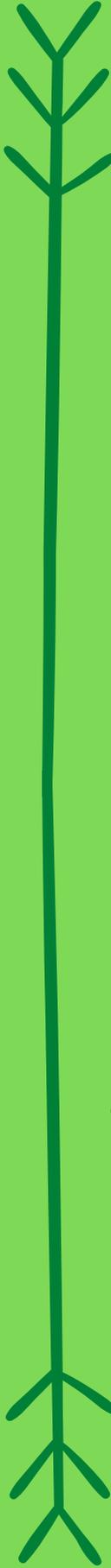
3. Pastoral care and accompaniment of ministers and their families.

Congregational Ministry, in cooperation with Service and Witness, will put concrete and clear actions in place for the pastoral care of our ministers and their families in these trying times of disruption.

Congregational Ministry will contact all presbyteries within days to set up ZOOM conferences with the aim of getting information on the position, needs and concerns of every congregation and to ensure that we have continuous communication with our congregations, to support church councils and the ministers and their families to the best of our ability. This pastoral care will be administered online via group counselling and/or individual counselling.



4. Rebuilding and strengthening of communication structures in the church



This is the time where we realise that we cannot afford to be like islands on our own anymore. We must work together to flatten the curve and push back the devastation COVID-19 can cause. A vital part of teamwork is to have a strong, effective, and active COMMUNICATION structure or system between Synod, presbyteries and congregations. This culture of building and strengthening our communication starts with small actions like immediate response to correspondence via post, email, or WhatsApp, submitting of forms (e.g. applications and reports) timeously, etc. Congregations who are not online and do not have email addresses are called upon to attend to this as a matter of life and death.

Please contact the office of Rev. Stephen Pedro of Congregational Witness (stephen@kaapkerk.co.za) if you need help to start up and set up internet and email. We are in this together and we need to be on the same page as a matter of urgency.

5. Let us avail our training and expertise for our communities

We call upon our members/congregants from the different sectors of society to avail their time, training, and expertise to strengthen the support structures within their communities. Do not wait to be invited or enquired; explore the community landscape, do research what is happening already and get involved.

6. Financial Matters

6.1 Synodical Offerings

Suggestions have been made that Synod should suspend synodical offerings for congregations for the time being.

However, against the backdrop of the big outstanding amount from congregations, doing this would plunge the administration of Synod's programmes, as well as the new initiatives mentioned above, into dire straits. We do understand the heavy burden this pandemic is putting on all our resources, and it will do so for the next year, but we must look at other alternatives to accommodate such a proposal.

Congregations who are in a sound financial position are requested to keep up with the synodical levies and support each other on presbyterial level.

6.2 Belhar Pension Fund

Ministers and church councils are encouraged to contact the Belhar Pension Fund at belharpf@vgksa.org.za, if they are not able to comply with the payment of current premiums.

6.3 PAYE and UIF

In the event of a reduction in salaries, the PAYE and UIF deductions will be adjusted accordingly, and need to be paid to SARS as per usual. SARS suspended penalties and interests on late payments for a period of three months. We encourage congregations, however, to keep up with these fiduciary payments, since history has taught us that it is difficult to recover from accumulated debt.

To draw from the benefits provided by the UIF fund, congregations must be up to date with their payments. Since every congregation is individually registered with SARS, each congregation must apply by themselves for such benefits.

