

# Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

*Regional Synod Cape – ISinodi-phondo – LaseKapa*

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## PASTORAL LETTER – 26 MARCH 2020

### COVID-19, STATE OF DISASTER, NATIONAL LOCKDOWN

*For Attention: Ministers, Church Councils, Congregations*

We greet you in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we stand on the promises of God in trying and challenging times like this.

On Monday 23 March 2020 President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a National Lockdown of 21 days following the declaration of a National State of Disaster a week earlier. The lockdown is set to begin at 23:59 on Thursday 26 March 2020 and end on 16 April 2020. It was done to contain the spread of the virus and to “flatten the curve”.

The Moderamen would like to congratulate our President, Cabinet, as well as all the officials and advisors for their incredibly strong and clear leadership in dealing with the pandemic.

The lockdown and accompanying regulations will impact almost every sector of society, including the church. In this particular situation, the Moderamen would like to convey the following message to you:

1. We are aware of the fact that a situation like this presents us with an entirely new set of challenges. These are indeed ‘unchartered waters’ and together we will have to navigate through it, interdependently utilising our collective experience and wisdom.
2. The impact of this virus on faith communities is already enormous. All of a sudden, we had to suspend our joint worship services, restrict the attendance at funeral services and postpone baptismal and communion services.
3. This is a time to learn from faith communities who over the course of history had to deal with severe crises, including pandemics, and drink from the wells of our ancestors and forebears. The Word of God remains a lamp for our feet and a light for our paths – let us seek guidance from it. Let us intensify our prayers to ask for Divine protection and intervention.
4. We would like to strongly appeal to you to adhere to the regulations prescribed by the government. At the bottom line of these drastic measures is an attempt to protect and preserve LIFE. We are reminded of the fact that one of our most fundamental theological principles is that we believe in the sanctity of life, life as a gift from God.
5. This situation is forcing all of us to reflect, to re-evaluate, re-align, re-learn, refresh and re-commit to the mission of God and Christ in this world. Fellowship and communication are taking on new and exciting modes; neglected core elements of being church are being re-appreciated and re-visited; we are becoming more aware of the importance and quality of relationships, etc. Yes, we are forced to ask questions, to look and seek deeper than the obvious.
6. We would like to appeal to ministers to continue to share inspirational messages, sermons, Bible studies and prayers with others as far and wide as possible. Let us rather spoil people

with choices and options, than starve them through a lack of spiritual resources. At the same time, we would also like to encourage members to appreciate and practice the gift of silence and quiet time.

7. We urge ministers, members and congregations to support our website and social media platforms – Like our Facebook page at (<https://www.facebook.com/URCSACAPE/>) and add us on Twitter (@urcsa\_cape – only 198 followers!) to stay updated with all the latest church news and announcements.
8. Special attention should be given to the most vulnerable members of our congregations and communities – the sick, elderly, needy, unemployed, etc. Our ministry of compassion and care should be sharpened and done in innovative and creative ways. Caring for the Elderly falls under essential services that can continue (“Care services and social relief of distress provided to older persons, mentally ill, persons with disabilities, the sick, and children” - Annexure B, B.10). It seems that the minister can give such a letter of authority (Annexure C, Form 1) to someone responsible for providing care services to older persons, people with disabilities, sick people and children.
9. Telephonic contact and electronic messaging will be the most important means of pastoral care for this period.
10. Funerals are allowed, but only 50 persons may attend a funeral service. No vigils will be allowed and all safety measures must be strictly adhered to. The measures already announced are valid - these will be discussed with you by your minister (Chapter 2, Restriction of movement of persons and goods, point 8 of the Disaster Management Regulations published in the Government Gazette on 25 March 2020). It is advisable to consult your nearest SAPS or Municipality.
11. We emphasise the importance of building and re-building healthy families and homes during the lockdown and pray that this will have lasting fruit.
12. Please join us in praying for:
  - our government and governments worldwide, government officials and staff in various departments;
  - everyone who will be at work rendering essential services – medical and related professions, security sector, retail sector, banking, transport, etc.
  - people infected and affected by the virus, globally;
  - the most vulnerable in our congregations and communities.

May we be encouraged and strengthened by the many promises of our God found in the Holy Scriptures. May each one of us and our loved ones continue to dwell in the shelter of the Most High and find rest in the shadow of the Almighty, as we declare: **The Lord is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust” (cf. Psalm 91).**

#### **The Cape Regional Synod Moderamen**

**Rev Dr LLM Macmaster**

**Rev E Vinqi**

**Rev HH Tromp**

**Rev LL Plaatjie**

**Rev Prof MA Plaatjies Van Huffel**

**Rev J Williams**

**Elder NM Mplatyi**

**Elder SS Dandala**