



MEDIA RELEASE

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DIACONIA LAUNCHES STRATEGY FOR DISASTER RELIEF

Diaconia, the joint compassion ministry of the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Western Cape and the Uniting Reformed Church Cape Region Synod, have announced their disaster relief strategy to improve food security and humanitarian aid in the province. This announcement follows despite that several congregations throughout the region have already been involved with aid initiatives since the start of lockdown.

The synodical strategy functions at multiple levels and is aligned with guidelines from national government, as well as the consensus of the South African Council of Churches that local ecumenical action networks are the most effective way to address urgent need in a sustainable manner. The strategy depends on the cooperation of local government through the Department of Social Development, faith-based and ecumenical networks as well as charities and non-profit organisations.

Nelis Janse van Rensburg, chairperson of the moderation of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, states that the extent and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will only increase in coming weeks. "Although congregations and individuals are already doing unbelievable work, the time has come for the church in South Africa to make a collective effort to join forces to assist our people in need and to ease their suffering. We have a responsibility to address the extensive need and to make a real difference. We shall be coordinating the various disaster relief efforts to tap into more resources and to provide relief where it is most urgently needed. We call on congregations and their members to contribute to the disaster relief fund where possible and to support this joint project. This will enable us to embody the compassion that lies at the heart of our existence as church."

According to Nioma Venter of Diaconia, the strategy is aimed at identifying the most pressing areas of need and to activate local networks to render aid in those areas. "The guiding principle of our strategy is to help our congregations to translate their calling and willingness to serve in the most efficient way. We would like to support the national government's initiatives for food security and practical aid through our existing networks. However, we also have to be aware the substantial differences between how rural and metropolitan communities function."

Venter reiterates that no individual congregation can sustain long-term disaster relief, but that the DRC and URCSA have an extensive footprint and presence in every community in the country. “We therefore call on our congregations to join coordinated reaction teams in each town or to take initiative to start forming such networks where they don’t exist.

Urgent reports from communities throughout the synodical region highlight the growing and increasingly critical demand for comprehensive humanitarian interventions. Diaconia aims to optimise existing networks, to compile an extensive database of resources and needs and to find a practical way to coordinate disaster relief and pastoral care.

According to Sean Esterhuizen of Diaconia, it is vitally important that each congregation compiles a need analysis within their specific community. This database should then be correlated with those of local disaster relief structures and religious networks. “Thereafter specific relief options such as food parcels, food coupons or the provision of prepared meals can be considered. If we can combine our available resources with the larger intervention initiatives from government departments and community organisations, the religious community can make a significant contribution to establishing food security and to protect our most vulnerable communities.” Esterhuizen also reminds congregations that they can apply to the Diaconia Relief Fund for financial support by sending an e-mail to Ria at diaconia@kaapkerk.co.za.

Llewellyn MacMaster, moderator of the URCSA Cape Region Synod, confirms that the COVID-19 situation has exposed several fault lines in the broader South African society in terms of poverty, inequality and unemployment. “The ripple effect of the crisis can be felt everywhere, but the hunger of our people is heart wrenching. Everyone is trying to make a contribution, but it feels as if we are drowning in a sea of indigence. Simultaneously, we also have to remain sensitive to other equally pressing needs such as pastoral care as well as spiritual guidance and support for our most vulnerable people.”

For more guidelines and resources, please visit www.kaapkerk.co.za.

Issued on behalf of DRC Synod of the Western Cape and URCSA Cape Regional Synod

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