

Bishop of the Diocese of George

The Right Reverend Brian Melvin Marajh

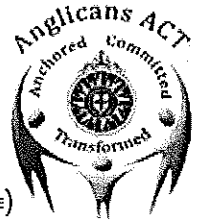
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11 September 2020

Dear Clergy and Parishioners

The Re-opening of Churches for In-Person Worship

Greetings in Christ.

We thank God for sustaining us, as a Diocesan family, during these trying times.

In consultation with the Dean and the Archdeacons, as well as various health practitioners, we have considered the re-opening of our churches for in-person worship as from the 20th September 2020 (except for 3 parishes that were given permission to start prior to the set date i.e. two parishes on the 6th September 2020 and one parish on the 13th of September 2020). The decision is informed by the decline in new infections, fatalities and the increasing rate of recoveries. We pray for those who have lost loved ones to the COVID-19 virus. We also remember those whose health and well-being continues to be impacted through infection, anxiety and economic difficulties.

In opening our churches for in-person worship it is imperative that we ensure strict compliance with all the health regulations and protocols (see my correspondence in this regard - Covid-19/001 and Covid-19/002 and the South African Council of Churches (SACC) Guidelines).

We must impress upon all Rectors and Priests-in-Charge to let us have all outstanding checklists and certificates of compliance no later than Friday, 18th September 2020. All congregations must have a Covid-19 Compliance Officer present at each service. Please ensure that the Acting Administrator, Mr Philip Williams, has the names and email addresses of your respective Compliance Officers by Thursday, 17th September 2020. If you need help with the training of your Parish Covid-19 team(s) kindly consult with your Archdeacon.

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Keep in mind that all religious gatherings, except for weddings, are limited to fifty (50) individuals at any service (this includes the clergy, lay ministers, altar party, and any other person(s) on duty for a particular ministry). Where the size of the church building cannot meet the required social distancing measures, the number of people in attendance must be reduced accordingly. As much as we love to sing, the agreed rules and regulations preclude it. No sharing of books. No incense. No liturgical dancing.

Take note Communion will be only of one kind. Parishioners are to keep social distance on their way to the Communion rail. When approaching the Priest for Communion they need to stretch out the full length of their arms (one metre) and the Priest will also maintain one metre distance as he/or she administer the sacrament of communion. Receiving Communion will only be on the palms the hand. No administering of Communion on the tongue or open mouth.

Parishes are encouraged to have more services throughout the week to give as many people as possible the opportunity to worship. The duration of a Service must be kept to one hour only – i.e. sermon, eucharist, and notices must take place within that time.

Every place of worship must display at the entrance a list containing instructions (concerning masks, screening, sanitizing, etc.). These instructions must be clear and presented in such a way as to be clearly noticeable. Parishioners should sign up in advance should they wish to attend a service. It is advisable that parishioners who suffer from chronic health conditions remain at home (provision needs to be made for virtual services, and /or other ways of offering ministry to them).

It must be noted that funerals and weddings are specifically regulated, we must ensure that we follow these stipulations to the letter.

Confirmations this year are suspended except in situations where for logistical reasons there are a candidate or candidates that must be confirmed. This will only be considered in exceptional circumstances after consultation with me. New dates for confirmations will be arranged as and when possible to do so. Rectors and Priests-in-Charge must let me know by when the confirmation candidates in their respective parishes may be ready to be confirmed. Given the safety protocols, I may not at present touch any candidate. We shall have to be innovative within our practices and symbolism.

Baptisms during this period, as with confirmations, no contact between the priest and the children or adults to be baptised is permitted. We shall similarly have to improvise (e.g. Parents can hold the infant over the font for Baptism).

There will be no Ordinations this year. Here as with Confirmations and Baptisms we will also need to be innovative.

This period of lockdown has placed significant strain and stresses on family life, on marriages, learners, and those whose work requires them to be in the frontline of the fight against Covid-19. This situation calls for pastoral intervention.

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We are aware that we enter a period of "a new normal" and there are a few challenges and adaptations that we will have to make. I want call upon all of us to be patient and flexible to expedite the opening of our churches for in-person worship.

Be ensured of my continued prayers for you.

Yours in the service of Christ.

+ Brian George

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Bishop of George**

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