



Bishop of the Diocese of George

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TO ALL CLERGY

My dear Sisters and Brothers

Greetings in Christ on the Eve of the Feast of Corpus Christi.

A pastoral letter from the *pastor pastorum* seems called for on the Feast of Corpus Christi as you join with the Ordinary in the renewal of vows. With the currency of the notion of 'vow' having been greatly devalued within the political climate of our country, it may be necessary to remind all of us of its import. In short, a vow is a solemn promise, an oath, to God and always relates to conduct. The context of a vow lies within the general ambit of affirmation and pledge and gives assurance to any witnesses to such an utterance.

Our ordained ministerial function requires us to obey God's call and the responsibility devolved to us by the Church. The importance of holy Scripture as containing all things necessary for eternal salvation; the faithfulness we show in prayer and the study of Scripture; the seeking out of the frail, helpless and indigent; the obedience we show the Bishop and officers of the Church; the humility to which we are called; are all part of our solemn promise to God made when we were first ordained. Renewing a vow is really an oxymoron or contradiction. Our renewal of vows serves to remind us, within the context of worship, of what we solemnly promised to do when we were first made deacons, later ordained priest and, in some cases, raised to the episcopate.

Early-on in our episcopate, the clergy of the Diocese met at St. Alban's, Pacaltsdorp with Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu. Some of those attending the Corpus Christi renewal of vows this year will have been present. Bishop Desmond, among his pearls of wisdom, stated something about the power of the clergy. His words have been especially relevant during the past 433 days of lockdown. He said something to the effect that by, with and through the Eucharist priests make God present. We may go further and suggest that our priesthood enables us in all sacramental actions to make God present.

With lockdown our activity has been severely curtailed. Initially, no services were allowed. Moving from total lockdown to lockdown Levels 1 & 2 we were legally and morally enabled to re-open our church plants and to hold open air services for limited numbers. Most of us have found very much smaller congregations and many of our people fearful of being infected by COVID-19 or one of its variants. Despite assiduous care being taken in exercising the agreed protocols negotiated by the SACC our congregants appear not to be convinced of safety and security in our buildings. Of course, the ban on singing has not assisted either. These same congregants appear to find little difficulty in shopping for food and other essentials. Apparently, some are even able to visit family and friends as occasion permits. Why is it that the congregational worship of the Almighty is proving more challenging?

1.

VISION

Growing the Kingdom of God together

MISSION

Making disciples and caring for all people

An answer may be found in the brilliance of your ministry to housebound folk through the use of modern technology. The comfort of worshipping from one's lounge, dining room or bedroom may well prove greater than that of the church pew or bench. The brilliance of some on-line sermon via a platform like zoom may be more meaningful than the local priest struggling to interpret the *sitz im leben* of the local parish church. Your efforts via e-mail, WhatsApp, twitter or whatever may allow greater thought to be given to the Bible Studies and prayer groups you have established. Nevertheless, none of these clear demonstration of the local church at work can replace or stand-in-for the reception of the Eucharist. It is in the breaking of the bread that the risen Lord was recognized on the first night of the resurrection of Jesus. It is in direct obedience to His will and command that we celebrate the holy mysteries. Receiving in one kind ought not to be a stumbling block as our Roman brethren fully understood between the two great Vatican Councils.

Extended periods of isolation in the past year have allowed many to find quietude in order to reflect. How has your reflection impacted on your ministry? Has your study of God's Word been shared with your people? Has the quiet reflection you have embarked upon resulted in greater devotion being shown to our Lord? You and I are called to make disciples universally. It is probable fair to say that church Marriages are probably down in numbers. Confirmation numbers, too, have decreased dramatically. We have no idea of how Baptisms or Confessions have been administered. As for the preparation of our people for any or all of the sacraments. . . who knows?

There are clear challenges, not least the fact that many in our Diocese do not have access to modern technology. Conscious of our vows made when we were first deaconed; conscious of our vows when we were first priested; conscious of my vows when I was consecrated we face the future together, strengthened by the Body and Blood of Christ and praying:

*Father Almighty we offer ourselves to you
as a living sacrifice in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Send us out into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit
to live and work to your praise and glory.*

Your father in God and servant in Christ,

Yours sincerely,

+ Brian George

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Bishop of George**



ACSA COVID ADVISORY TEAM

Updated Guidelines for Church worship services- 25 May 2021

The ACSA Covid Advisory Team continues to measure and monitor events around this pandemic as they unfold and provide advice to the church in terms of the most appropriate measures we can put in place as our response.

Our point of departure is always to save lives. We last updated guidelines around Easter and we appreciate the ongoing support and commitment to this imperative being demonstrated largely through-out the Province.

In this vein of continued self-regulation we are issuing this updated guideline and also adding a humble request that Bishops please consider issuing appropriate instructions in their various Dioceses.

The table of recorded infection rates is shown below:

COVID - 19 STATISTICS IN SOUTH AFRICA

25 May 2021

#	Province	Cases last 14 days	No. of Cases		No. of Deaths		Vaccines - Pfizer (1st)		Current Hospital Numbers		
			Total	New	Total	New	Total	New	Admitted	ICU	Ventilated
1	Gauteng	17 003	446 296	+1 445	13 850	+55	49 548	+11 740	2 052(+64)	496(+11)	193(+7)
2	Free State	5 978	98 343	+435	4 257	+32	4 026	+1 139	636(+43)	78(+7)	87(+1)
3	N. Cape	5 751	48 186	+254	1046	+19	2 531	+611	322(+30)	41(+2)	49(+4)
4	North West	4 286	73 761	+363	2 030	+16	15 619	+3 098	484(+37)	60(-1)	40(+1)
5	W. Cape	3 380	291 806	+222	11 765	+1	12 155	+3 664	794(-1)	119(+6)	29
6	Mpumalanga	2 123	81 339	+94	2 553	+3	8 520	+1 989	165(-8)	45(+2)	26(+7)
7	KZN	1 592	339 091	+154	11 036	+2	80 121	+13 791	415(+13)	62(+3)	29(+1)
8	E. Cape	871	197 203	+80	11 652	+3	26 232	+6 467	108(+8)	15(+3)	5(+1)
9	Limpopo	676	64 907	+37	2 715	+1	22 384	+4 547	62(+3)	9(+1)	7(+1)
TOTAL		41 660	1 640 932	3 084	60 904	132	221 136	47 046	5 038(+189)	925(+34)	465(+23)
New tests		Tests and positivity for the previous 7 days							J&J Trial		
28 026		M:23 352	Su:29 355	Sa:43 755	F:34 903	Th:39 612	W:40 355	Tu:32 397	Total	New	
11.0%		10.2%	9.9%	9.7%	9.5%	9.2%	8.7%	7.3%	479 768	0	

Source: NICD and Department of Health

@sugan2503

SA Daily Covid-19 Updates

We have long advocated and continue to do so, that vaccination is our best defence against the virus. We are of course all aware that our roll out of the vaccine has encountered a number of hiccups and

we have not vaccinated as many people as we had hoped to do by now. Presently, less than 7% of the population has been vaccinated.

In addition, when we look at the year on year daily infection rates we will see the following:

- 25 May 2020 – 1032 and we were in hard lockdown level 5 as compared to
- 25 May 2021 – 3084 level 1 lockdown .

Gauteng is registering the highest infection rates and so special attention is needed in this region. (some suburbs in Gauteng saw a sharp increase in infections following a religious celebration, supporting the view that faith based gatherings can be super spreaders).

This upward trend and the sharp increase in infections is a concern, especially as many of our churches are operating with the maximum number allowed under the country's level 1 lockdown rules. Winter is approaching and this brings an even greater danger of increased infections in closed indoor spaces.

At the same time the Team also considered the harsh economic reality that is being faced by many parishes and dioceses; the challenges around the cost of and access to data; the possible disturbance to the rhythm in having just gotten more people to attend church as well as the deep seated need for some form of normalization.

The reality is that we will only be in a position to work towards normalisation of church, once we have vaccinated at least 70% of our members. Until that point is reached, we need to continue to err on the side of caution and do what we must to save lives.

The COVID Advisory team advises as follows:

1. Decrease the number of people at all services to a maximum of 50 , if the church is able to accommodate 50 people within the COVID guidelines. In the event that the building is smaller and not able to accommodate 50 people then to a maximum of 50% of the capacity of the building.
2. Social distancing of 1,5 meters has to be enforced even for members of the same family, as if they are allowed to sit together, then the 1,5m distance between them and other worshippers is not being maintained.
3. Every service must have 2 dedicated COVID compliance officers who will ensure that:
 - a. A register and contact details is taken at every service. (These need to be kept safely and may only be destroyed seven(7) months after the State of Disaster has been lifted.)
 - b. All individuals coming into the building are screened, including the priest, lay ministers and altar servers.
 - c. The maximum number of 50 to include the priest and worship parties.
 - d. Masks to be worn at all times, covering the mouth and nose.
 - e. Hand sanitisers to be used upon entry to the church.

- f. The Church must be well ventilated
- g. Church mics, pulpit and lectern must be sanitised after each use.
- h. No singing allowed.
- i. Communion in one kind only.

We also continue to call on all our church members and communities to please consider being vaccinated and to register on the EVDS system **when called upon to do so.**

Recognising that vaccination is the best way to get us back to some semblance of regular worship, it is in the interest of every parish to try to reach 70% coverage of vaccinated parishioners. In this light, we encourage every parish to have a registration drive to register all eligible parishioners and to support vaccination centres to run as efficiently as possible,

Means of registering:



COVID-19 VACCINE PROGRAMME

Registering on the Electronic Vaccination Data System (EVDS) has just got easier

People who are 60 years and above can register on the following platforms to get vaccinated

 WWW. Any device with Internet Access	 USSD FREE on all South African Mobile Networks	 Whatsapp Internet access or data required	 Telephone
Connect device to the internet and go to: https://vaccine.enroll.health.gov.za	Dial *134*832ID-Number# No ID Number? Just dial *134*832#	Send the word Register to 060 012 3456 Whatsapp	Call 0800 029 999 to register for Vaccination

Have the following information on hand

- Full names and Surnames
- ID/passport numbers
- Home address
- Cellphone number
- Medical Aid number, if on medical aid

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