

UNITED CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

**P. O. Box 96014
Brixton 2019
Johannesburg
South Africa
Tel: +27 11 673 0182
Cell: +27 83 650 0115**



**5 Kurt Street
Florida Glen 1709
Johannesburg
South Africa
E-mail: gensec@uccsa.co.za
Website: www.uccsa.co.za**

26th March 2020,

Dear Fellow Congregationalists,

Re: Pastoral Letter at an Extremely Difficult Time for Church and Society

We bring you Christian greetings from the Central Office of the United Congregational church of Southern Africa at this time when both the Church and society are going through a hitherto unknown public health crisis causing unprecedented challenges at all levels of our existence as people in society.

At the beginning of this month (March 2020) almost all the countries of our region issued orders that gave guidance on what we should do to curb the spread of the COVID 19 infections within the various national contexts. As though that was not enough most of these countries have now moved a step further to put in place lockdown strategies further curtailing the freedoms of movement and association, which as we are all aware are some of the most fundamental human rights. As a denomination, it is our conviction that all these efforts are very well intended and meant to reduce the risk of the spread of the virus in our countries and the region. As you are aware almost all countries in which we operate have already recorded cases of the COVID 19 infections in their population, while only Botswana has not recorded any. It is in the light of this that we are urged to retain high standards of hygiene at both personal and community levels as a way of avoiding the spread of the virus. Cleanliness is something very dear to Christians of all times, there is actually an adage that says: “cleanliness is next to Godliness.” Keeping our environment, homes and observing high personal hygienic standards at this time is therefore something that is not just necessary but rather critically imperative to do.

We are also aware that one of the protocols that we are asked to observe is that most of us stay and where possible work from home instead of reporting at our normal duty stations. And that we avoid crowded places, which inadvertently includes church gatherings. That only those of our communities who serve essential services such health workers, security, transport, food service and working for utility companies continue to provide those services without which life is not possible are expected to be mobile. We are aware that these additional measures are a further encumbrance on our inalienable rights and freedoms, but at this time the situation demands that we prioritize life and sustainable good health than anything else. Therefore, the UCCSA is deeply aware that being locked down is not an easy state of affairs, particularly for our energetic children and young people, but it is necessary and befitting the context, we unequivocally support the governments that care for their people in introducing life saving measures. On the same vein, we encourage other national authorities to consider all ways possible to minimize and even eradicate the spread of this deadly pandemic. Of course, one cannot even begin to imagine what the impact of this lockdown will be on some of our already ailing economies, but the overriding fact driving all these measures that we all must at all material times keep in mind is that these measures are taken to safeguard human lives. All these and many more measures that may still be introduced point to the fact that we are living through the most precarious circumstances, and yet we dare not lose hope in the salvific triumph over the pandemic.

The church is called to times like this, the church's witness that is expressed through provision of loving, caring service is expected to come-alive in a very special way in times like this. We therefore must find ways in which we can continue to bear witness to the love of God for all Creation in the midst of our current debilitating

circumstances. As church, we cherish the invincible hope in God that while situations come and go, our God is the “same yesterday, today and forever, such that although difficult and life threatening our present situation maybe, it will certainly pass and a new day shall dawn “with healing in its wings.”

In this difficult time, we write to encourage the church and Christians everywhere not to allow the circumstances brought about by COVID 19 to define them, but rather, Christians should continue to focus on Christ in ways which their faith and hope in Christ define and strengthen them for the challenges they face. Indeed, the omnipresent God is not limited to space (building) but is everywhere and in all circumstances, we are called to keep hoping, worshipping and praying to the omnipotent.

We stand in solidarity with all members of the Church, their families and all people who have tested positive on the Covid-19. We pray for God’s love, mercy and healing upon all who have been infected. Our hope and faith is not moved as we face this devastating virus. May we all remain is faith and in prayer that God through Christ our Lord delivers all God’s people from this pandemic. We close with the words of the great quintessential disciple of Christ, our brother the Apostle Paul who for a time like this would say:

“Not only so, but we[a] also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us”. (Roman’s 5:3-5)

Far from assuming that the suffering that we are going through may be God’s punishment for sins we may have committed knowing or unknowingly; the UCCSA holds on to the biblical truth that “all things work together for the good of those who love the Lord.” Therefore, difficult and strenuous as the situations we facing, it is our hope that it will build perseverance in us which perseverance will lead to character development and all of these will strengthen our grip of hope in God and his ability to intervene and change every situation in our favour. Exceedingly beloved - our prayers are with you at this difficult time, may the God of grace and God of truth grant you all wisdom and strength you need for this time. We dare to hope when everything says no.

Yours in Christ service,

Yours sincerely,



Rev. Kudzani SBM Ndebele
General Secretary



Rev Sikhalo Cele
President