

To: The Leaders of SACC Member Churches
From: Rt. Rev. Malusi Mpumlwana, SACC General Secretary.
Subject: On the Challenge of Funerals for Pastors and their Churches
Date: July 24, 2020

Dear Leaders,

We write to share what we are getting as feedback across the country, that funerals continue to be a major source of mass infection, accelerating the numbers and leading to death and then more infectious funerals.

We consider it a part of our commitment to *Drive Down the Rate of COVID Infection*, to draw the attention of church leaders to the obligations of the local minister in regard to COVID compliant funerals. I refer today for the information and reference of the church leaders, to two publications of regulations. The first one was published at the neon March 28; abc it has not changed. The there have been two amendments to it - one providing for family members to travel to funerals across provinces, and the other tightening things and forbidding singing. I'll paste relevant excerpts of these, plus send whole documents.

According to the first set of regulations, it is the responsibility of the church minister to inform the family on the regulations requirements. And in the regulations, there is a form to be attested under oath by the family organiser of the funeral to say **that the minister did inform the family appropriately on the regulations**. This is in Government Gazette No. 43148 dated 25 March 2020, titled "Undertaking by Organisers of the Funeral". The relevant part about the church is in #5 and it's subsections that says: **"The bereaved family has been informed by the Priest that the family must comply with the following rules and regulations:..."**

This means that if anyone should be charged for a non-compliant funeral, it should be the minister in charge of the funeral, not the naughty crowd at Soshanguve, for example. This, I believe, will be more directly enforced going forward. And we do not want the churches to taken by surprise. After all in our own first draft of Norms and Standards, we had said our ministers may rightly face the might of the law if they break the regulations and risk the lives of the people to whom they are called to minister.



In many cases, the church ministers do not at all exercise their responsibility to ensure COVID compliant funerals, and therefore are rightly responsible for the death of people who die after an infection from a funeral they were conducting - not a happy charge you have on the conscience of a pastoral person! But this is because ministers genuinely do not know, and it is the responsibility of the leadership to ensure that this understanding is clear to every minister in their church. The SACC is providing pastoral information on funerals through the website churchinaction.org.za, we urge the churches to please visit the website for information. We are considering offering COVID Funeral Management training sessions for ministers in batches of provinces and districts. This to ensure that no local minister has to face the prospect of a COVID funeral without knowledge and preparation. This we would do with those churches that may so request, as a service to churches. One or two leaders, and one province has made this request. If we did this, we would consider conducting these on zoom in clusters of districts.

Secondly, when Level 3 was announced, a new gazette was issued on May 28, with new prohibitions on worship, which a funeral also is. A key part of these new provisions is that there be no singing at all, and we have seen a lot of singing led or permitted by church ministers at funerals. I paste below the relevant part of Section 5 of that gazette, which reads:

“Every religious leader in charge of a place of worship must ensure that:

- (a) there is no physical contact between persons at the place of worship;
- (b) there is a minimum of one and a half metres between persons;
- (c) all social distancing measures and health protocols are adhered to at all times; and
- (d) singing of hymns is limited to solo performances, or pre-recorded performances during the religious service or activity,**
- (e) Where the religious activity, such as preaching or leading worship cannot be performed with face-masks, the distance between persons must be increased to 2,5meters.”

I wish to advise church leaders that funerals are considered one of the foremost mass infection vehicles for the Coronavirus. There are a number of joy points for the virus in the context of death. We have considered all of these, and believe it is necessary for the pastor to fully appreciate the chain and pastoral ways of ministering to them.

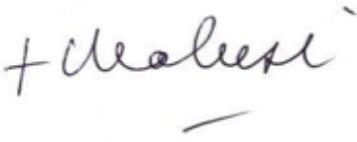
This letter is prompted by the feedback we are getting at the SACC, that funerals continue to be a major source of mass infection, accelerating the numbers and leading to death and then more infectious funerals. Our concern is that the finger is pointing to



the inability or unwillingness of church pastors to manage funerals in accordance with the regulations, opening them to prosecution.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours for a United Christian Action



Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana
SACC General Secretary

