



Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk

Rig alle korrespondensie i.v.m. hierdie skrywe aan die Gemeenskaplike Kerkkantoor vir aandag van:

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The President of South Africa
Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa
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Dear Mr. President, Cabinet Ministers, Premiers, Mayors, and Community Leaders of South Africa,

We are writing to you on behalf of a church denomination representing 30 000 Christians and also, so we believe, on behalf of a host of other churches in our country as well.

During this time of crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic we have been praying for each of you and continue to do so. We pray that the Lord may grant you wisdom in all of your decisions – decisions that must be evaluated and re-evaluated every day as new information about the virus informs our reactions to it. It is exactly this unfolding information that makes it more and more apparent that the initial information that motivated the state of disaster was incomplete.

We appreciate the president's statement in the press release of 20 April 2020 regarding the challenges he faced in the decision to impose a nationwide lockdown and that he chose to err on the side of caution. Because our goal is still to do what is best for the public good of the citizens, new decisions and a change of course must now be made, sooner rather than later. To scale up welfare provision to aid households living below the poverty line, will unfortunately not even closely be enough.

If we continue on the current course of action of extreme lockdown, things may get much worse, as we fear they most certainly will. We are now in a situation where it becomes clearer and clearer that any further imposed cure (lockdown) will prove to be worse than the disease. The data on the pandemic do not justify putting millions of people out of work and locking

down businesses and even more important, churches, for the indefinite future. The president thanked the many NGO's, religious groups and ordinary citizens who are donating money and volunteering to help feed the hungry and destitute, but your lockdown regulations makes it impossible for us to continue with this. In this we are referring to a lot of our farmers and family businesses that does not qualify for help from the solidarity fund, even while contributing to it. It is now time to open up for business, return to work and especially to unashamedly return to the public and corporate worship of the Triune God, even though some precautionary measures might still be necessary.

While Covid-19 is among us and 3300 citizens have contracted the disease, we cannot further ignore the much larger damage to our society that is done by cutting off the means of supporting the lives of families. In our churches, we have few Coronavirus cases, hospitalizations or deaths. However, we have many people whose ability to support their families has been greatly damaged through the loss of wages and damage to their businesses. For us, the lockdown regulations will worsen this state of affairs quite seriously. Without ignoring the facts that you have to deal with, we encourage you to more carefully consider the immense damage that will be caused by continuing this current path of a closed economy. In our congregations we already have experienced the loss of livelihoods, closed businesses, and the isolation of our congregants, and it is a tremendous loss to the health and well-being of our whole society. This damage will only worsen the longer we stay on the current course of lockdown and keeping the economy and houses of worship closed. And allow us to be so bold as to point out that if there was ever a necessary service, it is the public and corporate worship of the living God. He is by far the most important in any consideration. We also do not need to remind you that the dangerous (and probably uncontrollable) social unrest will also be the likely result of staying on this course. The looting of spaza shops and liquor stores are only the beginning.

We are also deeply saddened by the blatant racism from some government departments regarding relief and aid in response to the pandemic. We are also very concerned about the rising tide of crime during the lockdown. We also consider it our calling to point out that there will be much more unrest and disastrous consequences because neighbourhood watch groups are not allowed to operate.

As churches we have a great concern for the lives and health of our members as well as those in the communities that we serve. Especially because many in our churches are elderly or are in a high-risk category for Covid-19. The fact is that the responsibility for their health is not the government's alone. Those individuals and their families, pastors, leaders and physicians, are

the ones to make the best decisions about how they should live during the spread of this disease. If this were a great plague, a direct threat to the health and lives of all of our congregants, as many of us initially thought it was, we would be glad to continue to comply with reasonable measures to mitigate the spread – as we have done for the past month. However, it is now clear that that this crisis is not on the level it was viewed at first. Every day more of our churches indicate that they are not prepared to continue to comply with the extreme lockdown regulations. Our desire is to be obedient to the civil magistrate. However, we must also do what we believe God expects of us, and what is best for our people and our communities, and what our consciences dictate.

We acknowledge that the constitutional rights of freedom regarding movement, speech, religion and association may be limited in accordance with Section 36 of the constitution, but such “limitations must be reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom.” If we take into account the nature of these rights; the importance of the limitation, as well as the nature and extent of the limitation, the relation between the limitation and its purpose, and less restrictive means to achieve the purpose, it would seem that as church leaders we now have the moral obligation to re-evaluate our initial support for the current lockdown regulations in light of the latest facts about the pandemic.

Moreover, we have these rights not because the constitution grants them, but they are extended to us from God Himself. We believe the time is now at hand for our leaders to stand down from the extreme lockdown regulations.

Until today the response in the churches has been to humble ourselves, confess our sins – the sins of the church and the sins of our citizens and government. With this letter we invite the government to please join us in humbling ourselves before the Lord Jesus Christ. We call upon the grace and mercy of God to give us relief and to give us wisdom for the future. Death is an enemy, the last enemy that will be destroyed by the rule of Jesus Christ. We confirm this with all of our hearts and while we despise death, we do not fear death, because for us, to live is Christ and to die is gain. May God grant us repentance, and as we confess and repent of our many sins, we trust that He will be gracious to us and heal our land.

In the service of the eternal King, Jesus Christ,



Rev. JL Schütte

Director of Church Administration