



RETURN TO PLACE OF WORSHIP GUIDELINE

PURPOSE

Fighting Covid-19 is a collective responsibility. Therefore, this guideline is developed to guide churches and places of worship to adhere to the golden rules of Covid-19 to curb the spread of the disease.

The virus can spread in churches and places of worship through singing, shouting, talking, preaching, sneezing and coughing. It can also spread if social distancing and no physical touching protocols are not adhered to.

Everyone should be aware that returning to place of worship will be different and a lot of adjustments need to be made. All churches are different and it is important that these principles should be viewed as a guide in developing their own document.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Golden Rules of Covid-19

- Wear a face mask at all times
- Washing of hands with soap and water and sanitise it with an alcohol based sanitiser
- Keep a safe distance of at least 1.5m from other people.
- Cover your cough and sneezes.
- Stay home when feeling sick.

Comorbidities and People over the age of 60

People over the age of 60 and those with comorbidities must be encouraged to stay at home. Consider alternative means of praise and worship for this vulnerable group.

In the event that people over the age of 60 or those with comorbidities attend services, it is the responsibility of the church to make the necessary arrangements to create a safe environment for attendees.

A register must be kept of all the parishioners and those over 60 years old.

Cleaning and Disinfection of the Church

Cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched areas should take place immediately after each service. Frequently touched surfaces include, but are not limited to; door handles, light switches, seats and counter tops.

If there is more than one service per day, ample time must be allowed for disinfection between services. People tasked with the cleaning and disinfection should at all time wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as gloves, face masks, aprons and closed shoes.

General

Pamphlets must not be handed out. Use social media, websites or projector screens as a means of communication.

Singing should be highly discouraged - no singing.

To minimise physical contact there will be no collection taken during the service. Place an offering box at the entrance or exit of the church where parishioner can deposit their offerings.

No more than 50% of the church capacity must be exceeded during the attendance of any church service, taking in mind that social distancing principles must still be adhered to.

A person must be available at the door to do sanitising, but if not possible, provide a free standing sanitiser to minimise the touching of the bottle.

Holy Communion is discouraged. If a church decides to give the holy sacrament, the following can be used as guide:

1. Communion will only be distributed by the minister. An alter servant must be available to sanitise the minister's hands between offerings. Both must wear masks.
2. Parishioners must form a single line keeping the 1.5m distance between each other. An usher must be available to control aforementioned.
3. The communion must be received in the hand. He/she must step aside, remove the mask to place the communion wafer in his/her mouth and immediately put the mask back on.

Entrance Protocol

With reference to the Catholic Church, using the holy water at the entrance to the church for the sign of the cross must be prohibited.

It is recommended that only one entrance is used for attendees.

An attendance register must be kept of all attendees at every service. The following information must be recorded: name, surname, identity (ID) number, physical address and contact details of each attendee. The register must be completed by an official of the church and records must be safely kept for at least 30 days.

Screening and scanning must be done at the entrance to ensure that any person presenting with symptoms not be allowed entrance into the church.

Hand sanitising dispensers must be stationed at strategic places within the church to ensure that attendees can sanitize their hands when entering and at benches

Attendees must be discouraged from bringing their own hymnals and bibles to church; rather use projectors to display bible text.

Seating

Only 50% of the church capacity, including parishioners, the minister and servers must be allowed to attend a service at a time.

Areas for seating must be clearly demarcated, allowing a 1, 5 m distance between families and/or individuals. (Families staying in the same household may be allowed to sit together).

Once the capacity has been reached the church doors must be closed.

With the social distancing protocols in place the church capacity will be tremendously reduced and therefore churches are encouraged to have more than one service per day to accommodate parishioners.

During the Service

It is recommended that music (organ/piano) is played, rather than singing.

The sign of peace (greeting and hugging) must be prohibited.

The minister must ensure that all parishioners wear their face mask at all times.

Windows must be opened to accommodate proper ventilation.

Exit Protocol

The entrance door must not be used as an exit door. A side door, if available, must be clearly marked as an exit door. When parishioners exit the church they must keep a 1.5m distance between each other. Exiting row by row is encouraged.

Hand sanitiser must be available at the exit doors for hand sanitizing before leaving the church.

Ablution Facilities

Cleaning and disinfection of these facilities should form part of the cleaning schedule of the church.

A hand wash basin with piped hot and/or cold water must be available in the ablution facilities. A supply of liquid hand soap and disposable paper towels must be available at the hand wash basin. Sanitiser must also be available in the facility.

Signs must be erected in the facilities to encourage hand washing.

Waste Management

Refuse bins lined with a black bag must be available in the church for the disposal of disposable masks and tissues.

After the daily services, the black bag must be sealed and placed in a second black bag which is sealed again and kept on the church premises for at least 5 days, after which it can be disposed of into the normal municipal waste stream.

Sunday school and other church functions:

Sunday school classes are discouraged. In the event that confirmation classes must be conducted, the same principles as that of the church must be adhered to.

Fundraisers (braai sales) are highly discouraged as situations will be created for people to congregate. In the event that the church decides to do fundraisers the following principles must be adhered to.

1. Food must be prepared by a limited number of food handlers wearing appropriate PPE.
2. Food must be pre-packed for collection and no congregation of people must take place.

All other church functions and/or social event should be discouraged.

For more information, contact:

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