

## MULDERSDRIFT UNION CHURCH - COVID-19 PROTOCOL

### Purpose & Context

Following over two months of lockdown and associated bans of public gatherings which included the holding of church services, the government has announced that “places of worship” may re-open in June subject to certain conditions. At MUC we welcome this announcement and give thanks to the Lord for the opportunity to meet together once again to worship as a church family, as well as for the ability for our pastor and ministry leaders to resume critical counselling and caring activities.

The MUC church council, however, is acutely aware of the fact that the fight against the Coronavirus is far from over and that, in fact, the virus is spreading rapidly in our country, without vaccines or medical containment measures yet available to limit the spread. We are also aware of our responsibility to protect our congregation, their families, as well as our communities and the general public from the spread and effects of the virus.

Finally, at MUC we acknowledge the presence of many elderly folk, and others in our congregation who are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the virus due to medical conditions and hence need careful consideration and special protection. We are also fully aware of the fact that many of our folk may choose to remain at home with a clear conscience due to the risk inherent in meeting together.

### What is COVID-19?

Human Coronaviruses are common throughout the world. There are many different coronaviruses identified in animals but only a small number of these can cause disease in humans. On 7 January 2020, ‘Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2’ (SARS-CoV-2) was confirmed as the causative agent of ‘Coronavirus Disease 2019’ or COVID-19. The majority of the case-patients initially identified were dealers and vendors at a seafood, poultry, and live wildlife market in China.

Since then, the virus has spread to more than 100 countries, including South Africa.

### How can you prevent infection?

The following can provide protection against infection from Coronaviruses and many other viruses that are more common in South Africa:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay at home when you are sick and try to keep a distance from others at home.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a flexed elbow or a tissue, then throw the tissue in the bin.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

### Who are considered particularly vulnerable?

According to the Department of Health, people in the following categories would be particularly at risk:

- People 60 years and older.
- People with one or more of the underlying commonly encountered chronic medical conditions (of any age) particularly if not well controlled:
  - Chronic lung disease: moderate to severe asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), bronchiectasis, idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, active TB and post-tuberculous lung disease (PTLD)
  - Diabetes (poorly controlled) or with late complications
  - Moderate/severe hypertension (poorly controlled) or with target organ damage
  - Serious heart conditions: heart failure, coronary artery disease, cardiomyopathies, pulmonary hypertension; congenital heart disease
  - Chronic kidney disease being treated with dialysis
  - Chronic liver disease including cirrhosis
- Severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher).
- Immunocompromised as a result of cancer treatment, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications.
- Women who are >28 weeks pregnant (and especially with any of co-morbidities listed above).

## What are the directives from Government?

Government has released the following rules that must be applied to our church services:

- There may be no more than 50 people per service (or less depending on the space available).
- Worship services must be limited to a maximum of two hours, with a 30-minute break between each service.
- All religious organisations must put protocols in place to, among other things, thoroughly clean and sanitise places of worship before and after services.
- Places of worship will have to introduce physical distancing rules.
- Everyone attending a place of worship will have to wear a face mask.
- Under ordinary circumstances, where everyone wears a mask, congregants will be required to stay at least 1.5 meters away from one another. But where the religious activity, such as preaching or leading worship, cannot be performed with face masks, the distance between persons must be increased to 2.5 meters.
- Congregations are banned from singing hymns. All songs must be pre-recorded, or solo performances only.
- All religious practices which place people at risk should be avoided.
- Only activities that take place at the church may commence, and must comply with the aforementioned guidelines. This means that all Bible studies and other church meetings that do not take place on the church premises remain prohibited.

## What do we plan to do at MUC?

In response to, and to comply with these directives, as well as to ensure that we do everything reasonably practicable to protect the health of our congregation, we will do the following:

- To ensure that no more than 50 people attend a service, and to ensure that no one is excluded from worship, we will hold two mornings services: the first at 08h30, and the second at 10h30.
- Ensure that there are at least 30 minutes between services.
- Thoroughly clean our premises and facilities before each service.
- Ensure that people can enter and exit without congestion or excessive crowding.

- Provide a hand sanitising, and temperature and symptom screening station on entry.
- Compile and keep a register of all attendees of every gathering, with details such as names, addresses and telephone numbers.
- Insist on the wearing of face masks at all times whilst on our church premises.
- Plan and conduct the service so as to minimise risk and exposure.
- Communicate regularly on any changes, or other important information regarding our services.
- Though we will not start-up Sunday School at the outset, we will cater for our kids by providing a children's talk and worksheets to help them follow and benefit from the messages.
- Continue to provide on-line video and audio versions of our services for those who are unable to attend services at the church in person.

## What must you do when attending a service at MUC?

We would ask that you and your family members do the following, every time that you attend a service at MUC:

- Take note of the government's advice regarding high-risk categories, and carefully make your decision on whether or not to attend.
- If you are not feeling well, and specifically, if you have any typical COVID-19 symptoms, please stay at home until you have recovered.
- Thoroughly wash your hands before arriving and sanitise your hands on entering the church.
- Confirm that you do not have any symptoms of the virus by completing an electronic form before coming to church or by indicating at the screening station on arrival.
- Report to the screening station for your temperature to be taken.
- Report to the register desk to provide your details on entry.
- Wear your mask as you enter the premises and keep your mask on at all times.
- Observe social distancing and avoid touching anyone through handshakes or hugging.

## Closing Words

At MUC we are conscious of the need to respect and comply with our government, as well as to do all that we can to protect the health of our congregation, their families, and our society as a whole. We also have a responsibility to feed our church family by preaching the Word, and to lead our people in their walk with the Lord and spiritual growth, as well as to provide opportunities to share the gospel with those that are not yet saved and who may regularly attend our services, or be led to visit our church.

We do acknowledge that certain churches and individuals do not support the re-opening of churches at this time due to the perceived risks, however we believe that by re-opening our church under the conditions outlined in this document, and with your help and co-operation, we can best worship and serve our Lord together during this time. Those who are not able to meet will be sorely missed and we pray that the full body will be joined-together again soon.