



World Council of Churches

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To: World Council of Churches member
churches and ecumenical partners

Geneva, March 18, 2020

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

We greet you, as we pray together for one another, for our loved ones, indeed for all God's humanity in these testing times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

God of life – lead us to justice and peace! This is the God we believe in together, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God is our creator, our savior and our life giver. To pray to the God of life means that we as churches together stand firm on the side of life, together with our lord and shepherd Jesus Christ who did everything to protect life and who gave his life for us.

Therefore, we now have to give highest priority to doing whatever we can do to protect life. Praying and working for justice and peace includes also health. This is very concrete these days. We can, and we must, break the line of transmission of the virus. That means today to observe strictly the measures, restrictions and advice given by health authorities that are guided by all available and reliable scientific knowledge provided through the World Health Organization.

Some of you have already been very deeply affected. Many countries are touched by this now-global infection, and experience heavy restrictions and tough measures to reduce the transmission of the virus. Other countries are likely to face similar challenges in the days and weeks to come.

Many of us will be infected by the virus. For the most vulnerable this can be life-threatening. Evidence so far available demonstrates that those who are most in need and most vulnerable include especially the elderly and those with certain chronic illnesses. For their sake, those of us who may be at less risk personally – the young, the healthy – must nevertheless take strict and rigorous measures, and accept the inconvenience involved, to prevent the further spread of this virus and its worst consequences.

The loss of precious lives in our communities and in our families may be more than we are presently ready to contemplate or able to bear. We pray for all those who have or will lose loved ones to this disease. We pray for their consolation and comfort. And we pray that their loss will increase our collective commitment to preventing more suffering and more bereavement.

This infection is particularly serious as it is a threat to public health systems in all countries, and therefore to all in need of them, whatever illness. Even the most developed health systems in the world lack the capacity to handle the projected number of serious cases unless drastic measures are taken to slow the spread of the virus. The strain will be even greater on health systems that are less well developed and in contexts in which adequate preventative measures are not taken by the authorities and the community. Moreover, the associated economic impact of both the pandemic and the measures taken in response to it threaten livelihoods in many parts of the world.

In the face of this challenge, fear and even panic is a common reaction, and self-interest often pushes solidarity aside. We pray that our living and loving God will calm our fears, and quell any rising panic, so that we can be able to focus on what we can do for one another

Faith communities can in times like these do a lot to promote solidarity and accountability, wisdom and care. We as churches can and should raise the voice of the communities who are made vulnerable by their marginalization; who do not have sufficient water to drink let alone for washing their hands. We have to consider the displaced communities due to war, famines, economic and ecological collapse, living in precarious conditions, many of them not even recognized by the authorities of the countries in which they find themselves. They cannot be left completely defenseless against the pandemic. We have to be in

solidarity with those for whom self-isolating means a loss of livelihood and even the risk of starvation, and with those whose precarious daily life leaves very few options for social distancing.

For all this, halting the pandemic is essential, and this cannot be done unless people and nations care for each other and unite in action.

We must also be particularly aware that exactly what we normally do, in community, is what we should not do now if we want to protect life. We value togetherness in worship and Christian fellowship. But in this time of crisis, and out of love for each other and the neighbor, we should not gather in great numbers together, if at all, nor touch or embrace each other. This is a time to touch each other's hearts, by what we say, what we share, what we do – and what we do not do – to protect the life God loves so much. In that love, we must adapt our modes of worship and fellowship to the needs of this time of the pandemic, in order to avoid the risk of becoming sources of transmission rather than means of grace. I commend to all of you the advice and practical recommendations offered by intergovernmental and governmental health authorities to help protect the vulnerable in our communities and others.

Many of you are as churches the owners of hospitals and are therefore particularly responsible for providing health services to many, and much more than you are equipped for. We are immensely grateful for all the health workers and institutions in the whole world that are caring for the sick, also putting themselves at risk. They all need our prayers, our support, and our full cooperation.

In this context, WCC has itself taken many necessary steps relative to its staff, member churches, and ecumenical partners, by, for example, working remotely, as many of you are. Meetings, including even the executive committee and the central committee meetings, have been postponed.

We also follow and affirm the hard work and commitment of many in the local churches in confronting this crisis. This is the time to be well organized and creative —from changing liturgical practices to going digital, to staying in touch with those affected or at risk, through phone calls and other remote means, and otherwise adjusting to this new reality.

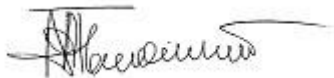
We reach out to you to encourage you in your crucial role at this time. God cares for the dignity and rights of all human beings, so no one should be left behind. All should have life in abundance. This is a wonderful call, enfolding all in a circle of care. This is the call to the one ecumenical movement of love. Because our hope is given to us from the God of life, it is powerful and keeps us united in love and service.

We recognize that we live in a time of a global crisis. We are in this together. We must focus on the essentials:

“And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor 13:13.)

God of life, lead us to justice and peace – and to health!

Yours in Christ,



Dr Agnes Abuom
Moderator of the Central Committee



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