



STATEMENT BY THE CHURCH MOTHER BODIES ON THE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19)

28th March 2020

Preamble

We, the leaders of the Church Mother bodies namely the Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ), the Independent Churches of Zambia (ICOZ) and the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB), greet you, as we pray together for one another, for our loved ones, and indeed for all God's people in these trying times of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

We acknowledge the measures government has put in place and the call to the nation made by President Edgar C. Lungu that we unite in fighting against the Coronavirus Disease. The concerned Church Mother Bodies do hereby pledge to work closely with government and other non-state actors in combating the spread of COVID-19 in Zambia.

Covid-19; Our Perspective

As Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, we understand the effects of this outbreak on the people of Zambia and the world at large. We are in a scenario like that found in the Gospel according to Mathew 8:23 where the storms hit the boat on which the disciples

were while Jesus Christ was asleep on the same boat. The storms were very strong and almost overpowered the boat. But the disciples knew who was with them in the boat and they cried out to Him; and he woke up and rebuked the storms. We wish to encourage everyone that we will be secure because there is hope in the Lord; we will take our rest in safety (Job 11:18).

We, the Church Mother Bodies pledge our commitment to collaborate with the Government of the Republic of Zambia in service delivery, especially during outbreaks and pandemics such as this one. As stated above, we note with gratitude the measures that have been put in place by the Government. Schools, Night Clubs, Bars, Casinos, and other public places that pose a higher risk of spreading the Coronavirus disease have all been shut. In this vain, we wish to inform the nation that as Church Mother Bodies, we have instructed all our membership across the country to be proactive and channel all energies in preventing the spreading of the disease.

Given the rising numbers of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Zambia, we have resolved to suspend Church gatherings for at least 14 days. For some Church Mother Bodies, this will take effect on Sunday 29th March 2020, while for others, the commencement date, as already communicated, will be Monday 30th March 2020. For those who will conduct Church services tomorrow, we urge them to religiously follow the guidelines given by government. Further, we call on the nation to unite in praying for success as we fight the Coronavirus Pandemic. Special prayers beginning this Sunday will be organised on different dates and Church Mother Bodies will participate in accordance with their policy and traction and at the time they will deem fit.

Our faith in the God of life compels us to protect life by doing all that we can to avoid transmitting this virus. Remember, physical distancing does not mean spiritual isolation. This is an opportune time for the Churches all over the country to review their role in society by safely ministering to, providing for, and caring for the poor, the sick, the marginalized, and the aged (all those who are most at risk due to COVID-19).

In the midst of this grave crisis, we pray for and urge the Government, to give priority to those who live in poverty, as well as to the marginalized and refugees living in our midst. We pledge to help provide pastoral care to communities, especially the vulnerable, the dying and bereaved, the elderly and psychologically distressed.

To the Government

While we acknowledge the measures put in place by the Government so far, we wish to urge the Government to consider closing all our borders to non-citizens and allow only a few exceptions to cross into Zambia. We are privy to the fact that this move will negatively affect our economy but given the current scenario, we do not have a choice but to close all our borders in order to preserve human life. In addition to closing borders, we also advocate for a shut-down of all public gatherings and stringent measures to limit physical contact in markets, bus stations and restricting numbers in public transport vehicles.

We further call on the Government to ensure that there is proper stewardship and accountability of all donations and allocated funds for this programme, as well as cost-effective utilisation of the same.

In the same vain, we advise that Pastoral and Chaplaincy services must be deliberately integrated into the interventions and responses to COVID-19. People who are affected and at risk require not only medical care but also pastoral care.

To our Political Leaders

The Coronavirus pandemic does not respect the boundaries of party affiliation. The reality is that the virus we thought was far away is here in our midst and for us as a nation to overcome it, we need unity of purpose in ideas and logistics. This is a time our politicians must burry their differences and instead come together to a round table to chart the way forward.

Let us put the safety of the nation first before our interests. We, therefore, plead with you that while we do our part, do your part as well by uniting as one force determined to overcome this challenge before us.

To our Health workers

We applaud the hard work, sacrifice and endurance being demonstrated by gallant men and women in the health profession across the country and wish to assure you that our prayers are with you. During this period, you will be required to be on high alert and subsequently will be expected to work beyond your normal working hours. Our prayer is that God will give you the strength and protection you need from contracting the virus in your endeavours to save lives. We encourage you to trust in the Lord.

The Media

We call upon all media houses and journalists to carefully exercise their role of educating the masses about the Coronavirus disease by publishing credible and true information. Further, we urge the media to consider charging lower rates on Coronavirus adverts and programs as a way of contributing to the fight against this pandemic.

To the Clergy

We wish to call on all clergymen and women across the country to understand the times we are in and act accordingly in response to what is going on. This is a time when Science and the Word of God must work together to effectively save the people of God from this calamity. Encourage people to go for medical attention while you pray for them. Avoid telling your members to depend on prayer alone. Let them get both prayer and medical attention from health facilities. The Church must avoid being an obstacle in the fight against the spread of Coronavirus disease.

The Church members and general citizenry

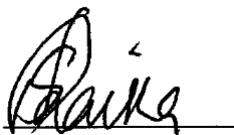
Instead of panicking, make every effort to follow strict personal hygiene so you prevent the transmission of the disease. Adhere and follow all instructions and guidelines being shared by the Government and other authentic stakeholders and pray for God's intervention. Be each other's keeper by loving one another in the same manner we love ourselves. Do unto others as you would love them do unto you. This means you must take care in the manner you interact with others in public places and even in your homes in order to ensure you are all safe from contracting the virus. Also avoid panic buying of essential goods and food stuffs as this will escalate the cost of the commodities.

Economic Impact and Mitigation

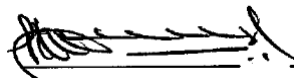
We urge the government to come up with mechanisms such as economic stimulus packages and mitigating measures as well as incentives to help the industry and citizens in coping with the adverse effects of the Coronavirus.

Conclusion

We, the Church Mother Bodies, commit ourselves to continuously monitor and give you necessary updates until this pandemic is completely eradicated. We also remain united in prayer for the nation and our leaders across the political, tribe and religious divide.



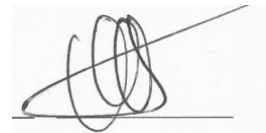
Bishop Sauros Phaika
CCZ PRESIDENT



Bishop Paul Mususu
EFZ PRESIDENT



Bishop George Lungu
ZCCB PRESIDENT



Bishop David Masupa
ICOZ PRESIDENT