



## **Democracy Digest**

**June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020**

### **Open For Worship?**

Last week, just a few days after announcing that the government would ease the lockdown conditions from Level 4 to Level 3 for the whole country, President Ramaphosa surprised everyone with a further announcement – that religious gatherings would be allowed to resume under Level 3, subject to certain conditions. No more than 50 people may attend; there must be proper social distancing and hygiene; facemasks must be worn; places of worship must be thoroughly cleaned before and after services; there can be no singing of hymns, shaking of hands or other touching; and, where applicable, no sharing of communion vessels.

<https://tinyurl.com/y9nf9ccg>

<https://tinyurl.com/ya3f3qy6>

The South Africa Council of Churches (SACC) and other bodies representing the faith community had been lobbying for a relaxation of the regulations that barred religious gatherings. One argument was that, since funerals with up to 50 people in attendance were allowed, it was inconsistent to prohibit other, equally important, religious gatherings. Also, if schools could gradually be re-opened, why not churches? In both instances, the conditions existed for a disciplined and controlled approach.

The argument was also put forward in terms of the fundamental right to religious belief and expression. For many people of faith gathering corporately is a sacred duty, and for it to be forbidden indefinitely might create the dilemma of “whether to obey God or man”.

<https://tinyurl.com/y95scadj>

<https://tinyurl.com/ybns2jzr>

After the announcement, the SA Catholic Bishops' Conference, the SACC, and Freedom of Religion South Africa (FOR SA), all issued statements broadly welcoming the relaxation, but also stressing the need for a cautious approach to re-opening, with strict adherence to the regulations. It was noted that the fact that permission had been given for services to resume did not mean that they had to do so.

<https://tinyurl.com/y9ecamef>

<https://tinyurl.com/yap52qsw>

<https://tinyurl.com/yb7o7ue3>

The leadership of the Jewish and Islamic communities went further, actively discouraging the resumption of services.

<https://tinyurl.com/y8qkh63g>

<https://tinyurl.com/y82gorc7>

Many evangelical churches have also decided that it is not yet safe to re-open.

<https://tinyurl.com/ycuqrrlh>

<https://tinyurl.com/y8evtmea>

Some religious leaders and commentators have expressed very firm views on the matter.

<https://tinyurl.com/y99o86tb>

<https://tinyurl.com/ycyorf89>

<https://tinyurl.com/ydzdsjlg>

Finally, a very clear and straightforward scientific viewpoint from within the Christian community.

<https://tinyurl.com/y9rsd8xb>

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