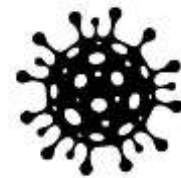


THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES



Call for Mutual Help

Covid-19 Pandemic



Never before have churches of the *International Conference of Reformed Churches* experienced such a disruptive year! Probably no single member church can recall a time in which church buildings stood empty for months on end. Indeed, the Covid-19 pandemic, combined with the reactions of governments across the globe, deeply impacted on church life. In the country where I live, South Africa, worship services in church buildings were not allowed since April 2020, and since July 2020 only services with a maximum of 50 people were allowed, lasting until the now, when I am writing this article (end of August), and it will probably continue for some more months. Restrictive measures such as these in South Africa were no exception. I haven't heard of a country where an ICRC federation is located, where this was not the case.

These extremely invasive measures of governments into church life were met with mixed reactions. Some sympathized, acknowledging that it was necessary to flatten the curve of the Covid-19 infections, yet at the other hand conspiracy theories about governments trying to silence the churches, were also rife.

Fortunately in these times the Lord provided many technical solutions, making it possible that in most cases worship services could continue, using for example livestreaming on the internet, or pre-recording the services. Church life could also continue to a certain extent, making use of internet platforms such as Skype, Zoom, Whatsapp, Facebook and the like.

In May-July 2020 the Diaconal Committee conducted a survey among ICRC member churches, in order to find out how everyone was coping. These were a few of the findings:

- Yes, there were deaths because of Covid-19, especially among the elderly and those with other medical conditions. In Scotland, for example, one of the retired ministers passed on due to Covid-19.
- In general the fatalities in the churches were / are comparable to the average in each country among the population at large. Church members are fully part of their society.
- Most churches managed to continue with worship services, although in digital format. Many ministers started recording daily or weekly devotions for their members to watch or listen.

Not seldom did these devotions focus on passages about epidemics and natural disasters in the Bible, the Mosaic legislation on leprosy, the way Jesus treated lepers and the like.

- Indeed, neither Covid-19 nor government restrictions could silence the Gospel! Some churches reported that thanks to their activities on internet, more non-members could be reached with the Gospel than before.
- In all countries Covid-19 caused an economic recession, also impacting on the churches. Many churches reported job losses among their members, or decreased job opportunities. However, it was also reported more than once that with the increased threat of poverty, there was also an increased willingness among church members to give for causes both inside and outside the churches. Covid-19 indeed precipitated Christian compassion to come to the fore more than usually. We sincerely thank the Lord, from whom all blessings come, for this!
- Especially in the poorer (third world) countries, Covid-19 caused huge economic damage. Apart from many members losing their income, some ICRC federations in these countries reported that in the months of lockdown they lost most of their usual collections, with the consequence that many of their pastors lost their livelihood. Whereas in first world countries churches reported a switch to inking their financial contributions and collections via electronic means (such as SnapScan), these options are often not yet available in the third world.

At this stage, all the restrictive measures have most probably saved many lives, yet at the other hand these same measures had many other negative consequences across continents.

First, we yearn for the day that church services at full capacity will be legal again! Although the internet, computer and mobile phone technology proved extremely helpful to maintain the community of saints, every believer who truly loves the Lord and his church, realizes that this is not as it was meant to be.

Second, the restrictive measures also caused huge economic damage, also to churches, and mostly in the third world. Especially with regards to this last point, the Diaconal Committee would like to call on all ICRC churches to reach out to one another. As a Diaconal Committee our role is not to distribute funds, but to network. In this regard we would like to ask your compassionate attention especially to those ICRC churches in Kenya, India and Indonesia. If you haven't established personal bonds with these churches yet, you are welcome to make use of the following ICRC federations or trusted organizations supported by ICRC churches, in order to channel your financial contributions to these severely stricken federations:

Country	Help via	Contact Person
India	Organisation Word & Deed	Rick Postma, email: publicrelations@wordanddeed.org
Indonesia	Organisation kerkenhelpenkerken.nl	Janneke de Vries, email: J.deVries@verrenaasten.nl
Kenya	Orthodox Presbyterian Church	David Nakhla, email:

Disaster Response

david.nakhla@opc.org

For more feedback on the survey, per continent, please visit <https://www.icrconline.com/>

It is important to note that the whole situation regarding the Covid-19 pandemic is very fluid. The survey only offers a “snapshot” of the situation halfway the year 2020.

On behalf of the Diaconal Committee of the ICRC

Dr. P.G. Boon

Secretary