



# Pacific Conference of Churches

www.pcc.org.fj

## Moderator

Rev. Dr. Tevita Havea

## General Secretary

Rev. James Bhagwan

e-mail : GenSec@pcc.org.fj

Mobile (679) 5085487

G.P.O Box 208, Suva.

4 Thurston Street, Suva, Fiji

Tel: (679) 3311 277 / 3302332

Fax: (679) 3303 205

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*Dear sisters and brothers in Christ called to shepherd the Lord's flock in Fiji,*

## **PCC Ecumenical Advisory to Member Churches after Fiji's COVID-19 confirmation**

WITH Fiji announcing its first COVID-19 corona virus case, it is important that churches take immediate action to ensure the safety of all people and to act as an example during the difficult months ahead.

We acknowledge that some churches took pro-active measures two weeks ago to limit human to human contact within worship services and especially around the distribution of the Eucharist.

For this we must be thankful for the wisdom shown by these churches, encourage them to continue and urge other faith communities to join the movement with their own preventive measures.

This is an opportune time for the church to review its role as God's hands in society by ministering to, providing and caring for the poor, sick and the aged – those most at risk from COVID-19.

Fiji has prohibited the gathering of more than 20 people at any one time across the nation, meaning that church services, prayer meetings and Mass cannot be held.

As Christians, we hold fast to the values of Jesus Christ – to love God and neighbour as we love ourselves. We can sure our love for God by protecting our neighbour by not attending church.

The early church worshipped in homes<sup>1</sup>, in the equivalent of what we today call cell groups. This is an opportune time to generate the closeness of a Christ-like community by worshipping at home or in groups of less than 20 people.

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<sup>1</sup> Philemon 1:1-2 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother. To Philemon, our dear friend and fellow worker. Also, to Apphia, our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier – and to the church that meets in your home

For the number of worshippers does not matter.<sup>2</sup> What matters is that those who worship do so in spirit and in truth.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, it will fall to ministers and leaders of the church to introduce new and innovative ways for people to gather and worship while abiding by the national laws on Public Health.

The early church did not have at its disposal the options of mobile phones, computers, the internet and live streaming.

Being home bound does not mean that one or two or 20 people cannot have a spiritual, meaningful gathering to give thanks to God, pray for strength, healing and courage.

Congregations can share their worship gatherings electronically. Ministers can distribute the Eucharist to those confined to their homes. Pastoral care and visitation become ever so important during this time.

Radio and television stations may provide their broadcast facilities to send liturgical celebrations into homes through radio and television as a social service.

It is also an opportunity to reach across the denominational divide and worship with or provide for people of other faith communities. This is not time for division<sup>4</sup> but a moment in which to show the love of Christ to all.

Difficult weeks, possibly months, lie ahead for Fiji and the church.

Through unity, prayer and a life centred in Christ, we will prevail and help to build stronger, closer families and communities.

When the church was forced underground during the persecution of the early Christians, it experienced an exponential growth in faith and in the numbers of the faithful.

Today we are placed in such a situation not by persecution but by the circumstances forced through a deadly virus during the Lenten Season when we traditionally reflect on how to become better people.

Let us seize this opportunity to deepen our faith by reflecting in our homes on God's word, praying for the people of Lautoka and the countries which have been affected by COVID-19.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 18:20 For where two or three have gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst

<sup>3</sup> John 4:24 For God is spirit and his followers must worship Him in spirit and truth

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:4 When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul" and another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world?

And may we seek to be filled with the Grace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to reach out to those who are in great need at this time.

While the global catch phrase around COVID-19 has been social distancing, may we encourage you to practise physical distancing and social solidarity?

At this time let us take strength in the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand."<sup>5</sup>

While we may be far apart physically at this time, let the love of God, the Grace of Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit strengthen and sustain us.

May God bless us all.



*Reverend JAMES S BHAGWAN*  
*General Secretary*

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<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 41:10