



Week: 19th – 25th July 2020

Big Idea of the Week:

United in faith, United in action

The Government of Sierra Leone National COVID-19 Response announced religious services could resume beginning July 13, 2020.

The Inter-Religious Council supports the regulations shared by the government and encourages all worshippers to follow the advice and stay safe.

Let us honor our faith by showing our love and care to protect one another.

Washing our hands with soap and water before entering places of worship, and wearing cloth masks and keeping a safe distance from others before, during, and after worship are some of the best ways to make sure we all stay healthy.

Let us support one another in taking all actions to keep all of us safe.

Share with your family and friends what you learn from sermons about actions we can take to protect ourselves and our loved ones from coronavirus.

Cleaning mosques and churches, even when there are no coronavirus cases in your community, shows we value life by doing everything we can to keep us all safe.

Bring your own prayer mat to the mosque so when praying you do not have to touch where many other people have touched.

We can stay physically distant, but spiritually united.

Suggestions for people to interview

- Inter-Religious Council members
- Imams
- Reverends and pastors
- District infection, prevention, and control pillar members

Suggestions for questions for interviews and panel discussions

- What is being done to make our mosques and churches safe places for us to worship?
- What can I do to help protect myself and others when going to mosque or church?
- Is it fine to still worship from home? Especially if I or my family members are vulnerable to getting seriously sick from coronavirus and I want to be extra careful?
- Why does our mosque or church need to be cleaned if we haven't had any coronavirus cases in our community?
- How will compliance be monitored – of the mosque/church and also the worshippers?

Guidelines for the Resumption of Congregational Worship

The following guidelines will be jointly monitored by the working committee from the Inter Religious Council of Sierra Leone and the National and District COVID-19 Emergency Response Centres (NaCOVERC and DiCOVERCs). Weekly review meetings will be held.

Churches and Mosques will have responsibility for following the stipulated guidelines and ensuring internal monitoring mechanisms:

Hygiene

1. Churches and Mosques should clean and disinfect their premises first before they are re-opened for worship. They should also be cleaned and disinfected in between services.
2. Every worshipper must either use soap to wash their hands or apply sanitizers before being allowed to enter the Church/Mosque.
3. Veronica buckets, soap and water or hand sanitizers should be provided at the entrance of every Church/Mosque.
4. The use of toilet facilities to be responsibly monitored.
5. Mosques authorities should ensure that foot wares are well kept within the premises of the Mosques. In the light of this, worshippers are obliged to take great care and place their foot wares in plastic bags.

Preventive measures

1. The temperature of every worshipper must be taken before admission into the Church/Mosque and people with a high temperature (37.5C/99.5F) should not be allowed into the Church/Mosque but be advised to go and seek medical attention.
2. Everyone in the place of worship must properly wear a facemask during worship. Masks should not be removed or lowered when speaking or singing.
3. There must be the use of sanitizers in Mosques/Churches as appropriate.

Numbers and seating capacity

1. All places of worship must not exceed fifty percent (50%) of the original capacity of the space taking into cognizance physical distancing of at least 6 feet. Churches and Mosques should map out the seating arrangements in the place of worship to ensure this.
2. Churches can make use of classrooms and multipurpose halls for services where available, especially in big churches in order to accommodate more worshippers at a go. TV circuit and speakers can be used for those who are not inside the main auditorium.
3. As for Muslims, Mosques in public market locations with huge turnout of worshippers, congregational prayers should be done in batches at most fifty percent of the capacity of the Mosques to ensure effective adherence to social distancing.
4. Multiple services can be held following the same guidelines as provided for in point 1 and 2 in this section for the Christians.

Social distancing and safe practices

1. Social distancing should be observed in the sitting arrangement with two metres gap between worshippers. A seating arrangement should be marked and guided by the Church/Mosque.

2. A church service must not exceed one and a half hours. In the case of the Muslims each daily prayer time should not exceed fifteen minutes while the Juma prayer must not exceed thirty (30) minutes.
3. There should be a gap of 30 minutes between one Church service and another where there are multiple services to avoid crowding.
4. Handshaking and hugging should be avoided before, during and after the worship.
5. Different exit and entrance points will be used by worshippers (where possible) and movement will be done row after row.
6. Social distancing should be maintained during counselling.

Ministration practices

1. There will be no Laying of Hands while praying for people.
2. Communion will be served row after row and in individual cups or by intinction.
3. Scaling down of the choir where necessary. Due to the high risk of spreading COVID-19, strict physical distancing of at least six feet must always be maintained by choristers.
4. Offering bags/plates will be taken from row to row to avoid movement of people. The use of envelopes is advisable.
5. Standing or individual microphones should be used at all times to avoid cross infection.

Monitoring of compliance

1. An internal and monitoring committee should be constituted in every Mosque/Church to oversee compliance to the suggested guidelines.
2. Medical awareness and health promotion should be done during Church services. And for the Muslims, in order to educate worshippers and wash out the denial syndrome, Imams are encouraged to utilize the period between azan (call to worship) and prayers to sensitize and educate worshippers about the COVID 19 pandemic.
3. All the measures outlined herein shall apply to all activities conducted in places of worship.
4. Churches/Mosques that are found non-compliant with the above guidelines will be warned through the appropriate oversight structures; and subsequently shut down for repeat offenses.