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Dear OAIC Member Churches

From Despair to Engagement

Greetings as we continue to celebrate the resurrection of Our Lord Jesus in realities where we need to experience that resurrection life fully. Since our first communication (A time for Leadership and Hope), a lot has changed as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread in Africa and the rest of the world. We are issuing this communication titled ***From Despair to Engagement*** after we have listened to you the member churches through the leadership in the regions and chapters. We are thankful to God for the strength and guidance He is giving us to respond to the crisis. We are also grateful for the work you are doing in response to COVID-19.

From Despair to Engagement is in recognition of what the churches are doing, the emerging challenges, and guidance on what we need to do to deepen our responses.

1.0. Action by churches

We have heard from you that the churches are active and responding in the following ways:

- a) Mobilising for prayer for God's intervention and discerning what the Spirit of God is telling us during the crisis
- b) Praying for the health of the frontline workers involved in prevention and care
- c) Community education for the prevention of the spread of COVID-19 by encouraging people to comply with the guidelines provided by the national governments
- d) Supporting people who are struggling with accessing food and other basic necessities
- e) Bringing messages of hope to the church members and the rest of the community using technology i.e. SMS, the internet, and FM radio stations
- f) Engaging public institutions to meet the needs of the people who are lacking basic necessities
- g) Innovation by some of our members who have been involved in the production of face masks, hand sanitiser and making these affordable
- h) Strengthening local support networks by organising local congregations into smaller groups with a leader who can reach each one of the people on phone on a regular basis
- i) Supporting families to continue with agricultural production

2.0. The challenges

It is clear that there are major challenges that are emerging as countries respond to COVID_19. Below are the issues of deep concern which are coming from the member churches:

- a. Social distancing could lead to pastoral distancing if we do not put in place processes that can enable us to continue providing pastoral support and even expand it during this time of crisis

- b. Loss of livelihood means loss of access to resources for basic needs such as food and housing. The food situation in some communities could be getting to crisis level hence worsening the already existing reality of undernourishment, and the threat of violence and civil unrest in our communities.
- c. Agriculture – the unforeseen consequences of the lockdown such as reduced work on farms, growing anxiety in the communities and limited access to farm inputs threatens the livelihoods of most households, as their livelihoods are under the threat of decreased production
- d. Social distancing has resulted in the disruption of life:
 - Rising unemployment due to layoffs by employers and the weakening of economic activities including small enterprises
 - Exclusion of most children from learning because of limited access to the internet, hence being left out of the digital learning processes. Further, schools are in many cases the place where children from families impacted by poverty get their decent meals daily. The closure of schools has increased the nutritional gap for such children.
 - Reported increase in domestic violence. Women and children are the main sufferers of this violence
- e. Theologies that are misleading and could lead to despair or complacency
- f. The uncertainty on accessing health-care due to lockdown arrangements and also because the efforts are largely concentrated towards ending COVID-19. Services for maternal and child health, treatment of People Living with HIV and AIDs and other critical areas are being impacted.
- g. The deepening poverty causing more of our members and the people in the communities we serve to fall into the poverty trap

We agree that COVID-19 is a public health and increasingly also a national security concern. The quick response by national governments is commendable; and has helped to stem the spread of the disease. Yet the emerging issues justify the need for a multi-sectoral response for the countries to respond effectively to the COVID-19 crisis.

3.0. Our response

Being Pastoral, Prophetic and Factual will continue to be the framework for our action in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.1. We will remain factual

Our Responses will be based on the facts and guidelines provided by the National Governments and the World Health Organisation (WHO)

3.2. We will strengthen the pastoral role

- Prayer and bringing messages of hope
- Bringing our contribution to prevention, care, support and healing of individuals, families and communities.
- We will continue to mobilise churches and the wider community to support the people who lack food and other basic necessities.
- Strengthening community system for psychosocial support for individuals and families
- Encouraging and supporting farmers-especially smallholder farmers-to continue with the production of food

3.3. We will strengthen the Prophetic role

We will continue to bring a collective voice in speaking to the institutions of the state, institutions of religion, institutions of culture, institutions of business to respond to the existing and emerging realities that curtail abundance of life. This is the reason we should bring before our governments the following:

- a. **The country responses to COVID-19 should be multi-sectoral including the churches.**
- b. **Lockdown and other social distancing measures should be handled in a humane manner whilst endeavouring to balance public safety and protecting livelihoods**
- c. **Social distancing measures should be accompanied by social protection.**
- d. **Undernourishment and the associated is a major underlying health issue making people living in a state of hunger vulnerable to COVID-19. This is the reason food security should be at the centre of the national responses. We call for action:**
 - i. **To provide food to people who are lacking it**
 - ii. **Support and secure production for small scale farmers to increase food production**
 - iii. **Keep the food supply chains open including incentives for making food affordable**
- e. **Governments should increase the involvement of Faith communities and community level structures as key actors in responding to COVID-19. The key areas of involvement are:**
 - i. **Awareness creation for prevention of the spread of COVID-19**
 - ii. **Elimination of stigma against people infected by covid19 and their families, health workers and other frontline workers**
 - iii. **Identifying the most vulnerable in society who should not be left out of on-going and future interventions**
 - iv. **Shaping social protection and psychosocial support initiatives during the time of the crisis**
 - v. **Involvement of faith communities in the rebuilding of lives and communities beyond the crisis**
- f. **Monitor and deal with all forms of violence**

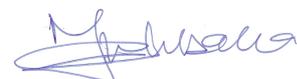
Again, we thank you: fellow leaders, sisters and brothers for the uplifting work you are doing. We will continue listening to you, analysing the emerging realities and serving you as we continue to shape our response to COVID-19.

....With God all things are Possible Mathew 19:26

Let us Keep Leading with Hope and Clarity.



Most Rev. Dr. Daniel Okoh
International Chairman



Rev. Nicta Lubaale
General Secretary