

# **THE CHURCHES IN SOUTH AFRICA, COBID-19 AND THE FUTURE**

**A Practical Manual as guideline for the future, for the use in  
group discussions in reformed churches, but also in other  
churches in Southern Africa**



<https://unsplash.com/photos/HcpEY6le->

**Prof Hoffie Hofmeyr (DRC), Prof Rikus Fick (GKSA), Dr Frikkie  
Labuschagne (NHKA) and Prof Nico Botha (URCSA)  
(Final Editors)**

**[Study Group of South African church historians from the four biggest reformed  
churches in South Africa as well as other church representatives]**



**Suid Afrikaanse Akademie  
vir Wetenskap en Kuns**



**Hofmeyr-familie**



**Pretoria FM**



**CHRISTIAN LITERATURE FUND  
CHRISTELIKE LEKTUURFONDS**

This publication has been made possible by the financial contributions of the institutions mentioned below.

SAAWK

NHKA

GLO-media.tv

PRETORIA FM

HOFMEYR-FAMILIE

CLF

*The content of this publication does not necessary reflect that of the respective sponsoring institutions.*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Preface	4
2.	Manual for congregations	5
3.	Leaders' guide	19
4.	Sermon Notes	23
5.	Addendum: List of people involved in videos	31
6.	Addendum: List of facilitators and consultants	31
7.	Addendum C: List of contributors	31

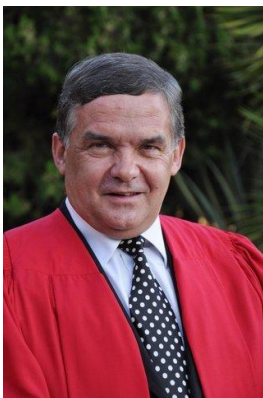
# 1

## PREFACE

This “Manual”, together with the whole “Toolkit” that you are receiving free of charge thanks to the generous support of a number of organisations and institutions, has as its goal to serve the Church and the Kingdom in southern Africa. Its primary aim is to encourage reflection on and discussions about the future of all churches of Jesus Christ and prayers for all involved in these difficult and challenging Covid-19 times.

This “Manual” has taken on a special meaning and additional relevance following the drastic reality of new waves and variants of Covid-19, which is affecting our whole world. During apparently continual new waves of the pandemic worldwide, it is hoped that the content of this material and its availability as a virtual resource may help in a particular way to meet all the challenges that this pandemic poses to people. Although vaccines may gradually become available, we will not be spared the direct and indirect effects of Covid-19 for a long time.

We sincerely hope that this will prove to be a valuable asset for the Church of Jesus Christ in southern Africa in general and for different congregations, so as to enter a rather uncertain future because of Covid-19 but also various other influencing factors.



Prof JW (Hoffie) Hofmeyr (Chief Editor)

Emeritus, Church History (University of Pretoria),  
Emeritus, Historical Theology (Leuven)(Belgium)  
and retired Vice Chancellor (Nkhoma University, Malawi)

# WORK MANUAL: “THE CHURCH, COVID AND THE FUTURE”

## WEEK 1

### The churches, the past and the present

Prof Johan van der Merwe  
and Dr Frikkie Labuschagne

#### 1. Welcome

Share with one another: What big crises in church history come to mind which could give us courage in present times but also for the future? Consider lighting a candle to burn for the duration of the discussion to symbolise the light and hope, which we search and strive for.

#### 2. Background

History and the present show that the church has survived many crises:

Looking back at the past often helps us to make sense of the present, and to find hope and direction for the future. This is the wonder of history. For this reason, the challenge during the Covid-19 pandemic is to look at the history of the churches. Events of the past help us believe that the church which we love will also survive this crisis and can make a positive contribution to the reconstruction of our beautiful country.



DC Boonzaaier se spotprent wat in 'De Burger' van 16 Oktober 1918 verskyn het

The history of the churches is interspersed with examples of similar crises. Think back to the scorched earth policy during the South African War from 1899 to 1902, the concentration camps, the Spanish Flu of 1918, the poverty problem and depression during the 1930s and the

adverse consequences of apartheid. Particularly the policy of apartheid and the opposition to this policy, brought South Africa to the brink of the precipice during the late eighties of the previous century. Leaders and church members, also from Afrikaans churches, helped from 1990 onwards to calm feelings and thereby allow the 1994 election to take place peacefully. While right-wing and left-wing groups threatened in the days leading up to 27 April 1994 to derail the election, church leaders said, “We will prevent bloodshed”. This by contrast with a well-known right-wing figure who threatened, days before the election: “We will let loose the dogs”. The manner in which believers were calmed, was by calling on church members in congregations to humility and prayer. Thousands of church members heeded the call, and in the week leading up to 27 April 1994 prayed earnestly at home and in churches for a peaceful election. Therefore, the peaceful election of 27 April 1994 was not the work of man, but of the Lord who intervened mightily and who through his church achieved a miracle in South Africa. Indeed, the whole world was moved by what had happened. In the words of an influential leader: “One of the biggest miracles which has ever happened in Africa.

In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, each church member in each congregation is challenged to have compassion on those who in various ways suffer as a result of the pandemic. Through this, the churches will also survive this crisis and have an opportunity to demonstrate the church’s compassion to the world.



Care in a time of  
**COVID-19**

**FOR CHURCH COMMUNITIES**

**Important communication from  
the Church about COVID-19**



**LOVE**

- The Church is a place of love, fellowship and worship.
- We must find new ways to worship during the COVID-19 virus pandemic.
- Loving each other means that we care, support and protect one another.



South African  
Council of Churches



Contact: 0800 029 999 | WhatsApp “hl” to 060 012 3456 | [www.sacoronavirus.co.za](http://www.sacoronavirus.co.za)

[https://heartlines.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Church\\_Message\\_COVID-19-Signed-off-Low-Res.jpg](https://heartlines.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Church_Message_COVID-19-Signed-off-Low-Res.jpg)

The fearful, disruptive and uncertain time in which we currently find ourselves, offers so many opportunities for fresh and creative thinking on how to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. The manner in which ministries in various working spaces happen, will in all probability never be the same post Covid-19.

While church members everywhere are affected by uncertainty and fear, the leader inspires confidence and security by creating a safe environment for people. Dr John Gosling (psychiatrist) points out in *Beeld* of 20 March 2020 that, in addition to the corona pandemic, a pandemic of fear has developed among our people. Fear paralyses people. Fear and anxiety inhibit our ability to engage creatively with our calling. Disruption and disharmony, however, are the habitat in which true leaders flourish. The challenge is how church members and congregations of the Church can make the necessary adaptations that are needed so urgently.

### **3. Words from the Bible**

Read Psalm 146 and Acts 27:13-16 and 22-38

- Whom should believers, also in these difficult times not trust? Why not?
- Instead, whom should believers trust?
- What are the outcomes of this trust?
- Additional literature: *Theory U. Leading from the Future as it Emerges* (C Otto Scharmer, 2009)

### **4. Video discussion**

See video discussion by Dr Frikkie Labuschagne, Prof Johan van der Merwe and Rev. Anandie Greyling) (Overhead projector or laptop). Download at:

### **5. Group discussion**

- Covid-19: A drastic and stormy time! Drastic times call for radical leadership. What are the adaptations that we as a body of believers have to consider and eventually implement?
- Bodies of believers everywhere have been disrupted and find themselves inevitably in a transition phase. As congregations of the Lord, we need to discover and rediscover our calling. Transition phases and in-between phases are some of the most fertile times in the life of a body of believers. What have we as a congregation of Jesus Christ learnt during this time? What is the single pearl that we discovered in this chaos?

- What is now happening with all of us? Otto Scharmer's *Theory-U* teaches us to make an about-face, to ask searching questions and to deal with existential issues in a responsible manner. The following searching questions must be addressed: What is the state of your inner life? What is the aim and value of life?

## **6. What can we do at a practical level?**

- How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected our lives at a practical level?
- How does the recent past of the churches help us at a practical level to accept new challenges?

## **7. Opportunity for prayer**

Let us pray that the hope we cherish be put to work in addressing many challenges. Let us call on God's guidance to tackle these extraordinary times.

# **WEEK 2**

## **The possible, the probable and the desirable future**

**Dr Barry Tolmay**

### **1. Welcome**

Discuss with one another your feelings about the future in the light of *state capture* and Covid-19. Consider lighting a candle to burn for the duration of the discussion to symbolise the light and hope, which we search and strive for.

### **2. Background**

The different options according to Future Studies:

We all plan for the future. What made 2020 so traumatic was that many things that we planned, did not come to fruition as a result of lockdown. This resulted in our experiencing different levels of exhaustion. This exhaustion manifested in different forms:

- Physically – we are confined and for extroverts this is particularly difficult.
- Emotionally – we experienced different levels of uncertainty and this had a big emotional impact. People are anxious about falling ill and dying.



- Cognitively – we often need more stimulation than what we can get via zoom, webinars and social media.
- Spiritually – we question how God could allow Covid-19 and allow people to suffer.

All these uncertainties are so exhausting that we have no desire to plan for the future until there is a Covid-19 vaccine. When we consider the future, we should examine various aspects through the perspective of Future Studies, notably probable outcomes of the future, possible outcomes of the future and then a discussion of the desired future.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/3FHp2yOPDxU>

What would we desire in terms of future events? The desired future is directly related to the Lord. The question is what the Lord desires in the context of the broken reality and how He sees the future. What, for example, is his plan for our congregation in a post Covid-19 phase?

### **3. Words from the Bible**

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9 and 1 Peter 5:5-7

What single verse or phrase in this section strikes you and why?

What does hope have to do with the future?

What does this mean to you at a practical level in your circumstances?

### **4. Video discussion**

Dr Barry Tolmay) (Overhead projector or laptop)

## **5. Group discussion**

- What are possibilities for our future in the context that we have just heard about?
- What would we desire in the future?
- How does the lens of 1 Peter 1 and 5 help us to think about this?
- Write down a few action items for yourself and the group.

## **7. Opportunity for prayer**

Let us ask the Lord to open our understanding to His future that he has planned for us and to give us opportunities to share hope with others amidst the negativity that surrounds us.

# **WEEK 3**

## **Church shrinkage and the nature of a missional church**

**Prof Rikus Fick**

### **1. Welcome**

Consider lighting a candle to burn for the duration of the discussion to symbolise the light and hope, which we search and strive for.

Then share with one another:

- What aspects of the church are you concerned about?
- Are you concerned about the future of your congregation?
- What threatens the existence of your congregation?

### **2. Background: Falling membership numbers and the nature of a missional church**

Debates are ongoing on many fronts regarding the dramatic downturn in membership numbers of many reformed churches. Many reasons have been cited for this. Among the most prominent are demographic factors, the influence of emigration to other countries as a result of political issues in South Africa, interdenominational migrations, the powerful lure of the charismatic stream, and absence of affiliation or indifference to a church. It has even been contended that the churches are in a battle for survival. This trend is evident in reformed churches in Europe, Australia and the USA.

There is general consensus that thought must be given to ministry models, church practice in which the role of the believer plays a bigger role, the training and equipping of church members, amalgamation of congregations in specific areas, etc. One of the most important matters requiring attention by the church, is a comprehensive missional ministry model.



<https://news.gallup.com/poll/259964/confidence-organized-religion-remains-low.aspx>

The missional idea cannot be confined to the agendas of synods and interdenominational discourse. To be missional requires that we should in essence witness through both word and deed. A missional congregation must make a difference in the community, the immediate vicinity and the rest of the world. This must naturally follow from a living relationship with God who sent his Son to this broken world. Therefore, this is part of the character of a congregation with an understanding of the true meaning of the kingdom of God.

There is reasonable consensus that continual renewal and reformation of the reformed churches in South Africa is absolutely and urgently needed. The role of Scripture and the reformed confession of faith must, however, remain a constant. The signs of the true believer and the true church must always remain clearly in sight.

### **3. Words from the Bible**

Matthew 16:13-18

Matthew 28:16-20

### **4. Video discussion**

Prof Rikus Fick (Overhead projector or laptop)

### **5. Group discussion**

- What are the causes of the fact that membership numbers in our own congregation are falling?
- What age group is more likely to look elsewhere for a church in which to feel at home?
- What has happened to the members who have disappeared from our congregation?
- What comfort for the church do the Lord Jesus' words in Matthew 16:18 have?

- Does this mean that no local churches will disappear?
- Whose problem is the falling membership numbers? The church council's or mine?
- How does one guard against change purely for the sake of change?

#### **6. What can we do about this at a practical level**

- If change is the solution, how does this affect the format of the worship service and the role of the church council?
- If change is the solution, how can we remain reformed?
- Can we as a congregation and a local church make a difference in the area where we are?
- How do we behave as a missional congregation in the light of the Lord Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19 and 20?
- How can we train members in our congregation or local church to think and act in a missional manner?

#### **7. Opportunity for prayer**

Let us pray that we will engage with those who have for whatever reason become alienated from the church. Let us earnestly seek to speak to others about the essence of faith and also make it practical by being missional.

## **WEEK 4**

### **Unity and reconciliation**

**Prof Nico Botha**

#### **1. Welcome**

On a positive note: Share with one another particularly positive experiences during Covid-19, which gave you courage and hope in the endeavours and search for unity and reconciliation. Consider lighting a candle to burn for the duration of the discussion to symbolise the light and hope, which we search and strive for.

#### **2. Background: Unity and reconciliation**

In the period covering the inception of democracy in 1994 to date, a number of buzz words have surfaced. Two of these words are peace and reconciliation. As politics dominates so completely, it is understandable that South Africans have come to believe that these two words have a secular meaning only. Unity and reconciliation are two extremely serious biblical terms. The URCSA (Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa) regarded them as so important that they were written into the Belhar

Confession. The question remains whether the URCSA has in fact continued to honour this biblical command. Now, particularly in Covid-19 times, all reformed churches must hear and obey the biblical command to strive for unity and reconciliation. It is, of course, easier said than done. Several trying realities in the country hinder unity and reconciliation. The triad of unemployment, inequality and poverty make it difficult for those who are most disadvantaged to feel in accord with others, even if all parties are Christians. At least two other factors aggravate this situation. One is the manner in which those with political power currently divide and fragment people according to ethnic and racial criteria. The other issue is the terrible manifestations of corruption prevalent in the country. Particularly during Covid-19, South Africans watched with horror the level of depravity to which people stooped through horrifying forms of corruption, described by the World Health Organization as murder. One sometimes wonders whether the country has turned into a den of thieves.

In reflecting on unity and reconciliation, it is important to keep in mind several important aspects, based on biblical principles. As people who belong to God, we know what price had to be paid to achieve unity and reconciliation. Jesus allowed his body on the cross to be broken to tear down the wall of separation. Prof Hannes Adonis wrote a thesis on the missional policy of the Dutch Reformed Church titled *Die afgebreekte skeidsmuur weer opgebou* [The broken wall of separation rebuilt]. One often wonders whether new practices are currently being employed to build new walls of separation.

The shape of the missional church post Covid-19 is a place and a movement where the separation between the proclamation of the gospel and social engagement must be radically overcome. The missional church will need to become a church with the poor, if it is too difficult to be a church for the poor. The gaping inequalities in our society, which are not defined by the texture of hair and skin colour, are clearly exposed.

The prophetic witness of the church should focus on justice, unity and reconciliation. And in the footsteps of the Belhar Confession, a fourth element comes to the fore, notably obedience.

A further challenge is that diversity should not be overlooked in the quest for unity. The missional church is also called to “manage” the diversity among people. The tendency to understand diversity only in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, language and culture, must be overcome. There must be space for diversity of gifts, talent,



<https://www.christianity.com/church/3-reasons-why-racial-reconciliation-should-be-a-church-priority.html>

spirituality, lifestyle choices, ideology, etc. Often efforts to achieve unity may be hampered, and resentment and even mistrust are evoked when the church fails to accommodate such diversity.

### **3. Words from the Bible**

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

### **4. Video discussion**

Prof Nico Botha (Overhead projector or laptop)

### **5. Group discussion**

- Has Covid-19 delivered unexpected and surprising moments that have made us realise how important unity and reconciliation are?
- Is it possible or preferable to pursue unity, reconciliation and peace (Ephesians refers to this repeatedly) without also working for justice?
- How does Ephesians 2:11-22 help us to overcome the defects, fault lines or wrongness, which Covid-19 has exposed?

### **6. What can we do at a practical level to promote unity and reconciliation?**

- What can the missional church/our own congregation do?
- How can different churches work together to promote unity and reconciliation with justice?
- What practical and concrete things can we do to make a contribution?

### **7. Opportunity for prayer**

Let us prayerfully seek God's guidance on how we should think about unity and reconciliation but also on how to make it a practical reality, in both our micro-contexts and also in our macro-contexts.

## **WEEK 5**

### **The church in rural parts, in the midst of Covid-19**

**Rev Nati Stander**

#### **1. Welcome**

Make everyone feel welcome and at home by asking how important the church is in rural parts. Consider lighting a candle to burn for the duration of the discussion to symbolise the light and hope, which we search and strive for.

## **2. Background: The church particularly in rural areas**

Covid-19 and other factors which play a role en route to the future affect the whole world and also all of us in southern Africa in urban and rural areas. We tend to think only of the urban dweller in a particular situation, while rural areas have their own attractions and also problems and challenges.

The depopulation of rural parts and the attraction of cities present a very big reality. Often the city is viewed as utopian while all the challenges of city life are not always adequately examined. Cities present enormous challenges regarding employment opportunities, housing, alcohol and drug addiction, and many other societal problems. The process of urbanisation is therefore often a complex reality and definitely not a utopia.

The church in rural areas is exposed to different realities. Shrinking numbers and associated challenges, the survival of isolated congregations or local churches far removed from other local churches, and the affordability of a full-time minister as a



result of socio-economic reasons, amongst others, are concrete problems to be tackled. The rural congregation is found in agricultural or related areas, or also in industrial and other development areas. In an agricultural society one encounters people who do not always live close to a church, or members who cannot attend events or meetings in the evenings. On the other hand, the agricultural community is often

exceptionally stable and forms the backbone of a local church. Local churches in rural industrial areas have other socio-societal challenges. Employment instability and smaller incomes often make it difficult for people to make positive and financial contributions to the survival of these congregations. Members of these local churches often contend with both rural and urban influences, and may be disempowered in these circumstances.

It is clear that rural areas face many challenges in the midst of Covid-19, and various other factors will also influence rural churches. Despite many challenges en route to the future, God also has a task for you in rural areas, whatever and whenever this might be. In the midst of issues such as farmers' uncertainties regarding land redistribution, drought, farm murders and poverty in and depopulation of rural areas, God call us to be a witness for Him at all times and in all places.

### **3. Words from the Bible**

Jeremiah 1:1-17 and Acts 6:1-7

### **4. Video discussion**

Rev Nati Stander (Overhead projector or laptop)

### **5. Group discussion**

- What is unique about the circumstances in rural areas where we find ourselves?
- What does God call us to do in these times?

### **6. What can we do in practice?**

- In what way can I assist in my immediate environment by using my talents?
- How can I join a mercy ministry for people in need?
- How can I, together with my fellow believers, be the true body of Christ in rural areas?

### **7. Opportunity for prayer**

Let us think in particular of the challenges faced by our people in rural areas. Let us think of our farmers and our farmworkers in terms of their safety, the issue of poverty and socio-economic decline of rural areas, and the conservation of our ecology and the protection of our natural beauty.

## **WEEK 6:**

### **Covid-19 and the future**

**Prof Hoffie Hofmeyr**

#### **1. Welcome**

As you have now worked through the 40-day series, do you feel less or more hopeful of the future and if so, why? Consider lighting a candle to burn for the duration of the discussion to symbolise the light and hope, which we search and strive for.

#### **2. Background**

Undoubtedly, the world in our time is particularly challenging. Naturally all times are challenging but we must be honest about the fact that the second wave of Covid-19 has left us feeling overwhelmed. We cannot deny that challenges and opportunities are significant for reformed churches as well as all churches in South Africa and in the world en route to the future. Many churches throughout the world are discussing themes such as church renewal, imparting of its significance by churches, new rituals and other themes. The most recent literature worldwide cautions that churches should guard against becoming merely electronic churches (e-churches) or even private churches (p-churches). Believers may lose the desire for and experience of unity and



fellowship in sharing the sacraments of God's presence through the elements of water, wine and bread. Many and varied positive challenges beckon to the church. Firstly, churches can garner credibility in this time. The fact that the church in our time has grown in its role and has provided much societal support, is very positive. Community service came strongly to the fore. The fact that the reformed churches have once again put first things first, and relegated moderately important matters to less important matters, is also positive. Many of our human and secular plans have proved to be fruitless pursuits. These difficult and even life-threatening times in which many have already lost loved ones, force us to reprioritise again. It is further positive that churches have worked in these times to enhance strong values with other churches that are not part of an underhand moneymaking business. Amongst others, we have tremendous challenges to realise better values in the realm of ecology. We thought that the resources of nature could be used and exhausted. However, this has resulted in natural imbalances that have helped pave the way for pandemics. So-called zoonotic viruses such as Covid-19 may increasingly be transmitted from animals to people. Thus, the reformed churches in South Africa have moved closer to one another. Many traditional stumbling blocks have become less important and a spirit of cooperation regarding a common confession of faith and witness has definitely developed. This is evident in many cases. In these times churches have been and will remain among the biggest and most important institutions in society. Their role is to spread a message of hope in the midst of despair, not only through words but by making actions concrete. Should Covid-19 become a less important factor in future, we will continue to build on the positive outcomes that the churches have achieved, as new hope and a better future come into being. As Desmond Tutu often noted, we are prisoners of hope and we do not have a choice other than to share this hope. Therefore, we must become bearers of hope to share with the world as we are tied to the greatest HOPE of all times as his children and as Christians.



Photo: Morné van Rooyen – Own work, Recognition,  
<https://af.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=131470>

### **3. Scripture**

Genesis 22:1-14 (God will provide)

### **4. Video discussion**

Prof HOFFIE Hofmeyr and Dr Coetzee Bester (Overhead projector or laptop)

### **5. Group discussion**

- Is only God able to determine the future and provide for us? What is the role of man in the future?
- How do you as a believer explain that bad things also happen in this world?
- Do you really think that there is hope for our world? Do the churches discuss and communicate sufficiently about the deeper meaning of hope, values and other contemporary themes of our time? Is leadership training emphasised adequately, particularly among young people?
- How do you understand the period of persecution of the church and the believer, to which Revelations refers?

### **6. What practical steps can we take to achieve this?**

- What can we do in our own congregations and local churches to prepare for and build towards the future?
- What can we do in the broader church context to prepare for and build towards the future?
- What can we do in our surroundings and in our country to prepare for and build towards the future?

### **7. Opportunity for prayer**

Let us bow before God in deep dependence regarding the past, the present and also the future: let us renew our trust in God who, in addition to our own responsibility, will still provide.

### 3

## LEADERS' GUIDE FOR MANUAL: "THE CHURCH, COVID AND THE FUTURE"



Photo: Melyna Valle

<https://unsplash.com/photos/zOYih3tQWSI>

### 1. Introduction

This "Leaders' Guide" together with the "Manual" that you are receiving FREE OF CHARGE thanks to the generous support of a number of organisations and institutions, has as its primary goal to serve the Church and the Kingdom in southern Africa. It aims to encourage reflection on and discussions about the future of all churches of Jesus Christ and prayers for all involved in these difficult and challenging Covid-19 times.

### 2. Purpose of the "Manual"

The "Manual" that you have now received in electronic format and which will be distributed widely in southern Africa, is the direct outcome of an extensive research project by a "Study group of South African church historians". This project focused primarily on the recent past and short-term future of the "Four (biggest) reformed churches in southern Africa (1990-2020)". This research project was sponsored by the "South African Academy for Science and Arts". [For more information about this "Research book", please refer below to Pt2(d)].

The primary practical goal of this “Manual”, which was also initiated by this “Study Group”, is as a resource for congregations and local churches, strategic workgroups and other smaller groups to guide discussion and reflection on the future of all, but particularly the reformed churches in southern Africa, en route to 2030 and 2040. This “Manual” has taken on a special meaning and additional relevance following the drastic new reality of Covid-19, which has affected our whole world. During apparently continual new waves of the pandemic worldwide, it is hoped that the content of this material and its availability as a virtual resource may help in a particular way to meet all the challenges that this pandemic poses to people. Although vaccines may gradually become available, we will not be spared the direct and indirect effects of Covid-19 for a long time.

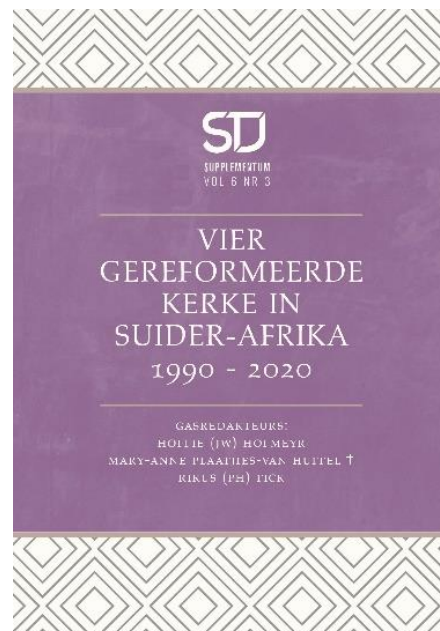
### **3. Accessories at your disposal in the “Toolkit”**

This “toolkit” in Afrikaans and English, which has been made available to you as leaders, and also to group members, comprises 4 resources. These are the “Manual”, a few “Videos” (unfortunately in Afrikaans only) and some “Sermon Notes” and this “Leaders’ Guide”. The fact that these accessories are available virtually, make this toolkit even more valuable in these uncertain Covid times. If there are people who however cannot access electronic resources, local churches can print the material to make them available. This toolkit is made available FREE OF CHARGE through the support received from the “South African Academy for Science and Arts”, the Christian Literature Fund (CLF) which is also well-known in the broader African context, the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk in Afrika (NHKA), the community radio station Pretoria FM, the visual media organisation GLOmedia.tv, as well as some personal donors. All you need to do is to download the “Manual” from the internet and use it electronically, and, if needed, to print it for discussion group leaders and possibly for members of small groups. Several practical guidelines for the toolkit are included below.

- a) **“Manual”**: The “Manual” is largely self-explanatory. It contains 6 different themes to be covered by congregations over a period of 6 weeks or 40 days. If the series cannot be presented at the start of February, it can be introduced at any other stage in the year. As is the case with the entire project, the intent of this “Manual” is not to offer a definitive view of the future of the churches or on Covid-19: instead, it aims to stimulate discussion and assist different congregations and local churches, each with their own specific interests, to seek distinctive solutions and guidance for their own unique circumstances.
- b) **“Videos”**: Use an overhead project to screen videos or use a laptop in a smaller group discussion. There is one video (unfortunately only in Afrikaans) for each of the 6 weeks; it has an introductory discussion featuring the person(s) presenting a specific week in the “Manual”.
- c) **“Sermon Notes”**: For each of the 6 weeks covered in the “Manual”, there is a set of “Sermon Notes” for preachers, in line with the particular theme of a specific week. The sermon Notes appear at the end of the “Leaders’ guide”. The Sermon Notes

are based on Scripture and are presented concisely to avoid being prescriptive. Changes can be made to these Sermon Notes based on inputs from a sermon-writing group or liturgical commission in your congregation. You may also decide that you do not need to use these Sermon Notes.

d) **The original “Research book”:** As mentioned above, this “Manual” and the assembled toolkit are the outcome of the initial research project on “Four biggest reformed churches in Southern Africa”. Although this 429-page book focuses mainly on the South African reformed churches, an English summary has been added to each article for the benefit of English-speaking readers. The book deals with hermeneutics, concepts of the church (ecclesiology), practices of worship, the role and experiences of women ministers, race relations and other contemporary issues such as ecology, poverty, and ecumenical issues. The book is also available FREE OF CHARGE via the online “open access” system of the Stellenbosch Theological Journal (STJ). Stellenbosch Theological Journal,



<https://ojs.reformedjournals.co.za/stj> The final 2 chapters of the book focus on the future of the churches. These 2 chapters highlight many aspects of the theory and practice of Future Studies and could be valuable reading material for the group leader in the oversight and facilitation of group discussions. Another very valuable resource could be the blogs of Carey Nieuwhof from Canada: he approaches the future of the churches, also as affected by Covid-19, in a very practical manner.

#### **4. Discussions in small groups**

Small group or growth group discussions have become commonplace in many churches, and many variations of this practice exist. Each congregation and small group could therefore use this material in a manner conducive to integration and use in a particular context. Of great importance is to use the Bible as a guideline for discussion, to use literature such as the “Research book” and the references contained in it, and to propose various topics for discussion. During these discussions by small groups, it may be sensible to institute a useful ritual such as the lighting of a candle or possibly something similar to symbolise the light that we seek.

#### **5. Strategic discussion in the context of church leadership**

There is also a possibility of strategic planning discussions in congregations and local churches, led by the church council or congregational management. The aim of this “Manual” is not to provide a guide for strategic management: its purpose is to stimulate conversation in the context of strategic management. Many aspects related to future planning regarding congregations in terms of Covid-19 and other future factors may be raised in this time. Church management and councils must be prepared

to address issues requiring guidance for church members when it comes to new and challenging questions and uncertainties regarding the church, church attendance and other activities, as well as stress relating to uncertainty, grief because of having lost loved ones, job losses and financial constraints affecting church members.

## **6. Other discussion groups**

This “Manual” with its comprehensive toolkit can be used in any discussion group in society, which could be a group of retirees, a book club, a youth group or even a professional group. There are no copyright restrictions.

## **7. Possible longer-term actions and effects of these discussions**

There is a good chance that various further discussions may evolve out of group discussions. It is our hope that the “Manual” will contribute in some small measure to reflection on all the realities of our time, which could, together with Covid-19, influence the future. It is clear that churches are among the few institutions that have retained and even grown in credibility during these Covid times, primarily as they have reached out to people in need. The church of Christ is one of the few institutions, which formulates and promotes values. Other possibilities to consider later include webinars and similar media for stimulating discussion or additional published material.

## **8. In conclusion**

It is our hope that this “Leaders’ guide” to the “Manual” will be of value for discussions in different congregations and local churches of various churches in southern Africa. The ultimate aim of the project as indicated earlier is simply to serve and grow the church of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God in these challenging times, and to live a life of devotion to God and to honour Him.



## 4

# SERMON NOTES: “THE CHURCH, COVID AND THE FUTURE”



Foto: [Aaron Burden](#) by Unsplash

## WEEK 1

### Theme of Manual and Video: “The church, the past and the present”

Prof Johan van der Merwe,  
Dr Frikkie Labuschagne  
and Rev Anandie Greyling

**Read:** Acts 27:13-16 and 22-38 (The storm at sea) and Psalm 146:1-6

**Text verse:** Acts 27:25

**Theme:** The Lord preserves his church – in whatever storms we may find ourselves

### **Proposed sub-themes**

- No storm on earth can halt the advance of the gospel.
- No storm on earth can sever my relationship with God or my fellowman.
- Storms on earth teach us to trust in Him to whom we belong and whom we serve.

### **Thoughts and questions for reflection**

- In the scripture reading, Paul is the messenger of the gospel, the foundation on which the church would be built. The gospel is yet to be proclaimed in Rome.
- Note the many words in this section, which indicate danger, risk, adversity, effort, hopelessness, fear, violent storms, loss, shipwreck, etc.
- By contrast: encouragement by an angel sent by God Himself, fulfilment of God's promise to Paul that he would bear witness to Him in Rome (Acts 23:11), trust in God, amongst others.
- The bigger question: was the storm, seen against God's big plan, really a disaster? Were Paul and his companions ever excluded from the will of God? Did the storm stop God's plan? Can we say the same about the Covid-19 storm in which we find ourselves?
- What is the particular significance of Paul's reference to himself as someone who belongs to God and who serves him?
- "It will be" is a pronouncement which comforts and encourages.
- When we read Psalm 146 alongside this passage, we are called upon, even during the Covid-19 period in which we find ourselves, to trust in God alone. Believers must therefore not put their trust in other people or in princes.
- In conclusion, what does Psalm 146 finally teach us, amongst others, about how to deal with the challenges of Covid-19?

## **WEEK 2**

### **Theme of Manual and Video: "Various future options for the churches"**

Dr Barry Tolmay

**Read:** 1 Peter 1:3-9 and 1 Peter 5:5-7

**Text verse:** 1 Peter 1:3 and 4

**Theme:** The church lives and plans in the hope born of the resurrection of Christ



### **Proposed sub-themes**

- The hope of the church is born of a living hope, the actual resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- Living hope is grounded in God's promises.
- Living hope spurs us to action with a view to the future, while we continue to work in obedience.

Thoughts and questions for reflection:

- Can a Christian live without hope? No, hope is a typical characteristic of a true Christian. We have a living hope because we have a Saviour who conquered death.
- It has been aptly said: "A living hope is the link between the present (rebirth) and the future (everlasting glory)" and "hope is faith in the future tense".
- Hope makes it possible to see heaven through the thickest clouds. Peter writes to people in difficult circumstances. Hope gives us the assurance that God has our good in mind for the future.
- Our hope is in an inheritance in heaven, which cannot be destroyed by moths or rust and which cannot be broken into and stolen by thieves.
- Time causes many people's hope to fade but the Christian's hope strengthens in time. Hope helps us deal with the future – a joyous future.
- Our hope for the future is grounded on what Christ did in the past and is still doing now.
- When we hope, we do not believe that the future poses insurmountable obstacles. When we hope, we do not need to look back to see whether we have made it. We have confidence in the outcome. Therefore, we do not fear the future.
- Hope causes the church to live in active anticipation, and never fall into passive anticipation. Therefore, the question: how should the church engage with the future in the light of the living hope?

## **WEEK 3**

### **Theme of manual and video "Church shrinkage and how to be a missional church"**

**Prof Rikus Fick**

**Read:** Matthew 28:16-20

**Text verse:** Matthew 28:18-20

**Theme:** The Lord causes his church to grow through the making of disciples.

**Proposed sub-themes**

- The church grows through the power of the Sender
- The church grows through the power of Biblical instruction
- The church grows through the power of sustained discipleship

**Thoughts and questions for reflection**

- “Go”: means to do something en route once you have started. Jesus’ command requires you to do something as part of your life as a disciple. Throughout your life, wherever you go or may find yourself, you must make disciples. This is true for every single believer, not just for the church council or a committee.
- “Make disciples”: This is a serious command and one that requires immediate attention. Not “make converts”. Rebirth and conversion are the beginning. A believer must become a disciple, To be a disciple is a life-long process during which you become less and Christ becomes more in you. This new life must become a way of living; you increasingly become more of what you already are. Believers are followers of Christ. This is a (re)productive life: each disciple makes disciples.
- “Baptise them”: this concerns the responsibility of the church to those who have become believers. They make a public confession of faith and become part of the church. They become part of the family of God. “In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost”: the doctrine of the church centres on the Trinity. You cannot separate what you are from what you believe.
- “Teach them”: The truth of Scripture must be conveyed (someone must do the teaching) so that it can be lived. Not by “preaching” but by systematic training to help someone from one point to the next.
- “I am with you”: the importance task of disciple-making needs not be done through our own efforts. Christ gives us power through his Holy Spirit; He has received all power. He sends and equips.

## **WEEK 4**

### **Theme of Manual and Video: “Unity and reconciliation in the churches after Covid-19”**

**Prof Nico Botha**

**Read:** Ephesians 2:11-22

**Text verse:** Ephesians 2:14

**Theme:** In Christ we must pursue unity and reconciliation in the church and in this world, even in the midst of Covid-19.

**Proposed sub-themes**

- Christ embodies the highest symbol of unity and reconciliation
- Manmade obstacles to unity and reconciliation, as are highlighted in the Bible
- Our challenge in these Covid-19 times remains the pursuit of unity and reconciliation in the church and in the world. Covid-19 reveals surprising moments that make us realise the importance of the message of living in unity and reconciliation.

**Thoughts and questions for reflection**

- Refer to the extraordinary context of this prominent church in Ephesus: aspects such as the fact that the city was under the rule of the Roman Empire; the fertility goddess Diana (Artemis) was an object of serious and devoted worship; in this new Christian church, Jews, Greeks and others needed to be reached; everything was only possible through the message of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ; brothers and sisters established new relationships in which Jesus Christ was Lord, and no longer emperors, princes and false gods.
- The question to answer next is whether true unity and reconciliation in Christ is cheap or costly to achieve.
- What is the meaning of the word, “wall”, in verse 14? What are the manmade walls which currently hinder the search for unity and reconciliation?
- What clear implications are there in the text for our mutual relations with the church and the world?
- It is clear that Covid-19 reveals unexpected and surprising moments that make us realise the importance to the church and the world of the message and the demonstrable evidence of living in unity and reconciliation.
- How does Ephesians 2:11-22 help us to overcome defects, fault lines or wrongness revealed by Covid-19?
- Is it possible or desirable to pursue unity, reconciliation and also peace (which is mentioned repeatedly in Ephesians 2) without also working to achieve justice?

## **WEEK 5**

### **Theme of Manual and Video: “How to be a church in rural areas, also in the midst of Covid-19**

**Rev Nati Stander**

**Read:** Jeremiah 1:1-10 and Acts 6:1-7

**Text verse:** Jeremiah 1:7: For you shall go to all to whom I send you, And whatever I command you, you shall speak.

Theme: God sends people everywhere, also to rural areas, to the farms and the vast plains and mountains of our beautiful country.

### **Proposed sub-themes**

- God calls someone like Jeremiah to perform an important task
- In spite of human hesitation and resistance, He promises to give Jeremiah his power and his presence, and to equip him fully
- God calls you who live in rural parts, on vast plains and mountains to be a wonderful witness for him

### **Thoughts and questions for reflection**

- God calls people from all over, such as Jeremiah, a shepherd and naturalist from the rural town of Anathoth, and Amos, the sheep and fig farmer in Tekoa in Judah.
- God spelled out a task for them, the contents of which was to be shared with the nation of Israel: to go up, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, and to build and to plant, and to work for justice.
- And although it breaks his heart, Jeremiah prophesies that, just as a clay pot is broken, the Lord will break the people who have forsaken him and also the city of Jerusalem. The exile to Babel is their punishment. The Lord will not spare them and they will be taken away by their enemies.
- Ironically this exile was also their salvation. As part of Jeremiah's calling to build and settle, he describes the exiles being led away as a basket of figs, and in a letter, he speaks of God's favour towards them.
- In the midst of many challenges on the way to the future, God also has a task for you in rural areas, whatever this is and wherever it may be.
- Despite our disobedience in failing to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout our country and in every place, He will honour his promises to us.
- God will guarantee his promises and confirm them by tokens
- When, for example, He showed Jeremiah the branch of an almond tree, He tells us that He is vigilant to accomplish his word in full, as He does not sleep, and certainly not in the Covid-19 times.
- In the midst of some unique characteristics as well as the poverty and the depopulation of rural areas, together with uncertainties among farmers regarding land appropriation, farm murders and crime, God calls us to be a witness for Him at all times and in all places. We need to spread the Gospel and serve our fellowman, whether old or young, poor or rich, weak or strong.

## WEEK 6

### Theme of Manual and Video: “The churches and the future: what next?”

Prof Hoffie Hofmeyr

**Read:** Ephesians 1:15-23 and 3:8-21

**Text verse:** Ephesians 3:16-19

**Theme:** With reference to Paul’s prayer for Ephesus, our prayer for the future in the midst of Covid-19

#### Proposed sub-themes

- Relevant aspects regarding the context of this moving prayer
- Paul’s specific prayer for the church in Ephesus
- Our prayer for our people and for the future in the midst of Covid-19: faith, hope and love

#### Thoughts and questions for reflection

- The epistle to the remarkable and fascinating congregation in Ephesus is often called a book of prayers.
- Paul’s prayers that are relevant here are patterned on the Jewish prayer of praise, the Baraka prayer, with four main elements: praise, intercession, confession of faith, and once again, praise.
- First and foremost, we bring all praise and thanks to God: not only does he give us chances and opportunities, he creates them for us in the midst of Covid-19.
- This is followed by intercession for God’s church to serve in every possible way.
- The first element of intercession is FAITH in God Almighty who has a plan; the second element is the plea for unity and support for one another through LOVE; the third element is to be a serving and witnessing church, giving HOPE in the midst of a life-threatening virus.
- Next is the confession of faith: God is the God of history and he needs people in his church, not as obstacles or demonstrating a lack of faith, but as channels for his Gospel message.
- In conclusion: praise again, for to Him all honour and glory to all eternity.
- Do we realise, particularly in these Covid-19 times, how wide and far and high and deep his love reaches?
- Due to Covid-19 and other factors, we as churchgoers have become lethargic and lack energy.

- God renews us and gives an injection to devotion: He wishes to equip and energise by a godly infusion in our living veins, similar to a medical drip. This he uses to strengthen and equip us to practise and affirm FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE in this world en route to the future.
- Throughout the ages, the Holy Spirit has worked powerfully in and through people, and brought new life.

## 5

### **Addendum A: List of people involved in videos**

Video Week 1: Prof Johan van der Merwe, Dr Frikkie Labuschagne en Rev Anandie Greyling

Video Week 2: Dr Barry Tolmay

Video Week 3: Prof Rikus Fick

Video Week 4: Prof Nico Botha

Video Week 5: Rev Nati Stander

Video Week 6: Prof Hoffie Hofmeyr

## 6

### **Addendum B: List of facilitators or consultants**

Dr Coetzee Bester: Email: [coetzee@pamodzicc.co.za](mailto:coetzee@pamodzicc.co.za)

Dr Barry Tolmay: Email: [bjt2012@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bjt2012@yahoo.co.uk)

Dr Frikkie Labuschagne: Email: [frikkie@nhk.co.za](mailto:frikkie@nhk.co.za)

Prof Hoffie Hofmeyr: Email: [linhof@mweb.co.za](mailto:linhof@mweb.co.za)

## 7

### **Addendum C: List of contributors to Work Manual in alphabetical order**

Dr Coetzee Bester (DRC)

Prof Nico Botha (URCSA)

Prof Rikus Fick (GKSA)

Ds Anandie Greyling (DRC)

Prof Hoffie Hofmeyr (CRC):

Dr Frikkie Labuschagne (NHKA)

Ds Nati Stander (DRC)

Dr Barry Tolmay (DRC)

Prof Johan van der Merwe (DRC)