

SURVEY REPORT

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY IN FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE



Researched and Compiled by the Interns and
Volunteers of Christian Lawyers Centre (LEGAL LINK)

Submitted to:

**The Ministry of Social Welfare
(NaCoVERC)
The Inter- Religious Council**

September 2020

DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to all religious institutions in Sierra Leone that are making frantic efforts in complying with the Covid-19 Guidelines thereby ensuring the health and safety of worshippers in churches and mosques in the country.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We give God all the glory for enabling us as interns to carry out this survey report successfully. We acknowledge the support of the Board of Directors and Executive members of Christian Lawyers Centre (LEGAL LINK) towards the success of this survey report.

We also appreciate our esteemed and selfless interns and volunteers at Christian Lawyers Centre (CLC) for their tremendous sacrifice in making this survey a successful one.

Special thanks and profound gratitude goes to our Executive Director and supervisor, Commissioner Rashid Dumbuya Esq. for guiding us throughout the survey process.

Furthermore, we acknowledge the support, prayers and wise counsel of Bishop Dr Abu Koroma, the Presiding Bishop and General Overseer of the Flaming Bible Church as well as the first Pentecostal Bishop and first President of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Sierra Leone.

Lastly, we salute and appreciate the efforts rendered to us by all the churches and mosques that took part in the survey. Without their cooperation, this survey project would not have been successful.

To God be all the glory!

ACRONYMS

AU	Africa Union
APC	All Peoples Congress
COVID-19	Corona virus Disease discovered in 2019
CCSL	Council of Churches in Sierra Leone
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
EOC	Emergency Operation Centre
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West Africa States
ESCR	Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
GNP	Gross National Product
HCP	Health Care Personnel
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICU	Intensive Care Unit
IRC	Inter-Religious Council
MERS	Middle East Respiratory Syndrome
MoHS	Ministry of Health and Sanitation
NGC	National Grand Coalition
NaCoVERC	National COVID 19 Emergency Response Centre
PFSL	Pentecostal Fellowship of Sierra Leone
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SLPP	Sierra Leone Peoples Party
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
UN	United Nations
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

CONTENT PAGE

1. COVER PAGE.....	1
2. DEDICATION.....	2
3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	2
4. ACRONYMS.....	3
5. CONTENT PAGE.....	4
6. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	5-6
7. INTRODCUTION/BACKGROUND.....	7- 8
8. METHODOLOGY.....	8
9. SCOPE.....	9
10.AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.....	9
11.RESEARCH SURVEY QUESTIONS.....	9
12.JUSTIFICATIONS/SIGNIFICANCE.....	9
13.TARGETTED BENEFICIARIES.....	9
14.CORE-WORK/HIGHLIGHT OF KEY FINDINGS.....	10-14
15.IMPACT & CHALLENGES.....	14-15
16.RECOMMENDATIONS.....	16
17.CONCLUSION.....	17
18.ABOUT CHRISTAN LAWYERS CENTRE (LEGAL LINK).....	18
19.CONTACTS.....	18

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This survey report gives a critical assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on the religious community of Freetown, Western Sierra Leone. It also unravels the level of compliance as well as the challenges faced by religious institutions as they seek to implement the COVID-19 guidelines given to them by the National Covid-19 Emergency Response Centre (NaCoVERC).

Furthermore, the setting of the research among other things include the Executive Summary, Introduction, Methodology, Scope, Aims & Objectives, Research survey questions, Justifications, Key findings, Challenges and Possible recommendations.

The survey report also adopts several methodologies in bringing out its findings. Key among many others include; observations, personal interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires and desktop reviews and analysis.

The scope of the survey limits itself to the month of July 2020 (the month in which churches and mosques were declared open) to September 2020. It focused primarily on 30 churches and 30 mosques with large congregations or jamaat within the Western area. Nevertheless however, other smaller religious institutions and audiences as well as key stakeholders within the religious community in Sierra Leone were also consulted. This was done in order to have a holistic assessment of the level of compliance to the COVID-19 guidelines.

The key survey findings include the following:

- Despite the challenges, 90% of the religious institutions surveyed in the Western Area are compliant with the Covid-19 Guidelines issued by NaCoVERC.
- There were no reports of Covid-19 victims in any of the churches or mosques visited since their reopening.
- There is 95% compliance with respect to the use of face masks by worshippers during services/ prayers.
- On the issue of washing of hands especially before entering of worship centres, about 99% of the religious institutions surveyed were compliant.
- Also, due to their seating arrangements, 90% of the Churches visited maintained social distancing during worship hours while 75% of the mosques surveyed maintained social distancing during prayers. This difference in outcomes was largely as a result of the standing position applicable to the worship style of the Muslim religion. It is obvious that the human body may move more often than a chair does.
- It was also noted that many of the congregation members showed outright disrespect to the guidelines before they enter the worship and prayer centres; and further express same immediately after they end their services /prayers and step foot out of the compound of the mosques and churches. For instance, many do not bother to wash their hands after services or prayers or even have their

facemasks on or maintain social distancing when interacting with each other after services and prayers.

- The use of facemasks on children in many of the religious institutions visited (mosques and churches) remains a big challenge.
- There is a great deal of effort being made by some churches especially the Methodist and Pentecostal denominational churches to have in place an attendance list containing the names and contacts of worshippers that were present during worship services. Though this condition was never required by the NaCoVERC guidelines, such a practise is of immense importance especially in ensuring effective contact tracing in the event of any outbreak during service meetings.
- Furthermore, even though 90% of the religious institutions visited clean their environment and fumigate / disinfect their places of worship before services and prayers, it was noted however that only a handful of them do cleanings and fumigation in between services and prayers.
- More importantly also, the survey reveals that unlike secular leaders, religious clerics (Bishops, Pastors and Imams) are making a great deal of effort during their respective services and prayer times to live by example with regards the Covid-19 guidelines. That is, they lead, preach and say prayers with their masks on, maintain social distancing and also emphasize on the importance of adhering to the Covid-19 guidelines to their congregation. The high compliance level within the religious community in Freetown therefore could be largely attributed to their efforts.
- Ironically however, Covid-19 has created some opportunities especially in the use of online social media platforms (facebook, zoom, instagram, youtube, whatsapp etc) for religious socialization, networking, worship and ministration to millions of people across the world. However, only few churches have leveraged on this opportunity appropriately.
- Cleanliness of worship centres and their environment has also been enhanced under Covid-19 era.
- The shortened time frame of worship as required by the Covid-19 guidelines for churches (1hr 30 mins) per service has also been received with great joy by many worshippers interviewed.
- There was no report of any religious institution being fined, suspended or shut down by NaCoVERC for willful disobedience to the Guidelines.
- In sum, notwithstanding the inconvenience that COVID-19 has brought along with it, 85% of the participant religious institutions surveyed admitted that it is quite premature at this moment for religious institutions to return to normal ways of worship without reference or strict adherence to the Covid-19 guidelines.

INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

Sierra Leone is a country situated on the West Coast of Africa on the Atlantic Ocean. It shares border with Guinea to the North and North East, Liberia to the South and South East and the Atlantic Ocean to the West. The country is also known for white sand beaches lining the Freetown peninsula.

Sierra Leone is a secular state although its inhabitants are highly religious in practice and outlook. Christianity and Islam are the two main dominant religions in the country. The constitution of Sierra Leone provides for freedom of religion and the government of Sierra Leone generally protects it.

According to statistics from the Inter- Religious Council of Sierra Leone, 77% of Sierra Leone's populations are Muslims, 21% are Christians and 2% are followers of traditional religion. Sierra Leone is regarded as one of the most religiously tolerant countries in the world. Muslims and Christians collaborate and interact with each other peacefully and often times inter-marriages between both faiths in the country do occur. In politics, the overwhelming majority of Sierra Leoneans vote for a candidate without regard to the candidate being a Muslim or a Christian.

The country contains legal, institutional and policy frameworks that regulate religious activities within its jurisdiction. In terms of legal framework, the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone under section 24 recognizes and protects the right to freedom of religion in the country. With regards institutional frameworks, there is the Ministry of Social Welfare that provides policy oversight to the religious community, the Freetown City Council that serves as a registration body for churches and Mosques as well as the Inter-Religious Council that superintends over inter- faith disputes in the country. Sierra Leone's Inter-Religious Council is made up of both Muslim and Christian religious leaders whose core mandate is to serve as moral guarantors to the peace and religious tolerance of the country.

Sierra Leone has had a turbulent past that has killed thousands of its inhabitants and devastated its economy and infrastructure. These ugly incidents include among many others, a 10 years bloody civil war, an ebola outbreak, a ferocious Mudslide and now a Corona Virus pandemic.

The Corona Virus which started in Wuhan, China as far back as November 2019 migrated rapidly across the world claiming thousands of lives on a daily basis; Sierra Leone being no exception. But even before the country could record its first Covid-19 index case on the 31st March 2020, the government, in a Press Release dated 20th March 2020, announced a ban through the Ministry of Social Welfare restricting all social and religious gatherings in the country. A state of public emergency was subsequently declared on the 24th March 2020 and all schools across the country were shut down to the extent that even Universities and colleges could not finish their first semester exams due to the bans placed by the government.

Some Churches and Mosques immediately resorted to holding their activities through social media, radio, TV and other online platforms like facebook, zoom, youtube and

whatsapp especially on Sundays in order to keep their congregations spiritually engaged during the lockdown. This resulted in numerous challenges for many religious institutions in the country particularly in the area of communal prayers and administration of religious rites and doctrines.

In addition also, religious institutions and their members suffered financially, morally and even spiritually. Financial contributions and intake dropped drastically and many members had no access to their spiritual leaders for impartation, deliverance, healing, counseling, etc.

After four months of the ban on communal worship, several NGOs, CSOs and other spiritual stakeholders in the country had deliberations with the state authorities on the re-opening of Churches and Mosques. These deliberations led to the government's consideration of lifting up of the ban on congregational worship. Consequently, on the 9th July 2020, the President of Sierra Leone, His Excellency Julius Maada Bio declared the lifting up of the ban on communal worship throughout the country. To minimize the risks however, Covid-19 guidelines were subsequently issued by NaCoVERC on the 10th of July 2020 to guide the safe operations of religious institutions in the country.

These guidelines included the practice of washing of hands, wearing of face masks whilst in church/mosque, maintaining 6ft physical and social distance during prayers and fumigating of places of worship amongst many others. The guidelines were issued in order to prevent the risks of an outbreak of COVID -19 within religious institutions as they return to congregational worship and prayers.

This survey report therefore gives a critical assessment of the impact of COVID -19 on the religious community of Freetown, Sierra Leone and further unravels the level of compliance as well as the challenges currently faced by religious institutions as they seek to implement the COVID-19 guidelines given to them by (NaCoVERC).

As an organization that advocates and defends the rights of religious communities and vulnerable groups in Sierra Leone, this report has been put together in good faith to showcase not only best practices but also the impacts as well as the challenges being faced by religious institutions within the COVID-19 era as they seek to worship and offer prayers to God/Allah.

METHODOLOGY

This report adopts both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to bring out its findings. Regarding the quantitative methodological approach, tools like observations, personal interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires were administered.

The qualitative methods adopted largely include desktop reviews of reports, journals and articles on the impact of Covid-19.

SCOPE

The scope of the report ranges from July 2020 to September 2020. The survey focused primarily on 30 Churches and 30 Mosques in the Western Area, Freetown capital city and these Churches and Mosques were of mixed denominations ranging from large, medium to small.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. The principal aim of this survey is to critically assess the impact of Covid-19 on the religious community of Freetown, Sierra Leone.
2. In achieving this, the work focuses on the extent to which religious institutions in Freetown are being compliant to the Covid-19 guidelines issued by NaCoVERC.
3. Furthermore, the report looks at the internal mechanisms being put in place by religious institutions to prevent an outbreak of Covid-19 within their environment.
4. The work also proffers plausible recommendations on how religious institutions can effectively mitigate the risks as they carry out their normal religious activities in the country.

RESEARCH SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. To what extent has Covid-19 impacted on the religious community in Freetown, Sierra Leone?
2. Has there been any outbreak of Covid-19 in any religious institution in Freetown since the reopening of churches and mosques in the country?
3. Are the churches and mosques fully compliant to the covid-19 guidelines issued by NaCoVERC?
4. Are there any mechanisms put in place by these institutions to prevent a covid-19 outbreak or mitigate its spread in the event of an outbreak?
5. Is it timely for religious institutions to return to normal ways of worship without reference or adherence to the covid-19 guidelines?

JUSTIFICATIONS / SIGNIFICANCE

- This research survey will help showcase the extent to which Covid-19 has impacted on the religious community of Freetown.
- The survey report is also significant because it assesses the level of compliance of religious institutions to the Covid-19 guidelines.
- The research survey also discovers best practices within the religious community.
- The survey also unearths challenges and proffer recommendations for reform.

TARGETED PARTICIPANTS/BENEFICIARIES

The targeted participants and beneficiaries of this survey report are essentially the two predominant religious institutions in Sierra Leone, i.e Churches and Mosques.

CORE WORK

HIGHLIGHT OF KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

These survey findings as contained in this report have been tailored in line with the guidelines given by NaCoVERC to religious institutions. They stipulate the extent to which compliance has been made, best practices effected, challenges faced, gaps identified and risks mitigated within the religious community in Freetown, Sierra Leone. For an enhanced comprehension of these findings, they've been categorized via appropriate headings.

HYGIENE

- ❖ The NaCoVERC guidelines for the resumption of congregational worship stipulate that all religious institutions upon reopening must disinfect their premises and also do so in between services.

Findings:

- Based upon our findings, it was discovered that all the churches and mosques visited disinfected their premises upon reopening. However, not all churches\ mosques disinfect their worship centres in - between services and prayer times as there's usually not enough time to do so. Nonetheless however, for most of the churches and mosques visited, fumigation is done on a weekly basis usually after or before the Sunday service and Friday prayers respectively.
- ❖ Guideline A (2) stipulates that every worshipper must either use soap or apply sanitizers before they're allowed to enter the premises. Also, veronica buckets, soap, water and hand sanitizers must be provided to worshippers upon entering the churches/mosques.

Findings:

- In all of the churches and mosques visited, there were veronica buckets, hand sanitizers, soap and thermometers provided at every entrance of the worship centres. There were even posters displayed directing members to the location of available veronica buckets where the jamat or congregation could wash their hands. The level of Compliance to the guideline requirement was 99%.
- The guidelines further required mosques to ensure that the foot wares of worshippers are well kept within the mosque and that worshippers are urged to place their foot wares in plastic bags.

Findings:

- Even though this guideline to a very large extent was given due attention to by many of the mosques visited; however, there were a handful of mosques where

worshippers still placed foot wares outside of the mosques as was the case before the Covid-19 outbreak.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- ❖ The preventive measures stipulated by the guidelines emphasize the use of thermometers to check temperatures, facemasks and sanitizers.

Findings:

- As stated earlier, in all of the religious institutions surveyed, there was the appropriate use of thermometers. During the interviews conducted, none of the pastors or imams had experienced any case of abnormal temperatures or covid-19 patients or anything of the sort. Also, in all of the churches and mosques visited, veronica buckets containing water, soap and sanitizers were available, giving worshippers the option to chose from among the two which one they were comfortable with.
- Face masks / face shields were widely in use in all of the churches and mosques visited. The use of face masks was made compulsory and strictly enforced by church and mosque officials. No worshipper could enter into the worship and prayer grounds without a facemask appropriately attached. In most of the religious centres visited, posters were placed on walls in different locations instructing members to wear face masks. The inscription 'NO MASK NO ENTRY' or 'PLEASE PUT ON YOUR FACE MASK' could be seen almost everywhere around the religious premises.
- But notwithstanding however, even though all worshippers had their masks on, there were instances where some worshippers placed their facemasks down to their chins or slightly below their noses during services or prayer time. When asked why they do this, some claimed it was because they needed fresh air or they were being suffocated by the continuous use of facemasks.
- Our findings further revealed that there was 99% compliance rate regarding the use of facemasks by religious leaders and authorities. 99% of the pastors/imams heading the churches and mosques visited wore face masks / face shields while preaching or leading prayers. This is quite the opposite when compared to secular leaders in the nation. Even praise and worship leaders as well as choristers made use of facemasks while doing their song ministrations.
- In cases where worshippers forget their masks, it was noted in some of the mosques and churches visited that, authorities provided masks or sold it out to them for reasonable prices. Ankara masks were usually available to lend to worshippers without facemasks and could be washed immediately afterwards.
- In cases where members had no masks on, they were either asked to buy one (which is usually for sale at the entrance) or were denied entrance into the worship centre or premises.

NUMBERS AND SEATING CAPACITY

- ❖ The guidelines further provided that “all places of worship must not exceed 50% of the original capacity of the space taking into cognizance physical distancing of at least 6ft.”

Findings:

- There was a high level of compliance to this guideline with only minor shortcomings.
- Most churches increased their number of services and made a reduction in the number of attendees per service.
- Due to the 6ft physical distancing maintained in the sitting positions of church congregants, additional spaces were provided by churches for an overflow congregation in cases where seats were not adequate.
- The guideline also required that Muslims congregational prayers be done in batches of at least 50% of the mosques capacity.
- Except for the Friday juma prayers were overcrowding posed a serious challenge, many of the mosques visited had lesser challenges regarding increased number of worshippers during other days in the week. So the need for this variation does not often arise except during Fridays prayers. It was observed that half of the mosques visited did endeavor to have prayers in batches while the other half just do a one-off prayer for all.
- Furthermore, unlike churches that stay a bit longer in their services, prayers in mosques did not last for long and there were efforts on the part of imams particularly on FRIDAYS to shorten their sermons so as to mitigate the risks of an outbreak due to overcrowding.

SOCIAL DISTANCING AND SAFE PRACTICES

- ❖ The Guidelines required that all places of worship take into cognizance physical and social distancing of at least 6ft and other safe social practices.

Findings:

- Majority of the churches and mosques visited adhered to the guideline stipulating the length of time every service or prayers should last for.
- Services were conducted within one and half hours whilst juma prayers lasted thirty minutes with each service or prayers having an interval of thirty minutes.
- With regards maintaining social and physical distancing, majority of the churches organized their seating positions reflecting 6ft physical distance between worshippers. However, the issue of social distancing remained a big challenge to some mega churches especially after the end of each service. A lot of the members do not maintain adequate social distancing on their way out of the church.
- Regarding the mosques, the issue of social and physical distancing was strictly maintained only by half of the mosques surveyed. Bulk of the majority

encountered serious challenge in ensuring this. In some of the mosques visited, members were seen praying close to each other almost shoulder to shoulder. This was perhaps largely due to the standing positions applicable to the Muslim prayers. It is more likely that a human body may move easily from its position than a chair does.

- There were instances also where seats and mats were marked in churches and mosques respectively in order to indicate social and physical distancing.
- Refusal of hand shakings and hugging were only adhered to during service hours but largely neglected after service or prayer hours by majority of worshippers.
- Pastors / imams have desisted from laying hands on members during prayers and ministration.
- The mode of exit in some of the mosques and churches visited also proved a challenge to physical distancing as many worshippers were seen crowded at exit doors while trying to make their way out of worship centres.
- Most of the worship members took off their masks once they were out of the churches and mosques and further associated and interacted with one another without deference for the guidelines.

MINISTRATION PRACTICES

Findings:

- As earlier stated, the prohibition of the laying of hands by pastors or imams was strictly adhered to by all religious leaders in the institutions surveyed.
- In all churches visited, Choristers were divided according to the number of services in order to reduce physical contact. They even sang and lead praises with their facemasks on.
- Special microphones were reserved exclusively for the imams or pastors. In some churches, several microphones were made available to different speakers while others even sanitized them before it was used by another person.
- The method of administering communion by churches was also altered in order to reduce contact with the congregation. For some Anglican churches, the intinction method was adopted. This method involves steeping or soaking the bread in the wine and putting it in the hands of the communicant so they may receive both aspects of the Eucharist simultaneously. Some of the churches even used spoons to serve the communion bread to congregants instead of allowing them take it from the plate by hand.
- During the survey also, it was observed that in both mosques and churches, worshippers sat together with their family members perhaps for fear of the spread of the virus from a stranger or third party.

MONITORING AND COMPLIANCE

- ❖ It is provided under the Guidelines from NaCoVERC that an internal monitoring committee is to be constituted in every mosque/church in order to oversee compliance to the suggested guidelines.

Findings:

- An internal monitoring committee could only be found in about 70% of the religious institutions surveyed. In some cases, the survey team was referred to that committee for enquiries and answers.
- In some churches especially the Methodist denomination, the internal monitoring committee maintained a register for attendees of every service. This register contained information about the names, addresses and telephone numbers of every member. This was done in order to make contact tracing easier in case there was a report of any suspected covid-19 case during the service.
- During the course of this survey, it was also discovered that most churches had suspended counselling sessions in order to minimize contact with members.
- Sensitization was principally done by the internal monitoring committee and also by pastors and imams during every service/prayers time and also during general announcements.
- Ushers in churches and some mosques authorities played a great role in ensuring compliance. Members were usually policed by these people to put on their face masks appropriately and properly wash their hands before entering the worship premises. Members who refused to follow due procedure were kindly asked to exit the premises or do as required.

IMPACTS AND CHALLENGES

IMPACTS

Churches and Mosques have been seriously impacted in the following ways during this covid-19 era.

- Churches and Mosques were closed down from operations in the country for about four months due to the Corona Virus pandemic.
- Churches in particular have been greatly affected by the 1hr 30minutes time allocated for corporate worship and prayers. Most churches have omitted relevant procedures in their religious rites and ceremony.
- The financial inflows of religious institutions have also been gravely affected leading to huge administrative costs and deficit.
- The prolong use of facemasks during services have also come along with serious challenges especially to the aged and persons with pre-existing conditions.
- Strict observance of social and physical distancing has further impeded camaraderie and socialization in many churches and mosques in Freetown.

- Certain traditional religious rites are no longer been observed such as laying of hands, anointing of the sick, deliverance and in some cases even counseling. The absence of these fundamental rites and dogmas has seriously impacted on the lives of worshippers.
- Even burial and marriage ceremonies have been gravely impacted. Such services are no longer required to be long or to entertain large crowds as was the case before the Covid -19 outbreak.
- Another area gravely impacted is the All Nights of Prayers. Due to the restriction of service and prayer meetings to 1hr 30 minutes and coupled with the curfew that is currently in force, religious institutions are currently unable to hold All night of prayers / worship/ reading sessions.
- Covid-19 has however ironically created some opportunities especially in the use of online social media platforms (facebook, zoom, instagram, youtube, whatsapp etc) for religious socialization, networking, worship and ministration to millions of people across the world. However, only a few churches have leveraged on this opportunity appropriately.
- Cleanliness of worship centres and their environment has also been enhanced.
- The shortened time frame of worship as required by the Covid-19 guidelines for churches (1hr 30 mins) per service has also been received with great joy by many worshippers interviewed.

CHALLENGES

- Children between the age of three and ten years in most of the mosques and churches visited were not seen wearing masks.
- Overcrowding still remained a challenge for both churches and mosques particularly on Sundays and Fridays worship and prayer hours respectively.
- Members do not strictly observe the use of facemasks, social and physical distancing after the end of the Muslim prayers or church services.
- Churches and mosques do not usually disinfect their worship centres in- between services and prayer time since the 30-minutes interval may not be enough to disinfect the churches and mosques after a given service/prayer.
- Some members refuse to wear facemask while outside of the church and mosque. They only wear it when entering into the church and mosque for service/prayer.
- Most of the members in the churches and mosques do not put on facemask after leaving the church and mosque premises after services / prayers.
- Much of the emphasis and announcements coming from pastors/ imams regarding the wearing of face masks and social distancing seem to have been misconstrued as applicable only within the church and mosque precincts.
- In some of the religious institutions surveyed, there was an absence of internal monitoring committee to monitor the compliance of their institutions and liaise with the Covid-19 emergency response team.
- The 11pm Curfew continues to affect prolong worship and All night prayer sessions.
- There is still the practice of hugging and shaking of hands in some of the churches and mosques surveyed especially after services/prayers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings and challenges, we hereby recommend the following to the religious institutions in Sierra Leone, NaCoVERC and by extension the Inter-religious council.

- That Pastors/ Imams in the churches and mosques encourage their congregations to wear facemask before entering and also after leaving the church/mosque premises. Compliance should not only be seen within the precincts of churches and mosques.
- Authorities in the churches and mosques should ensure that parents wear facemasks on their children between the age of three (3) years and above.
- Pastors/Bishops/Imams should ensure to establish the covid-19 Internal Monitoring Committee as advised by NaCoVERC.
- Authorities in churches and mosques should ensure that worshippers adhere to the health guidelines not only when they are within the precincts of the worship centres but also when they are out of the church or mosque, in the streets, offices or at home.
- Authorities should also ensure that churches and mosques are always fumigated before the commencement of in - between services or prayers.
- Authorities in churches and mosques should continue to emphasize social distancing during service/prayers and admonish worshippers to refrain from touching and hugging themselves after services/prayers.
- Proper mechanisms should be put in place especially on Sundays and Fridays to control the overcrowding of worshippers in Churches and Mosques respectively especially in their entry and exits of the worship centres.
- Religious institutions should engage the state authorities for a lifting up of the timeline restrictions on services as well as the curfew so that worship services will not be rushed and night prayer sessions resurrect again within the religious community in Sierra Leone.
- Churches and Mosques should make use of online social media platforms (facebook, zoom, instagram, youtube, whatsapp etc) for religious socialization, networking, worship and ministration to their members and millions of people across the world. This will help to mitigate the risks associated with overcrowding in churches and mosques.

CONCLUSION

No doubt, serving God in the midst of a Covid-19 pandemic has posed a serious challenge to the religious community around the world; Sierra Leone being no exception. The use of facemasks, social and physical distancing, avoidance of hugging, handshaking and laying of hands have all fundamentally affected the very fabric, core values and practices of the two most dominant religions in the country. The costs on faith have been quite phenomenal and far reaching. But nevertheless however, the undying passion, quest and love for God by the religious community in Sierra Leone continue to surge on.

While it is hoped that a cure for the Coronavirus may soon be handy, at the moment however, the reality is that the religious community in Sierra Leone may have to continue to adhere to the Covid-19 guidelines issued by NaCoVERC and look out for other proactive ways of dealing with this virus so as to mitigate the negative impacts that come along with it on a daily basis.

In conclusion, even though 15% of the religious institutions surveyed called for the return to normal worship and religious life, 85% however did admit that it may be quite premature at this time for religious institutions to return to normal ways of worship without reference or strict adherence to the Covid-19 guidelines.

[ABOUT CHRISTIAN LAWYERS CENTRE \(LEGAL LINK\)](#)

Christian Lawyers Centre (a.k.a LEGAL LINK) is registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission of Sierra Leone as a non-profit legal advocacy group comprising of lawyers, law students and human right activists that seeks to provide legal assistance to the religious community as well as vulnerable groups in Sierra Leone; through legal advocacy, public interest litigations, open education, state and private sector accountability, enforcement of the rule of law and ensuring respect for domestic and international laws that guarantee fundamental human rights and freedoms.

[CONTACTS](#)

Rashid Dumbuya Esq

Executive Director

Office Address:

CHRISTIAN LAWYERS CENTRE, (a.k.a LEGAL LINK)

89 Fort Street, off Circular Road, Freetown

Mobile No: +23279167457/ +23299954470

Email: rashiddum@yahoo.co.uk / legallink2018@gmail.com

© All Rights Reserved – September 2020 Production