



## Church Leaders' Call to Action

13 July 2021

Church Leaders, Clergy and members of LEANs and Fraternal

These are worrying times and we know many of the people you lead may have been directly affected by the violence of the last few days. Food is a major concern at the moment, as are safety, jobs and livelihoods. These are all legitimate concerns filling our minds.

Our call to you, is that now is not the time to be crippled and polarised by fear. Now is the time to draw on the relationships and networks developed during the Covid pandemic to respond to this latest crisis in our Province. Once again, our peaceful collaboration is our spiritual act of resistance to the climate of our time.

As you would have seen, the KZN Church Leaders' Group met yesterday morning and came to a number of resolutions which were circulated late last night. Drawing on these, there are a number of immediate actions Church Leaders can take at a local level.

1. **Connect and Pray:** If nothing else, Covid-19 offered us an incredible opportunity to connect across old lines of division. Now is the time to use these! Let's connect again and start praying as a matter of urgency. Encourage your congregants to turn every anxious thought into an active prayer.
2. **Be visible. Get active:** The Church needs to be engaging in our communities at this moment to de-escalate violence and tension. We urge leaders, LEANs and fraternal to be active and visible in offering pastoral care and support wherever it is needed, in playing a role in peace monitoring and peace building, and in engaging with local government, SAPs and other bodies about the role that can be played to support the de-escalation of violence. We asked one community practitioner what he thought the Church should be doing at the moment and his response was: Engage! Engage! Engage! If you need support or further ideas on this please get in touch.
3. **Communicate clear messages of non-violence, peace and stability:** Emphasise that we appreciate that people have different viewpoints and opinions on the socio-political issues of the day, and that we therefore urgently call for dialogue and practical interventions from all parties and stakeholders. We condemn, in the strongest possible terms any forms of violence, intimidation or fear-mongering.
4. **Encourage a posture of listening:** We need people in this moment who are open enough to really, really listen. And to listen to everybody without prejudice or judgement. It is only once we are really able to listen that we will be able to speak with true prophetic wisdom. Otherwise we risk just adding to the noise.
5. **Be clear that the language we use to describe people matters:** As the Church, and people of faith, we need to be clear that racist, ethnically-based or any other statements which dehumanise others should not be tolerated. The theological principal of the Imago Dei, that we are all made in the image of God, requires us to see and value each other's humanity. We can condemn violence without dehumanising others. Let us encourage people, now more than ever, to walk in the shoes of another and seek understanding rather than hurling stones.
6. **Discourage the spreading of fear:** Encourage your congregants and faith communities around the managing of information. All of our social media platforms are flooded with videos and messages around the situation. Many of the messages are incredibly frightening. We urge people of faith to not get swept up in this tendency to spread fear, but instead to look for ways to be a Christ-fuelled non-anxious presence in our communities.

We will continue to be in contact over coming days. Please reach out if you are meeting as a local group and would like support or input to the discussion. We will do whatever we can to join as many virtual discussions as we can.

Warmly, the LEANs support team

*KZN Churches Respond and supporting the LEANs of KZN is a project convened by the KZNCC*