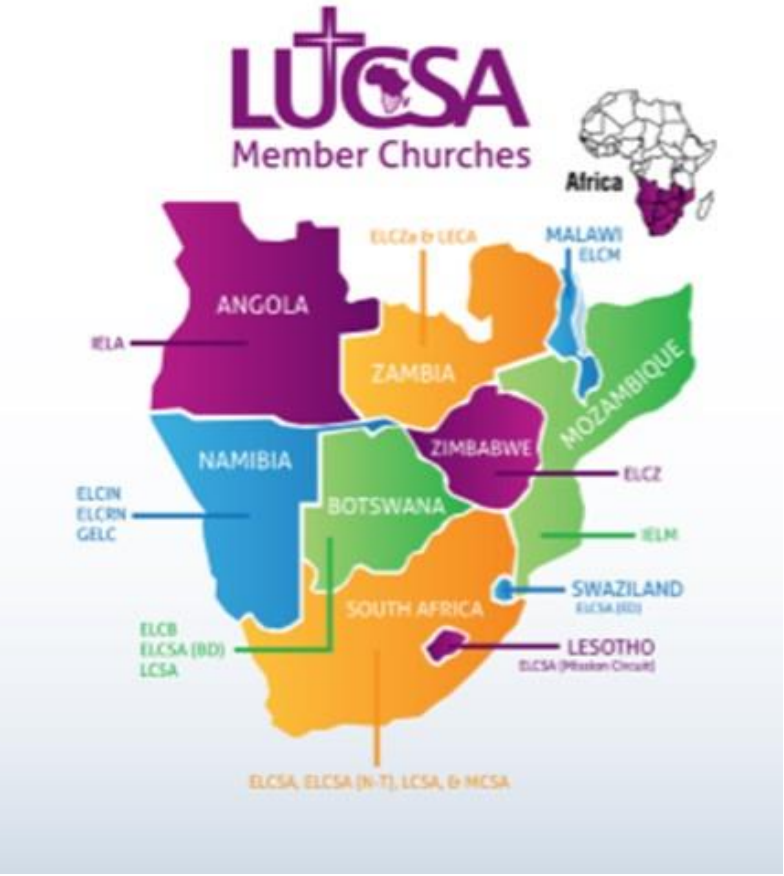
LUTHERAN COMMUNION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT
TRAINING OF TRAINERS MANUAL



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INTRODUCTION AND BRIEF BACKGROUND MOTIVATION

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO), declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic. As of 20 November 2021, more than 256 million cases and 5,14 million deaths had been confirmed, making the pandemic one of the deadliest in history. The pandemic has resulted in severe social and economic disruption around the world. Misinformation has circulated through social media and mass media, and political tensions have been exacerbated. The pandemic has raised and exposed issues of racial, economic and geographic discrimination, health equity, gender-based violence and the balance between public health imperatives such as lockdowns, masking and vaccination mandates and individual rights and social responsibilities.

The pandemic also resulted in a **psychosocial crisis*** as it seriously impacted the health and wellness of people (individuals, families and communities) across the world.

**Psychosocial refers to the person's inner world and the relationship with the external environment. Psychological effects are those that affect different levels of functioning including cognitive (mental), affective (emotions), and behavioural. Social effects concern relationships, family and community networks, cultural traditions and economic status, including life tasks such as school or work.*

However, economically deprived communities were more affected as they had limited response mechanisms and access to resources. Findings from several participatory research projects show that those affected experience multiple challenges such as isolation, anxiety, fear, relational difficulties, complex grief and stress. People affected by COVID-19 adapted in the face of adversity through a wide range of religio-culturally embedded coping approaches, legal mandates and medical strategies.

In order to effectively support people affected by COVID-19 in their recoveries, it is essential that we pay close attention to – and avoid undermining – existing patterns of resilience in communities. The church was initially paralysed by the fact that clergy were not considered as essential services and they were locked down just like the rest of the population. It was much later into the pandemic that some countries started realising that political and medical interventions were not enough without the spiritual dimension. The church came in and filled the spiritual gap by offering spiritual resources, counselling and diaconal programmes.

This manual is a result of the initiative of the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA)* through the Communion office where it was realised that the church, through pastoral initiatives, can and should respond to the psychosocial needs of church and society. The manual does not claim to be exhaustive, however users have a launch pad and framework for responding to the psychosocial needs of congregants and the rest of society. Users are encouraged to adapt the manual to their contextual realities for meaningful training of trainers. Where the manual is general, facilitators and participants should be specific as per their context.

** The Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (www.lucsa.org) with 15 member churches and a membership of more than 2 million in 10 countries acts as the sub-regional expression of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). (www.lutheranworld.org) LUCSA is involved in a number of programmes helping to build capacity in member churches through Christian education, leadership development, diakonia, HIV&AIDS, theology, advocacy, ecumenical relations and communication.*

TRAINING OBJECTIVES

a) To train trainers to continuously multiply human resources for responding to the psychosocial needs in church and society
b) To equip participants with knowledge about possible responses to the psychosocial challenges posed by COVID-19 and related safety protocols.
c) To introduce participants to the concept of psychosocial support in the light of challenges posed by COVID-19 in the LUCSA region.
d) To introduce and practice narrative therapy as a tool that pastors/caregivers can use to g participants
e) To develop the basics of contextual/situation theology especially in times of crisis
f) To enable ministers to do introspection regarding the identity of a pastor as a "wounded healer" in times of trauma
g) To equip pastors with knowledge and skill for facilitating training workshops

PARTICIPANTS

The participants should be people (pastors and lay leaders) who are willing to working voluntarily in responding to the psychosocial needs of society. There should be an equitable balance between males and females and younger and older participants. All the participants should be keen and eager to capture as much information and skills as possible to carry home with them. Participants should demonstrate maturity, pastoral integrity and a hunger for knowledge throughout the training workshop. Participating churches should choose committed and responsible participants who in turn will be able to train others.

THE TRAINING PROGRAMME CONTENT

The TOT workshop is organised to run for 3 days. Each day starts with breakfast followed by morning devotions. The morning devotions centre on the theme of the day. Similarly, the day ends with devotions. The end-of-day devotions should summarize what was covered during that day. This means that the texts for each devotion require the participant or participants to think through the topics of the workshop. The devotions are an integral part of the training to help participants learn how to select relevant texts that speak to the context. This is part of doing situational or contextual theology. The training programme includes lunch and tea breaks.

Participants work in plenary and in groups as outlined in the programme. In addition to the topics that are planned for as shown below, the participants may also bring in other relevant and related topics such as leadership challenges and the need for relevant theological education and training in the LUCSA region.

The programme includes the following topics:

- Self-Introductions and their COVID-19 experiences as a person and as a minister
- The purpose of the workshop in response to the advent of COVID-19
- Lockdowns and the impact on society
- Pastoral theological challenges posed by lockdowns
- Mental health challenges posed by COVID-19
- Soteriology and Eschatology in a time of COVID-19
- Group work – What are the psychosocial challenges posed by COVID-19?
- Feelings and physical/bodily actions associated with psychosocial challenges
- Group work - What are possible church-based strategies and responses to psychosocial challenges identified by groups?
- What are the diaconal needs and opportunities posed by COVID-19?
- The nature of pastoral identity and pastoral care in COVID circumstances
- Skills and resource audit in the church (The Asset-based Approach)
- Group work – How will you train others to expand the number of helping-hands in your context? What are the available resources in your context for such an exercise?
- What are the challenges and strategies for conducting worship and liturgy in virtual spaces in the context of COVID-19?
- The advantages and challenges of being church in times of crises
- Challenges audit in church and community
- Identification of and facilitating the training of care givers
- The importance of providing reliable communication and information by and for the church

These topics are designed to stimulate and guide reflection and discussions. The topics are not prescriptive at all.

MENTAL HEALTH AND COVID-19

COVID-19 has augmented (increased) existing mental health issues and created new ones as individuals and society have struggled to respond to the many effects of the pandemic. Fear, worry, and stress are normal human responses when faced with danger, uncertainty or the unknown. So, it is normal and understandable that people are experiencing these feelings and emotions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 context has challenged many of the tried and tested coping mechanisms of society such as meeting in person for worship, communitarianism in times of suffering, hospital visitation and funerals according to religious and cultural traditions.

Added to the fear of contracting the virus in a pandemic such as COVID-19, is the impact of the significant changes to our daily lives as a result of measures to contain and slow down the spread of the virus. Faced with the challenging new realities of social distancing, wearing a facial mask, working from home, temporary unemployment, home-schooling of children, and lack of physical contact with loved ones and friends, it is important that we look after our spiritual, mental and emotional health as well as our physical health.

The overall objective of the LUCSA initiative to facilitate training for psychosocial support for and by church leaders is to raise awareness and understanding about social and mental health issues and mobilize support for action by the church in the local community and on the international stage. There is a need to recognize that there may be a number of challenges to addressing psychosocial issues because of the stigma related to mental health amongst some individuals and communities.

While most people are not shy to go for health services when they are physically ill, many people with a mental illness or emotional trauma do not receive the treatment that they are entitled to and deserve and together with their families and care givers continue to experience stigma and discrimination.

The gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' grows ever wider and there is continuing unmet need for the care of people with mental health issues. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the fact of inequality of access to health resources. No nation, however rich, has been fully prepared for this. The pandemic has and will continue to affect people, of all ages, in many ways: through infection and illness, sometimes resulting in death bringing bereavement to surviving family members; through the economic impact, with job losses and continued job insecurity; and with the physical distancing that can lead to social isolation.

The LUCSA Wellness & Health campaign provides an opportunity to come together and act together to highlight how inequality can be addressed to ensure people are able to enjoy good mental, physical and spiritual health.

SUGGESTED TRAINING PROGRAM FOR TRAINERS OF TRAINERS IN PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

The program should be conducted through facilitation. As a pastoral caregiver trained by LUCSA, you are a key facilitator for the program. You are conducting the training of trainers to reproduce yourself. N.B. You should not be the only presenter for the training, but a facilitator for a variety of presenters. Identify some local resource people who can lead some of the topics under discussion. Give them the topics ahead of time so they can prepare properly. Group work is another way of making sure that everyone participates in the processes and discussions. Do a skills audit of the group that you will be working with. That should be relatively easy as you already know the pastors and lay leaders in your church and community.

Suggested 3-day Programme outline

Day 1

- **Devotions**
- **Introduction regarding the purpose of the workshop.**
- **Background information:** The uniqueness of COVID-19 pandemic challenges (Closure of tried and tested means of coping such as in-person fellowshipping, community gathering, visiting the sick, proper funerals, --- talk about limits placed on the usual coping mechanisms: (e.g. Pastors were not considered as essential workers initially and therefore could not offer in-person pastoral care)
- **(Group work and then groups to report back to plenary)**
    - Our experiences and feelings in relation to COVID-19 (Being infected, losing a beloved one, being locked-down at home, losing income)
    - How was our wellbeing as individuals and as a community affected physically, mentally, religiously and socially by COVID-19.

- **(Group work and then groups to report back to plenary)**
    - What are the Pastoral challenges and opportunities posed by the COVID-19 pandemic?
    - How can we offer others the same opportunity as we have now to narrate their experiences in a safe, sacred space? (Propose that this training should be extended to parish pastors and then parish pastors will share the same training with their parishioners/congregants)
- **Devotions**

Day 2

- **Devotions**
    - **Presentation:** What is psychosocial support?

What are some of the psychosocial challenges faced by the church (and society) in the particular contexts of the participants?

Outline some of the feelings and physical reactions/actions associated with COVID-19: (What do these feelings tell us about our emotional, mental and physical conditions?)

Plenary Discussion

Group work and then groups to report back.

- What are some of the possible solutions and strategies to address these challenges?

Presentation: The training of others as caregivers offering psychosocial support as a faithful response and strategy by and for the church and community.

Plenary Discussion regarding the need for the training of others and ways forward.

Why do we need more hands?

When and how should these others be trained?

Who are the others that we need to train?

What is the program of action that we will follow to train the next group?

Can we use the same program as the one we have used in the training of pastors? If not, can we design a program together? What are the timeframes for this next level of training considering the urgency of the need for psychosocial support?

- **Devotions**

Day Three

(The third day can also be done through ZOOM or other virtual means accessible by participants. However, it must be programmed, and timeframes must be set. This can be done two or three days after the first two days. It can also be done as a physical meeting after day two in the same gathering if resources permit).

- **Devotions**
- **Presentation**: Soteriology and eschatology: Reading the Bible and the Context from a Lutheran Perspective.

- **The challenges and advantages of being church in times of crises:**
  - The contextual nature of Pastoral identities in COVID-19 settings
  - The nature of liturgy in virtual spaces
  - Communication in the church (What is communication? Fake news? The role and responsible use of social media: WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter reliable communication and information from the church)
  - Skills and resources audit
- What are the points of anxiety about this pastoral plan? (Discuss possibilities, fears, possible challenges, important people to be informed as the project progresses, who will receive reports about the progress being made for the sake of transparency and accountability?)

- **Closing devotions**

Note regarding confidentiality*: Teams that are trained at the level of the parish such as elders and lay preachers (or any person deemed fit to be trained for this pastoral ministry) will have*

shared confidentiality with the sending pastor. Clients, especially church members will have to know that their lay pastoral caregivers, if necessary, will share or refer their pastoral counselling cases with the pastor in charge or whoever is responsible for the project.

The pastor should have regular meetings with the pastoral teams for debriefing otherwise, you may create a new group that will be seriously in need of psychosocial support itself as burnout can easily kick in.

SOME NOTES FOR THE FACILITATOR

DAY ONE

- **DEVOTIONS**

The first devotions should be about the importance of pastoral care in times of crises caused by pandemics. Choose texts that show the church as a troubled institution as it responds to the needs of society. Locate the church as a liberating institution when people are in bondage. When people lament to God, pastoral caregivers should listen carefully and respond accordingly.

- **MAINTAINING COVID SAFETY PROTOCOLS**

It is important to begin the workshop with a session on COVID-19 safety protocols for meetings like this TOT. Emphasize physical distancing throughout the training period. In the morning and coming back from lunch participants will have their temperature checked. Those with a high temperature will be offered the necessary support. Hands will be sanitized every hour during the training. Seating arrangement will comply with social distancing regulations for that venue. Each participant to stick to their seat throughout the training. Changing seats may compromise safety for individuals. Every morning the workshop venue will be cleaned and sanitized. No sharing of water glasses, writing pens, Bibles and Hymn books. All participants must wear their masks throughout the day as long as they are with others. Social distancing and particularization of seats should be maintained during meals and worship sessions. Participants should not visit each other in their rooms. Group work will be conducted in a manner that helps to maintain physical distancing. The facilitator should be an advocate for the maintenance of the COVID-19 safety protocols. The facilitator should remind participants about the protocols such as keeping their masks on. Anyone who becomes sick with COVID related symptoms should be offered psychosocial, spiritual and medical assistance as soon as possible. It can be helpful to go through the relevant government ministry to ensure the correct health safety protocols in your country are known and adhered to.

- **INTRODUCTION TO THE PURPOSE OF THE WORKSHOP (COVID-19)**

Introduce the workshop by giving the background and what necessitated the workshop. You should talk about the effects of COVID-19 and the related COVID-19 protocols. Make reference to the LUCSA initiative to address psychosocial challenges and possible responses. Make reference to the training that you have received which has resulted in this training. Emphasize issues of health and wellness in times of COVID-19 in relation to mental health and social health. The workshop is a capacity building exercise to empower pastors and lay leaders in responding to the psychosocial needs of the church and society

- **THE UNIQUENESS OF COVID-19 CHALLENGES**

Lockdowns resulted in isolation, loneliness, helplessness and distancing from religious and social structures for communal sharing of experiences and coping mechanisms. Discuss the closure of tried and tested means of coping such as fellowshipping, community gatherings, visiting the sick, proper funerals, --- talk about the loss of these previously commonly used coping mechanisms. Pastors were not considered initially as essential workers by government and therefore could not offer in-person pastoral care under the lockdowns. It is the uniqueness of the challenges related to COVID-19 that have partly contributed to the

need for the training of pastors and church leaders to respond meaningfully to the psychosocial needs of church and community

- **ACKNOWLEDGING AND SHARING OUR EXPERIENCES AND FEELINGS IN RELATION TO COVID-19 (Introduction to NARRATIVE THERAPY)**

It is difficult to expect pastors and church elders to offer support to the church and community because they are also victims of the same challenges facing society. Pastors are also suffering the same psychosocial challenges that they have been trained to respond to. This session should be both a documentation of the range and magnitude of experiences and feelings as well as an opportunity for narrative therapy. All human beings need an opportunity to talk about their own unique experiences. Talking about our experiences is a form of therapy known as narrative therapy (healing that comes from venting out, speaking out, sharing one's experiences in a compassionate, non-judgmental, safe, and sacred space.) The workshop should be a safe sacred space where participants can share their own physical, mental, economic, religious and social pains. Participants should feel free to talk about being infected, losing a beloved one, being locked down at home and the resulting feelings. The participants are themselves a true reflection of the wider society, so that what is being shared in this session is a major reflection of mirror of what is being experienced by the wider community. In brief, this session should allow participants to make an exposition of their experiential knowledge and perceptions about the:

- Advent of COVID-19
- Responses by Governments
- Local responses
- Infections/deaths/funerals/quarantine/fake news/
- Related feelings by communities and individuals

- **HOW WAS OUR WELLBEING AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A COMMUNITY AFFECTED PHYSICALLY, MENTALLY, RELIGIOUSLY AND SOCIALLY BY COVID-19?**

The previous session was full of emotional venting. This next session is supposed to be the documentation of the effects of the COVID-19 on individuals and the community. Participants should share from their own experiences as an individual as well as a member of society. This is where issues such as the prohibition of physical fellowship and social gatherings due to legislated safety protocols prevented the usual and necessary sharing of sorrow and support during funerals. This sharing can be done in small groups. Groups should not have more than 4 people to minimize crowding. If possible, groups can meet outside in the fresh air. The participants must keep wearing their masks even during group work or when making presentations. Groups should record their feedback on posters that can be displayed.

- **PASTORAL CHALLENGES POST-COVID-19**

This session applies to the challenges faced by the ordained clergy in trying to do their work during COVID-19 lockdowns. It also applies to lay church leaders who perform pastoral duties such as preaching, preparation for services on Sundays and during the week. Lay pastors who also plan and carry out home and hospital visitations. There are a number of issues that can be highlighted in this session such as the failure to conduct services due to lockdowns. Services included fellowships, Sunday services, Bible studies, league meetings, funerals, etc.

Offering pastoral services through online platforms was difficult knowing very well that such services only reach a few who have data, network, smart phones and/or a variety of types of computers. This mainly excluded the have-nots who are in the majority of cases living in rural areas.

- **HOW DO WE OFFER OTHERS THE SAME OPPORTUNITY AS WE HAVE NOW TO NARRATE THEIR EXPERIENCES IN A SAFE SACRED SPACE?**

Participants should honestly share how they feel after being offered the opportunity to share their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Remember that the sharing was part of the healing process through narrative therapy. Narrative therapy offers healing that comes through telling about one's traumatic experiences to a caring listening and non-judgmental audience.

The discussion should lead to the realization that all people in congregations and communities also need an opportunity to share their traumatic experiences to well trained, caring and, non-judgmental listening caregivers. Hence the need to train all the clergy and church elders for this ministry. The role of the participants is to go back and offer the same opportunity to others and those who have been offered that opportunity should reach out and also offer it to others. Ideally everyone should be offered this healing opportunity through narrative therapy administered by caring listeners. Each congregation is called to be a place and community of healing.

- **CLOSING DEVOTIONS**

The closing devotions are a key aspect of the training workshop. The text should be chosen in a manner that emphasizes what the facilitator sees as the core learning outcome of the day. There are many people who will respect a process that is affirmed by relevant Biblical texts. The hymns or psalms should also relate to the deliberations of the day. The closing prayers should be linked to the desired outcomes of the day and possibly what you will be looking forward to in the next day.

DAY TWO

DEVOTIONS

The morning devotions should be linked to the objectives of the day. What do you hope to achieve on this day and how do you see the Bible, psalms, liturgy, hymns and prayers speaking to what you want to do? Participants conducting devotions should be guided by the expectations outlined by the facilitator.

- **THE NEED FOR THE TRAINING OF OTHERS**

(Discuss the need for the training of others. Why do we need more hands? When should these others be trained?)

This where the facilitator proposes that the participants should also become trainers in their local contexts. Propose that this training should extend to parish pastors and then parish pastors will share the same training with their parishioners/congregants. The purpose is to multiply the number of people who can respond to the psychosocial needs of communities at the grassroots local/village level. If the training is limited to ordained pastors only then accessibility will be limited by the virtue of numbers. The

ratio of ordained pastors to church members is very low yet the need for support is wide and urgent. If a skills audit is done in each congregation and proper training offered there will be many hands that can become caregivers of individuals and society able to address many of the psychosocial challenges. Participants should discuss possible strategies so that they can own and manage the process.

- **WHAT ARE THE PSYCHOSOCIAL CHALLENGES FACED BY THE CHURCH (AND SOCIETY) IN THE PARTICULAR CONTEXTS OF THE PARTICIPANTS?**

This session requires categorization of people who make up the church and also society and how each category of people were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is helpful so that we do not leave out certain groups of people as if they are not as human as others. For example, at times society forgets that ordained pastors are human beings who also experience the same challenges as everyone else. There is need for a discussion about the psychosocial challenges faced by Church leaders, Community leaders, the church members and the general population in your context.

In this session think of the effects of the COVID pandemic and related protocols on:

- Bishops
- Deans
- Pastors
- Church workers including FBOs linked to the church
- Church members
- Families
- Individuals
- The community around the church

Offer the participants the opportunity to delve into the different and similar experiences of people in their community. The facilitator should decide if this should be group work or a plenary session.

- **WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THESE CHALLENGES?**

(Group work and then groups to report back)

This is a session where the facilitator should limit examples to allow participants to think through possible responses that are relevant to their contexts. Giving too many suggestions by the facilitator has a tendency of limiting the capabilities of participants to think of their contextual responses. Participants should go into groups. Preferably, participants from similar backgrounds can work together and then report to the plenary.

The possible responses should be divided into psychological challenges and social challenges.

The psychological challenges can also be divided into emotional and spiritual challenges

- Feelings associated with COVID-19 (What do these feelings tell us about our emotional and mental conditions)

There is a high chance that participants may not be able to identify psychological challenges. This is an issue of language and terminologies used. However, if participants can be asked to describe their feelings, then the psychological challenges that relate to mental health will come out. There are some common terms like anger, frustration, irritability, anxiety, fear, loneliness, insecurity, insomnia, emptiness, etc.

Ask the participants to identify the symptoms of the above feelings. For example, what happens to your body when you are anxious or when you are angry? Participants can then hold discussions on how these feelings are part of mental health issues. Alternatively, if

participants are shy or reluctant to share their own feelings and thoughts, the facilitator may ask the participants to explain how the above feelings affect the wellbeing of other individuals and their relationships.

On the social aspects participants should think about how relations and life in community have been affected and how this presents a challenge to communal and individual wellbeing.

- **WHAT STRATEGIES CAN WE PUT IN PLACE AS THE CHURCH TO RESPOND TO THESE FEELINGS IN PARTICULAR AND TO COVID-19 IN GENERAL?**

The key questions in this session will be: Which aspects of COVID-19 relate to a specific feeling identified in the previous session? How can we respond to that particular source of stress in life-affirming ways? What are some specific faith-based responses to COVID-19 and related safety protocols? How did the following church structures respond to COVID-19?

- Clergy (Bishops, Deans, Pastors and Deacons)
- FBOs linked to the church
- Theological training institutions/Church theologians
- Central church administration
- Dioceses
- Deaneries/Circuits
- Parishes
- Congregations

- **HOW DO WE TRAIN OTHERS?**

This is crucial for the multiplication of caregivers to respond to psychosocial needs caused by COVID-19. (Who are the others that we need to train? What is the program of action that we will follow to train the next group? Can we use the same program as the one we have in the training of pastors? If not, can we design a program together? What are the timeframes for this next level training considering the urgency of the need for psychosocial support?).

Think through the training of response teams to psychosocial challenges:

- Core team of pastors trained by LUCSA in consultation with Bishops
- Pastors (To train other pastors in consultation with Bishops/Deans) - depending on the size and nature of the church, the pastor from LUCSA training can train one or two pastors from each deanery/circuit)
- The pastors/Deans that have been trained by the LUCSA trained minister can then go and do the same training at the level of their circuits/Deaneries. This will keep the number of participants manageable.
- Pastors (To train pastoral teams from elders/lay preachers/skilled church members such as teachers, medical personnel, social workers, etc.)
- These caregivers respond to psychosocial needs of church and society in consultation with the clergy

- **CLOSING DEVOTIONS**

As already noted, closing devotions are meant to give a summary of the work of the day through the word of God. It is possible to sing and pray to close the day.

DAY THREE

- **MORNING DEVOTIONS**

The purpose of the devotions is to energize the participants with hymns, psalms, Biblical texts and prayers that speak to the work of the day. The purpose is to bring God into the key issues of the day. In fact, a well-organized morning devotion can be a good introduction to the deliberations of the day.

- **SOTERIOLOGY (Salvation) and ESCHATOLOGY (The end times)**

Discuss the complications to theological understanding brought by COVID-19. Theology that is contextual is usually affected by contextual developments.
Think of salvation as new life now and salvation as eternal life in the here-after.
Think also of eschatology, i.e. the end times, and how such concepts are affected by pandemics. Is the advent of pandemics a sign of the end times?

How do these two concepts play out in the context of COVID-19?
How is salvation interpreted from a Christian Lutheran perspective in the context of COVID-19?

A list of verses is provided in the appendix relating to salvation and eschatology.
Read some of the verses and discuss how different people in church and society understand and interpret them in the context of suffering.

How do people choose and interpret bible verses in times of suffering? Do they choose verses about soteriology/salvation/deliverance/new life, or do they choose verses about end times/eschatology/judgement/punishment?

Which verses are life affirming? How do we help people to use relevant and appropriate biblical texts as sources of healing and transformation in traumatic situations?

What is the Lutheran "tradition" or "identity" all about? "Liberated by God's Grace"

We proclaim the "good news" of God's love for the world revealed in Jesus Christ's birth, life, death on the cross, and resurrection. Together, we witness that, despite our sins, limitations and brokenness, we are all uniquely created in God's image and accepted unconditionally; forgiven, liberated and justified by God's grace through the gift of faith alone and not by anything we do or not do. We are freed by Christ, called, gathered and sent to love and serve our neighbor. Our service in the world and our care for creation are integral to our Lutheran Christian identity and our common humanity.

> *In the Late Middle Ages Europe experienced the deadliest disease outbreak in history when the bubonic plague, hit in 1347, killing one-third of the European human population. In September 1527, an outbreak struck the town of Wittenberg, Germany. Luther wrote a letter to a nearby pastor giving him advice on how Christians should respond to a plague. This letter grew into a small treatise, "Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague." In this letter, Luther gives Christians some very practical advice on how to remain faithful in the face of such a pandemic. Luther's message was that a*

Christian never stops serving Christ even in a pandemic, saying: "Now if a deadly epidemic strikes, we should stay where we are, make our preparations, and take courage in the fact that we are mutually bound together…so that we cannot desert one another or flee from one another. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bubonic_plaque https://montanabiblecollege.edu/martin-luthers-advice-on-worshiping-christ-amid-a-pandemic /

Five principles for reading and interpreting the Bible. (A Lutheran Perspective)

1. Law and Gospel
2. What shows forth Christ
3. Scripture interprets scripture
4. The plain meaning of a text
5. Public interpretation

1. Law and Gospel

God's law shows us what we should do, and it shows us when we do not do it. The gospel shows us what God does for us and how God frees us and saves us in spite of our failures. We do not only find the law in the Old Testament and gospel in the New Testament. Instead, we believe the entire Bible reveals God's law and God's gospel to us. God's word always reveals our brokenness (the law) and also heals our brokenness (gospel). That is Good News! God's law and God's gospel are both good because they work together to set us free. A question to keep in mind when reading the Bible is, "How does this verse reveal my/our brokenness (law) and how does it offer me/us healing and hope (gospel)?"

2. What shows forth Christ?

Martin Luther referred to the Bible as the manger that held the Christ child. The Bible shows us Jesus Christ but we don't worship the Bible, we worship Jesus Christ who is revealed to us through scripture. The Bible helps us to know Jesus and to have a relationship with Jesus. A second question to keep in mind when reading the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) is this, "How do I see Christ revealed in this verse?"

3. Scripture interprets scripture

Some parts of the Bible are fairly easy to understand while other parts are very difficult and complicated. We can use the parts that are easier to understand to help us make sense of the more difficult parts. In fact, we should always be thinking about the relationship between the specific text we might be reading and the overall story of the Bible (The Good News). This means we need to have a good understanding of the Bible as a whole. A question to keep in mind when reading the Bible is this, "How does this verse connect to the overall biblical story and how do other stories agree, counter or balance things out?" For example how does Jesus' teaching on forgiveness and reconciliation shape our reading of stories of violence and warfare in some parts of the Bible?

4. The plain (ordinary) meaning of the text

Another thing to keep in mind when interpreting the text is simply what it means at face value. In an age of fearful conspiracy theories, we are often tempted to assume that there is always something more meaningful or sinister hidden behind the text. We should not

become distracted by these theories. Instead, we should try to understand what the author meant to say to the original audience at that time. So, a fourth question to ask when reading the Bible is this, "How were people expected to understand this verse in their context and their time in history which is both similar and different from ours?"

5. Public (Communal) interpretation

We are to interpret the Bible in community. We should read the Bible on our own, but the message is not for me alone and this requires me to interpret scripture with others in mind. Therefore, we should find ways to read and interpret Scripture together with people who are quite different than ourselves. This helps us to realize just how broad and deep God's word is and it prevents us from narrow, one-sided interpretations. A key question to keep in mind is, "How might someone in a completely different life-situation or another part of the world interpret this verse or story in the Bible?"

• THE CONTEXTUAL NATURE OF PASTORAL IDENTITIES IN COVID-19 SETTINGS

This section seeks to help participants rethink their pastoral identities. You can use the slides that are provided on pastoral identities from a functional perspective. The session should also consider that pastors are also human, and they live and work in church and society as "wounded healers." What are the functional expectations of one's identity? What are the expectations of society from the pastor and from the church? What are the challenges posed by one's identity in society in times of crises? How do you enhance your functional identity in traumatic situations?

• THE NATURE OF WORSHIP AND LITURGY IN VIRTUAL SPACES

Discuss the effects of Covid-19 on worship and liturgy. Liturgy as symbolics in worship spaces, liturgy as a programme for church services and liturgy as the symbolic life of a Christian in community. What does it mean to conduct a church service through WhatsApp? What does it mean to conduct a church service on all of the other virtual platforms? How do we do baptism during COVID-19? How do we continue to provide the Eucharist during Covid-19? How do we conduct funeral liturgies during COVID-19? What are we losing liturgically because of COVID-19? What does all this mean theologically? How is all of this affecting clergy and congregants mentally and socially? How should we be responding to this changing situation? How do we choose what to do and what not to do liturgically? What theological reasoning informs us in making choices that are loving and responsible?

• COMMUNICATION IN THE CHURCH

Communication is like breathing for an institution. This is even more important in times of crisis, anxiety and fear. There is a need for a discussion about communication systems, channels, and reasons for communication. At the moment, social media is peddling news about Covid-19 and the efficacy of vaccines. The major challenge is the peddling of false news through social media platforms especially WhatsApp and Facebook. There is so much information being shared without clarity of the purpose or source. The church should be a source of credible news/information. It is prudent for pastors and caregivers not to forward sensational and untested news. When passing on information make sure that it is true news. If you are not sure check with those who know such as medical doctors, nurses and the ministry of health websites. It is important to rely on official websites for COVID-19 such as the World Health Organization (WHO) https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

- **THE ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF BEING CHURCH IN TIMES OF CRISIS**

There is need for church leaders and elders to notice the privileged position of the church in society. This session seeks to enable participants to think through the advantages of being church in times of crisis. Some of the advantages are:

- Availability in almost all communities where no other organized institution can be found
- Accessibility in almost all communities
- Relatively well-trained leaders who compassionate
- Invisible tools for healing such as prayers and the Holy Spirit
- It offers free services such as worship services and counselling
- It meets regularly
- It accommodates all people, ideally the church does not discriminate
- It is an institution that is trusted by society
- It has people that meet regularly in a spirit of unity and love for one another
- The church is invited and called to bear people's problems/burdens.

- **SKILLS AND RESOURCES AUDIT**

It is believed that the church is very rich in terms of skills. However, these skills can only be harnessed if they are identified by the church leadership and are used in the vineyard of the Lord. You may find great leaders in society being very silent in church as there are no opportunities for such leaders to exercise their leadership skills. The church should begin to take advantage of the gifts and resources that God has given to it. In addition to a skills audit, there is need for a resources audit. We speak here of an Asset-based approach (based on what we have) rather than a needs-based approach (based on what we don't have). What are the available resources in the local community that can be used to respond to communal challenges? The church is very rich in terms of both human and material resources. Who is who in the local church? What skills do we have among the congregants? When and how can we use the available skills and resources in our community for socio-economic and religious transformation in this time of COVID-19.

Make a list of the following:

1. *Physical Assets: What are the physical assets of your congregation/organization/ community?*
2. *Individual Assets: What is something you do well? Everyone has a gift!*
3. *Relational Assets: What groups/associations/partnerships do you belong to?*
4. *Economic Assets: What do the members of your congregation/organization have and spend money on?*
5. *Spiritual assets: What sign(s) have you seen recently of God's grace in the world?*

- **WHAT ARE THE POINTS OF EXCITEMENT & ANXIETY ABOUT THIS PASTORAL PLAN?**

(Discuss possibilities, fears, possible challenges, and important people to be informed as the project progresses. Who will receive reports about the progress being made for the sake of transparency and accountability?)

- **CLOSING DEVOTIONS**

This should be in the form of a **commissioning service**. You may use the LUCSA candle lighting service and the LWF Intercessory Prayer (see below). However, it can be contextually relevant to translate this service into the local language(s).

LWF Intercessory Prayer in the midst of the spread of COVID-19 *www.lutheranworld.org*

L: O God our Healer, show your compassion for the whole human family that is in turmoil and burdened with illness and with fear. Hear our cry, O God,

C: Listen to our prayer.

Come to our aid as the coronavirus spreads globally, heal those who are sick, support and protect their families and friends from being infected. Hear our cry, O God,

Listen to our prayer.

Grant us your spirit of love and self-discipline so that we may come together, working to control and eliminate the coronavirus. Hear our cry, O God,

Listen to our prayer.

Make us vigilant, attentive, and proactive in the eradication of all diseases, malaria, dengue, HIV & AIDS, and others [may be named out loud or in silence] … that create suffering and often result in death for many people. Hear our cry, O God,

Listen to our prayer.

Heal our self-centeredness and indifference that makes us worry only when the virus threatens us, open ways beyond timidity and fear that too easily ignore our neighbour. Hear our cry, O God,

Listen to our prayer.

Strengthen and encourage those in public health services and in the medical profession: caregivers, nurses, attendants, doctors, all who commit themselves to caring for the sick and their families. Hear our cry, O God,

Listen to our prayer.

We give thanks for the development of vaccines to combat COVID-19 and pray for rapid and equitable distribution around the world. Hear our cry, O God,

Listen to our prayer.

Sustain all workers and business owners who suffer loss of livelihood due to shut-downs, quarantines, closed borders, and other restrictions… protect and guard all those who must travel. Hear our cry, O God,

Listen to our prayer.

Guide the leaders of the nations that they speak the truth, halt the spread of misinformation and act with justice so that all your family may know healing. Hear our cry, O God,

Listen to our prayer.

Heal our world, heal our bodies, strengthen our hearts and our minds, and in the midst of turmoil, give us hope and peace. Hear our cry, O God,

Listen to our prayer.

Hold in your gentle embrace all who have died and who will die this day. Comfort their loved ones in their despair. Hear our cry, O God,

Listen to our prayer.

Remember all your family, the entire human race, and all your creation, in your love.

Amen

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE MATERIALS FOR FACILITATORS (Note these materials and links are for reference purposes and do not necessarily represent the views of LUCSA and the LWF)

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 3

APPENDIX 4

APPENDIX 5