

## Notes on meeting of Church Leaders with Ministers Grace Fu & Lawrence Wong on 19 March 2020

1. MCCY first met church leaders on 14 February on tackling the first wave of COVID-19 from China. Government thanked church leaders for their support. The priority then and now is not to overwhelm health care workers.
2. We have now been hit by the 2nd wave, coming mainly from Europe and what is beginning to develop in US. In Singapore, the 2nd wave is mainly imported cases from Singaporeans returning from overseas from business, holiday or social trips who have been infected. So drastic measures need to be taken now in terms of strict implementation of social distancing.
3. Health briefing: MOH has two main teams: one focuses on contact tracing, while the other on rigorous investigation to set in place protective measures for certain groups e.g. the vulnerable and elderly.
4. Calibrated social distancing measures which include Stay-Home Notices (SHN), cancel non-essential events, temp and health screening, limit visitors to healthcare and eldercare facilities and to sit 1m apart. For contact tracing, priority is those that have contact for > 1/2 hour within 2m
5. We need to expect that the number of cases will rise, reach a peak, come down and then hopefully stay at lower numbers. MCCY emphasized that we need to manage the peak, flatten it as much as we can so that we don't over-stress our health care system.
6. We have been advised that there is a need to not cross churches (church-hop) or cross services (service-hop). The implementation of strict social distancing measures aimed at reducing social interaction focused on the three elements of
  - Density (physical proximity between individuals)
  - Intensity (degree of expression of droplets)
  - Duration (transient vs non-transient)
7. Reducing Density (limit worship sessions and other religious activities to <250, with at least 1m spacing checkerboard seating arrangement). Important point to note is that the <250 applies not just to the worship/prayer space (i.e. the sanctuary or hall capacity) but the entire church premises (incl. its common spaces)
8. Q&A session with Ministers Grace Fu and Lawrence Wong:
  - Minister Lawrence Wong mentioned that there will be an announcement on 20 Mar regarding reinforcement of social distancing measures in restaurants and encouraging workplaces to adopt telecommuting as the basic mode of operation. Religious organisations will have to implement the social distancing principle of <250 with DID in place (Density; Intensity; Duration)
  - **Question was asked if complete suspension of services will help to curb the virus.**

Minister Wong replied that suspension might not necessarily help; even if you stop one or two weeks, that's why schools have not stopped. What is more important is social distancing, in this case "<250 with DID in place".

Minister Grace Fu further clarified that suspension of services will help if churches need time to reorganise to implement the "<250 with DID in place". Minister Wong reminded us that it was not just the worship time that has to keep to the <250 with DID in place, but throughout the entire duration that the congregational members are in church. For example, it would be pointless if we keep to <250 with DID during worship time but after that we share food and drink over communal meals in close proximity.

- **Question was asked if the 250 number is fixed. What happens if the church hall is able to sit 5,000. Can the figure of 250 be increased to say 1000 in this instance?**

Minister Wong emphasised that it was not just the worship/prayer space that the number of 250 is concerned with. The principle of <250 DID also has to extend to the entire church premises, and cover all aspects of the service, including entry and exit of the members. No point having 1,000 in the hall with social distancing in place but another 1,000 people bunching outside the hall waiting to attend service.

Minister Wong stated the number 250 is open for discussion if individual organisations can prove adequate social distancing measures are undertaken.

- **Question was asked if the 30min duration for the entire service has to be strictly adhered to?**

Minister Wong mentioned that he is less concerned over the duration than he is on the intensity of the activity. For example, if the preacher is preaching with adequate social distancing measures in place, Minister Wong would be less concerned that if the entire 30 min consisted of singing (a high intensity activity).