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URGING CLOSER COLLABORATION BETWEEN CHURCHES AND CHURCH-HEALTH FACILITIES AND ASSOCIATIONS

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. 1 Corinthians 12:27-28 (NRSV)

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges in the world. In Africa, socio-economic structures and livelihoods have been disrupted. There is also an infordemic (a pandemic of fake news, misinformation, rumours, treatment claims and misleading theologies) that is complicating the fight against the pandemic.

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) are pleased to note that churches, church-health facilities and Christian health associations (CHAs) are continuing to play an active role in promoting health and wellbeing at local, national and international levels.

We are encouraged with dynamic relationships in some countries between churches and church health facilities, whereby Christian health professionals support churches in providing health education, dispelling rumours and misinformation, as well as accompanying the leadership of churches as they make pertinent decisions. In other places however, churches and church health facilities are working in isolation and the health facilities are not part of the life and witness of the churches, or cooperation is only along denominational lines.

While churches are being challenged to discover more creative ways of fulfilling the mission of the church, we believe it is also an opportunity to strengthen collaboration with and among the church health facilities so that they are clearly a dynamic part of the calling of the church in healing ministries.

We, the AACC and the WCC, therefore call on:

1. Church councils to work closely with CHAs, where such associations exist, in order to strengthen their strategic partnerships; and where CHAs do not exist, to explore mechanisms for such collaboration;
2. Church health facilities and CHAs to enlist the support of the churches and other partners to ensure comprehensive primary health care and to secure continuity of essential health services, including child immunisation and other maternal and child health services, HIV and other chronic care services;
3. All to exercise caution and wisdom in translating public health guidelines to local contexts and in responding to the COVID-19 infordemic.