

to: ACTEA Council Members, Partners, and friends

from: Executive Director, ACTEA

date: March 24, 2020

re: The COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact & Concerns

The Corona crisis has thrown the world in total disarray. Many countries are now in lockdown; some are unsure what to do. The world is in prayer, literally. This message shares some challenges and concerns that we, as the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA), have experienced in recent weeks so that you can pray for us and our member institutions.

Our Staff:

We praise God that no ACTEA staff has been infected. The Director was in Nigeria for several meetings and returned back to Kenya just before the government shut down the international airport. He is still on the required 14-days self-quarantine. Dr. Dwight Singer, who had been working from Nairobi since January, had to leave the country before his scheduled end of March departure. He is now working from his home office in the USA. Since the government now requires Kenyans to work from home unless those in essential services, the ACTEA office will remain closed for the next few weeks.

Our Schools:

Unfortunately, our schools are more directly impacted by this pandemic. Most have shut down in compliance with government directives. Since the institutions had not completed their semester, they had to find creative ways of teaching. Those with online capabilities will complete the semester online; however, most of them issued lecture notes and assignments with the hope of resuming teaching and exams when they open. One thing we are concerned about is the institution's survival after the pandemic. Most institutions rely on Western donors in addition to the little money from students. It is unclear whether the institutions will be able to meet their monthly financial obligations during these difficult times. Of course, ACTEA also depends on institutions paying their annual fees. We can only pray that our institutions and ACTEA will thrive despite the pandemic.

Our Programs:

The Director, together with ACTEA Chairman, Prof. Emiola Nihinlola, participated in Scholarleaders' VSI project for eight schools in Abuja and Lagos (from 9-11, March, 2020). It was a big success despite the fears and concerns. The most encouraging thing was listening to a testimony from Prof. Emiola about how VSI has helped revolutionize his school, the Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS). The enthusiasm expressed by most schools to start VSI immediately, demonstrates the need for sustainability in theological schools in Africa. We hope and pray that this virus will come to an end soon so that the program may continue.

We also held a successful GATE workshop for 10 institutions in the Southern part of Nigeria, the biggest event in the history of GATE (a total of 83 participants). The workshop, held from 15 to 18 March 2020 at the Foursquare Camp, Lagos, was on "Leadership that Transforms Theological Education."



Figure 1: GATE Workshop Participants, Foursquare Camp, Lagos, 2020

However, the following immediate capacity-building programs and assessment visits are impacted:

- ♣ March 19-20, 2020: Affiliate Accreditation visit of Reuben George Theological Seminary, Ibadan, Nigeria. **Cancelled.**
- ♣ March 25-26, 2020: Affiliate Accreditation visit of Nehema Lutheran College, Nyamira, Kenya. **Cancelled.**
- ♣ April 1-3, 2020 – Tearfund’s consultation on “collaboration in theological education and training in Africa” Nairobi. **Cancelled** - virtual meeting planned for April 2nd.
- ♣ 21-24 April, 2020- OCI’s Institute for Excellence (Francophone Africa schools). Theme: “Bridging the gap between spiritual and social development in theological formation.” Cotonou, Benin. **Cancelled.**
- ♣ 28thApril-01 May 2020 – OCI’s Institute for Excellence (Anglophone Africa schools -West Africa Region). Theme: “Training for Effective Ministry through Contextual Research.” Place: Monrovia, Liberia. **Cancelled.**
- ♣ 19-22nd May 2020 – OCI’s Institute for Excellence (Anglophone Africa schools - South & East Africa regions). Theme: “Training for Effective Ministry through Contextual Research.” Place: Nairobi, Kenya. **Cancelled.**

Future Plans:

Regardless of the uncertainties, we are still planning future events and activities. Obviously, we are open to rescheduling them if necessary. But we do hope that these events will go as planned:

- ICETE Board Meeting & other USA Engagements. ICETE Board meeting is scheduled to happen from 10-14th June in North Carolina. In addition, the Director is scheduled to visit and possibly speak at Upendo Baptist Church (UBC), Dallas, Texas, the weekend of June 6. UBC is a thriving church serving Africans in the Dallas region. He is also scheduled to visit two key ACTEA partners in the Grand Rapids area on June 16 and 17th and to attend the annual all-team VSI meeting in Chicago (June 17th to 20th) before returning home on June 21.

- We are planning the annual Global Theological Initiative (GTI) consultation at the Resurrection Garden, Nairobi, from July 16 to 18, 2020. The theme for this year’s conference is “Lord and Giver of Life: The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit.” The GTI is an invitation-only three-day theology conference for East African evangelical theologians and scholars, sponsored by White Horse Inn and jointly hosted by both ACTEA and White Horse Inn.
- ACTEA Exco & Council Meetings in October: The schedule for this year’s ExCo and Council meeting to be held in Zambia (exact venue to be announced) is as follows:
 - ♣ Wednesday, October 28: Arrival of Exco Members
 - ♣ Thursday, October 29: Exco Meeting; Arrival of Council Members
 - ♣ Friday, October 30: Council Meeting
 - ♣ Saturday, October 31: Fellowship with Heads of Churches, Denominations and Theological Institutions.

Urgent Prayer Need:

ACTEA Office Project: As you may be aware, ACTEA made a commitment to purchase a floor (5,082 square feet) at the newly built AEA Plaza in Upper Hill Nairobi. ACTEA paid an initial deposit of USD 200,000, the balance of USD 490,000 was required by end of February 2020. However, ACTEA was not able to make this payment. We are trusting God for provision of these funds within the next 3 months because AEA needs the money to pay loans taken during the construction of the building. We have also talked about the possibility of downsizing – possibly to 2,500 square feet, which means we will still have to raise at least USD 100,000. In the midst of the impact of the virus on world economies, we pray and trust that God will provide. Please join us in praying for this project and consider supporting it. Below is a photo of the building and the floor.



Concluding Remarks

The pandemic has posed serious theological issues that the church and their institutions must be able to address. We are more aware, now, of the frailty and transitory nature of human life. Life is very fragile. We are all vulnerable beings. Those who always think they are here permanently are, I hope, aware that life can turn around so fast. We have also known the importance of community. We cannot conquer this ‘monster’ alone. Even strong economies like Italy are receiving help from weaker economies like Cuba. We are in this thing together. We are going to conquer it together. A friend of mine mentioned to me that the global lockdown

is a blessing; perhaps God is telling all of us that we need to slow down. Perhaps the world, the so abused world, needs a break from human activity. After all, the creation groans for the day of redemption (Romans 8:19-23). Taking a break from too much busyness is a form of creational redemption. But this is my modest theological musing. We need to think on these issues more. One more thing, we need to find creative ways of sustaining theological education in the midst of worldwide challenges such as this pandemic. *How best can African theological schools resource technology to facilitate quality theological education? How best can theological schools serve remote students?* We need to ponder on these issues, and many more, as we address the other challenges posed by COVID-19.

I welcome you to get in touch with us. We would like to know how Covid-19 has affected your institution and your country. Our emails are: actea.africa@gmail.com; director@acteaweb.org; adm.ass.actea@gmail.com; our website is <http://www.acteaweb.org>

In Christ's Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Tarus', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rev. Dr. David Tarus,
ACTEA Executive Director.