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PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

On Friday 12th February 2021, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Dr. the Hon Ralph Gonsalves held a meeting with a representative grouping of the **Coalition of Churches** comprising Pastor Stephen Ollivierre, Bishop Wendell Davis, Reverend Adolf Davis and Pastor Reynold Murray. The meeting was convened to discuss a number of issues relating to the COVID-19 protocols for mass gatherings and their implications for religious worship and other church activities. The virtual meeting was also attended by Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Simone Keizer-Beache and Cabinet Secretary, Mrs. Kattian Barnwell-Scott.

During the very fruitful discussions, several concerns were articulated and a number of suggestions and recommendations were proposed. As a result, the following proposals are either being actively pursued or are under consideration:

- Church leaders to notify the police in their districts of funerals that are scheduled to facilitate the management of such gatherings particularly with regards to the procession;
- Funeral services to be held not later than 11:00 a.m. to ensure the completion of burial before 3:00 p.m. To support this, cemeteries to be closed at 3:00 pm;
- Funeral homes to be requested to refrain from playing live or amplified during funeral processions; and

- A review of the current COVID-19 mass gathering protocols as they apply to churches to be undertaken within the next three weeks.

In addition, the members of the committee have agreed to meet with other members of the Christian community, particularly the leaders of churches who appear uncooperative or non-cooperative with the existing protocols, to encourage support for the measures to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The meeting concluded with the church leaders agreeing to consider taking the vaccine in support of the vaccination drive by the Ministry of Health, Wellness and the Environment. A meeting is to be held between the Chief Medical Officer and the church leaders soonest on this matter.