

Dear Clergy, Lay Readers and Vestry Secretaries

The following update will be posted on the provincial website of the Scottish Episcopal Church today [Friday 22 May 2020].

Kind regards

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Director of Communications
Scottish Episcopal Church

ADVISORY GROUP FORMED TO ASSIST WITH EASING OF LOCKDOWN RESTRICTIONS

The College of Bishops has previously announced the intention to issue guidance to the Scottish Episcopal Church in connection with the gradual easing of lockdown restrictions.

An Advisory Group has now been established for the purpose of producing guidance for local churches on the implications of the reopening of places of worship. The Group brings together expertise across a range of skills and experience and will be chaired by Robert Gordon, the convener of the Provincial Standing Committee. The other members comprise, Bishop Andrew Swift, the Bishop of Brechin, the Rev Elaine Garman (Rector of St John's, Forfar and with a background in public health), the Rev Mike Jones (Consultant Advisor, HealthLink 360), and Derek Thomson (Executive Director, St Mungo's, Balerno). The Group will have its first meeting next week.

The Group will carefully consider all relevant guidance issued by the Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland and, in the light of the phased route map announced by the Scottish Government yesterday, will approach its work on a phase by phase basis in order to follow the Government's framework for any future easing of restrictions in relation to places of worship. The Group will maintain regular contact and dialogue during the period of its work with the College of Bishops.

The Government route map envisages the possibility of private prayer in churches in Phase 2, "extended groups" meeting in churches in Phase 3 (though the meaning of "extended groups" has not so far been defined) and "mass gatherings" only in Phase 4. It would seem therefore that resumption of full public worship in the form which was "normal" prior to lockdown is not envisaged by the Government until Phase 4 of its route map and is therefore still a long way off.

It is the Group's intention to ensure that guidance is issued sufficiently early so as to enable churches to prepare adequately to steer a course through the intermediate phases and it is fully aware of the bishops' statement of 15 May that *"there will be no pressure on individual churches to reopen before they feel prepared and safe to do so. We have to protect those who would want to return to worship in our buildings, those who would want to come and join us and especially those who will be asked to manage such a safe return. The guidance we produce will enable each congregation along with their bishop to look at what is needed to open the church building. The final decision to open or remain closed will be taken by the diocesan bishop."*