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Subject: Advisory Group update
Date: 8 October 2020 at 11:24
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Dear Clergy, Lay Readers, Vestry Secretaries and Diocesan Secretaries

The Advisory Group has noted the First Minister's [statement to the Scottish Parliament](#) yesterday (7 October) and has decided not to adjust its current guidance but would like to draw attention to these points:

The arrangements for public worship and private prayer now in place are not affected by yesterday's statement but the First Minister made clear that the Scottish Government will be working across all sectors not affected by the statement to review - and where necessary tighten - the guidance and regulation on their operating practices. So further change may come in the future.

The restrictions announced in the statement may affect the use of church premises for activities other than public worship and private prayer. Details will be found in the Scottish Government regulations and guidance relating to the particular sectors and activities involved and churches should follow that (where appropriate, working in conjunction with external groups or bodies using their premises) in reaching decisions on whether new restrictions apply.

The material in paragraph 4 of the note of 2 October (reproduced below for ease of reference) seems increasingly relevant during this period of further general restriction to seek to halt the spread of coronavirus. As vestries draw on information now available on the incidence of the virus at more local levels, and take stock of their arrangements, they should feel able to consult their diocesan bishop if they have concerns about continuing to open for public worship or consider that changes should be made to the arrangements previously agreed with the bishop.

- 1. Risk assessment:** the Advisory Group wishes to remind clergy and vestries that risk assessment in the current climate needs to be seen as an ongoing process. Simply because a church may have reopened for public worship does not mean that the process of risk assessment ceases. It will be important to consider, for example, in a church has reopened, whether the arrangements for public worship are operating satisfactorily, whether those attending are observing the requirements for physical distancing, face coverings, hand sanitising etc. The future remains uncertain and it cannot be predicted with any degree of accuracy at this point whether further local lockdowns or more stringent national restrictions are likely to be introduced. Congregations are reminded to maintain vigilance. Ongoing risk assessment may mean that, in some circumstances, the view is taken by a vestry that public worship, having been resumed, needs to cease for a period. That may be appropriate if there is concern at the level of risk to which those attending church might be exposed. If the vestry considers that re-closure is necessary or appropriate, it is encouraged to confer with the Diocesan Bishop and also to consider its contingency planning so that pastoral support can continue to be provided, even if public worship is temporarily discontinued.

In a separate development the Church Relations Officer, Miriam Weibye, has been contacted by Interfaith Scotland to alert the Scottish Episcopal Church to the

availability of funds of up to £500, subject to successful application, to places of worship that are struggling to meet the safety requirements of re-opening their buildings and safely holding services (within the Government Guidelines). Full details are within the attached document, titled 'Places of Worship Fund'.

Kind regards

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General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church Scottish Charity No SC015962

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