

Dear Clergy, Lay Readers, Vestry Secretaries and Diocesan Secretaries

The Advisory Group of the Scottish Episcopal Church met yesterday to consider the First Minister's statement to the Scottish Parliament earlier this week. Owing to the fact that the situation remains somewhat fluid, the Group is not at this stage reissuing revised versions of its previous substantial advice documents. Instead, it considered it would be more helpful to draw specific points to the attention of clergy, lay readers and local churches, as set out below.

As mentioned in earlier communications, the First Minister has previously announced that public worship could resume from 26 March 2021, provided there is no overall deterioration in the pandemic situation. She is due to confirm definitively on Tuesday 23 March whether or not worship can so resume. The Advisory Group's expectation is that that confirmation will be forthcoming on Tuesday and we do not intend to issue a further update at that point, unless the Government decides to reverse its previous indications.

The most recent information from Government regarding the timescale for lifting of lockdown restrictions is available at the following link from which an infographic can also be downloaded: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-timetable-for-easing-restrictions/pages/timetable/>

The dates in the Government's timetable should continue to be regarded as indicative. However, you may wish to note the following:

- 2 April: whilst the "stay at home" requirement is lifted, the local authority based travel restrictions are expected to remain in place for at least a 3 week period thereafter. Consequently, crossing a local authority border to attend a place of worship is not yet permissible except for clergy or lay readers responsible for taking services (under the "work" exception).
- 26 April: weddings and funerals for up to 50 people are permitted (including wakes and wedding receptions without alcohol).
- 26 April: indication that the restrictions on travel within all of mainland Scotland should have been lifted.
- 17 May: possibility of increase in communal worship, subject to capacity constraints.
- Early June: increased numbers permissible at places of worship, subject to "stakeholder engagement" (but no indication of specific numbers at present).
- End of June: again, increased numbers permissible at places of worship, subject to stakeholder engagement, but no indication of specific numbers.

Other specific matters to draw to your attention: –

1. As indicated in last week's update, all of the previous limitations which applied when churches were previously allowed to reopen similarly apply from 26 March, including matters such as social distancing, the wearing of face coverings, hand sanitising, and the maintaining of a register of contact details of those attending services. Singing is not permitted, except that in an act of worship, a single individual may sing or chant behind a plexiglass screen. The cap on numbers remains at 50.
2. Outdoor services: since our update of last week, we have sought greater clarification from Government on the issue of outdoor services. Services in a public place, such as a park, are not permitted at this stage. However, in a change to our update last week,

the Government has confirmed to us that an outdoor service within the perimeter of church grounds (for example, a church garden, or car park) would be permissible, subject to the overall cap of 50 people, 2 m social distancing, the wearing of face coverings, and provided that all individuals are seated. If, therefore, you wish to organise such a service, you may want to ask your congregation to bring their own seating with them. Please note that the overall cap of 50 applies to the entirety of such a worship service (so that it would not be permissible to have 50 inside the church and a further 50 outside). Record-keeping of those attending should of course be undertaken.

3. The Government has also confirmed that on the basis that public worship can resume from 26 March, the opening of churches for "individual prayer" is also possible from that date. The Advisory Group issued guidance on such matters in June last year which is available at: <https://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/Phase-2-Revised-Guidance-Version-2-19.6.20.pdf> and the principles of which should similarly be applied now. No more than 50 should be present in a church at any one time for individual prayer. Records of those attending for individual prayer should be kept in the same way as for a service of worship.
4. Whilst no church is obliged to reopen at this stage, it is nevertheless encouraging that, for those who wish to do so, it will be possible to resume activity for Holy Week. Any such services or other activities being organised should observe the general principles applicable to public worship, as mentioned above. Such principles therefore ought to be applied to Holy Week liturgical practices represented by the breadth of traditions represented within the Scottish Episcopal Church. Palm crosses may be available for taking at the back of the church but church members should hand sanitise immediately prior to taking such a cross. The washing of feet on Maundy Thursday should not take place, nor should the sprinkling of congregations with water as part of the penitential rite during Eastertide. If the stripping of the altar is to be undertaken, it should be carefully choreographed in advance to ensure social distancing and the cleaning of all touched surfaces before hangings are reinstated. Objects which have been removed should be cleaned before being replaced. The "Watch" on Maundy Thursday could be undertaken within the scope of churches being open for individual prayer as referred to above.
5. Children's activities: Sunday school activities, where linked directly to the main act of worship, are permissible once churches reopen but remain subject to the overall cap of 50 applicable to the congregation as a whole. In relation to children/youth activities taking place on separate occasions, Government guidance indicates that outdoor organised activities can now include children and young people (up to age 18), where there are no more than 2 adults at any one time and the overall group size, including the adults, is no greater than 15. Parent/baby and toddler group activities, where parents are expected to attend, can take place outdoors with no more than 15 adults present at any one time and provided that the children at such activities are under the age of 5. Government guidance on these is available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-organised-activities-for-children-from-5-january-2021/> and at <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/5974/youth-work-covid-19-guidance-framework.pdf>

The Government's own guidance on Places of Worship is to be updated by 26 March, but the Advisory Group's expectation is that any changes will be minimal and will be consistent with what is outlined above.

Kind regards

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