

Dear Clergy, Lay Readers, Vestry Secretaries and Diocesan Secretaries

As you will be aware, on Tuesday this week, the First Minister announced some further restrictions coming into force after Christmas.

One of these is that from and including 26 December 2021, limits are to be placed on the size of "live public events". Such indoor seated events are to be subject to a maximum attendance of 200 people and subject to a requirement of 1 m physical distancing. **We have today had clarification from civil servants that a church service is not to be regarded as a "live public event" for the purposes of these restrictions.** Consequently, there is no limit on capacity but, as mentioned in our email update of 16 December 2021, the Advisory Group continues to recommend social distancing between households attending church for the time being. Weddings and funerals are also not regarded as a "live public event" and so not subject to the 200 limit.

The Government is however strengthening its encouragement for everyone to socially distance in places of worship where that is possible. (The 2m requirement for those not wearing face masks when leading worship or singing in a choir or participating in a worship group, remains a legal requirement.) Revised Government Places of Worship guidance, which reflects that strengthening, also includes some minor changes to language rather than substance, is available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/>

The First Minister also announced further protections to be applied in hospitality settings from 27 December. The Advisory Group in its email update last week recommended discontinuing post-service refreshments at this time. It emphasises that it remains of that view. If, however, despite that advice, any church, following risk assessment, considers it safe to provide such refreshments, please note that the Government is requiring 1m distancing between groups attending hospitality outlets. In the context of church refreshments, in effect, that means 1m distancing between households.

As anticipated in our email update last week, the Advisory Group has now produced an updated version of its Frequently Asked Questions. These were posted to the provincial website on Monday and can be viewed at: <https://www.scotland.anglican.org/coronavirus-updates/>

Finally, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government, Shona Robison, has recorded a Christmas video message for the Christian communities in Scotland, which can be viewed at: <https://wettransfer.com/downloads/7588cc1062f79b1393960fd3a1a3e26220211222185234/bccef25c0d144934a273fc465d5bae9a20211222185300/0e54ed>

Kind regards
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