

Dear Clergy, Lay Readers, Vestry Secretaries and Diocesan Secretaries

The Advisory Group has met recently and draws the following to your attention: –

- While there is no immediate change to the current regulations, we await the publication next week of the Scottish Government's revised Strategic Framework which we expect will lay out the Government's view on how we adapt to living with Covid on a long-term basis. The Advisory Group continues to make representations to Government to address the inconsistencies of regulation now applying in different parts of the UK. We expect that Government to move soon in the direction of further reducing regulations.
- In the meantime, the Group is aware that the beginning of Lent is approaching and has considered the question of the imposition of Ashes on Ash Wednesday. If a church wishes to offer imposition of ashes, a local judgement needs to be made on how to do this safely. There are options that a cleric/church might consider. Face coverings must be worn by all coming to receive ash and by the person imposing. The person imposing ash might sanitise the fingers being used between each imposition, noting that this might be clumsy and messy given the use of the ash. Dry ash (which is often used anyway) could help. If the person imposing ash does not wish to sanitise between each imposition a little ash could be offered for each person to impose on themselves whilst a prayer is said. If there is anxiety about any public health or liturgical aspect of imposition, it is entirely appropriate for a church to omit imposition of ash. The regimen we are now entering is one where, after following remaining hard requirements like face coverings, common sense should be used to manage the mitigation of virus spread.
- The Group is aware that whilst many are hoping for a return to greater normality in the foreseeable future, there are also those who are feeling apprehensive about such a move. The Group has previously encouraged us all to be sensitive to the needs of others and draws your attention to the Government's "Distance Aware" scheme which provides a way of enabling those keen to keep a social distance from others to make that known. Churches are asked to acquaint themselves with the scheme if they are not already and to make congregational members aware of it – both for those who might wish to wear a "distance away" badge or lanyard but also to make sure that others respect the wishes of those wearing such a badge/lanyard. Further details are available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-distance-aware-scheme/>
- The Group continues to encourage all to be fully vaccinated, boosted and to take regular lateral flow tests – and not attend services or other church activities in person if a test proves positive.
- Finally, the taking of contact details of those attending worship has been voluntary, though recommended, for churches during the pandemic. The Scottish Government has loosened its guidance on this in relation to places of worship and the Advisory Group is of the view that churches may discontinue the practice of collecting such information, if they wish.

Kind regards

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General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church

Scottish Charity No SC015962