

Church of Scotland - Covid-19 Briefing

17th March 2020

Cancellation of Services and other information

The Church's Covid-19 Task Group met this morning, and considered the most recent advice from the Scottish Government, issued on the evening of Monday 16th March, available [here](#). This information from the Scottish Government takes precedence over the briefing note issued by myself at 17:53 on 16th March 2020.

The Scottish Government advised that people should minimise social contact by avoiding crowded areas and large gatherings, including religious congregations, and smaller gatherings, listing areas which were of concern.

Worship – Cancellation of Worship Services

In the light of the above, the Church of Scotland Task Group has agreed to ask, in the strongest terms, that all gatherings for worship should cease until further notice, with effect from Wednesday 17th March 2020, or earlier if possible. Other Scottish Churches are taking similar actions. This obviously includes Easter services. Some Presbyteries have already instructed this action. This will include, but not be restricted to, housegroups, meetings for youth work, and church cafes. It will still be possible for an individual to offer a livestreaming of a sermon and prayers. Further information on livestreaming, including information on copyright, can be found in this circular on the Law Department's webpages [here](#). Sunday broadcasts of a weekly service take place on Radio 4, and also on Radio Scotland; other radio stations are available.

Church buildings can be kept open as a place for people to come and pray. Notices should be clearly displayed asking that visitors observe robust hand hygiene, including washing their hands on entry to the church.

Prayer

The Moderator, the Right Reverend Colin Sinclair, has, along with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and other church leaders, have issued a call for a National Day of Prayer; more details [here](#).

Offerings

The Task Group is aware that closing down worship services will impact on congregational income, and we'd want to encourage people to continue contributing financially as far as possible, and to encourage the increased use of standing orders as an expression of ongoing stewardship.

Funerals The key phrase here is to minimise social contact. Sensitive conversations will need to take place with families and mourners ahead of funeral ceremonies, and to consider the size of groups gathering for funerals. It may be necessary in the future to consider whether funerals should be restricted exclusively to minister, immediate family, and funeral directors. In addition, local guidance from funeral directors and crematorium staff will be critical here. It should be noted that many crematoria have the facility to livestream services and to host a recording of services for a period of time after the cremation service.

Weddings

For weddings, the advice offered in the briefing note of 12th March 2020 remains unchanged; certain venues will be restricting attendance, and it may be that couples have to work through what changes have to made, including in some cases rearranging. Travel restrictions on travel into the UK will also have an effect on guests at weddings. Again, sensitive conversations will be the order of the day.

Pastoral Care Networks

Please find attached a guidance note from the Church's Safeguarding Department with some useful guidance about setting up small pastoral care networks with a practical outcome. This guidance note contains a postcard which may be useful. There are some good ideas here about small groups; such groups can mitigate social isolation, and help people to continue to feel that they are part of the wider community of faith. Previous advice about using tools such as Skype, email, letters, greetings cards, Facetime, and Whatsapp groups are all useful approaches and some of these are particularly helpful where people don't use technology.

General Assembly

The decision has been taken in the light of Scottish Government advice to cancel the General Assembly of May 2020. The Office of the General Assembly will be in touch with commissioners separately.

Conclusion

The above is offered in the light of current information, and is of course subject to further public health guidance and directives from the Scottish Government. The above has taken some time and care to compile, and at this stage we apologise for not being able to respond to every email.

Task Group Members

The Task Group Members are:

the Rev Dr George Whyte, Principal Clerk;
Dave Kendall, Chief Officer;
Catherine Skinner, Strategic Programmes Officer;
Ruth MacLeod, Head of Communications;
Mary MacLeod, Solicitor of the Church;
Liam Fennell, Head of Facilities;
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