

STATEMENT FROM THE COLLEGE OF BISHOPS

Friday 15 May 2020

The message from the Scottish Government remains 'stay at home' and our church buildings remain closed to protect the vulnerable, but thinking is underway to address how the Scottish Episcopal Church will respond to the eventual easing of restrictions on movement.

The First Minister announced last week that lockdown measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus in Scotland have been extended until a further review on 28 May, and the College of Bishops continues to follow this guidance from the Scottish Government.

The College of Bishops will call on expert advisors to assist with planning, and in due course will issue a set of guidelines to support churches as they prepare for what will and will not be possible as government restrictions are eased.

In a joint statement issued today [15 May], the College of Bishops said:

“The College of Bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church intends to provide a set of principles which the Church can follow when we are considering the way forward in the coming months.

“The College has tried to consider what can and cannot happen when we eventually come out of lockdown. We recognise this is a piece of work for which we will need to bring together a group with specialist skills to help us.

“We are preparing these guidelines for the time when it is clear that returning to our church buildings is possible. We will only put these measures into place after listening to the advice of the Scottish Government and after particular aspects of the worship and practices of our Church are taken into account. We are reminded that as Bishop Kevin said in his service of the Eucharist recently, we closed our churches out of love, not out of fear, and we must open them again with that same love and not because of external pressure.

“We will continue to ensure that all can worship safely, either at home or in their church building. There will be no pressure on individual churches to reopen before they feel prepared and safe to do so. We have to protect those who would want to return to worship in our buildings, those who would want to come and join us and especially those who will be asked to manage such a safe return.

“The guidance we produce will enable each congregation along with their bishop to look at what is needed to open the church building. The final decision to open or remain closed will be taken by the diocesan bishop.

“The College of Bishops continues to meet on a weekly basis to discuss these matters. We also continue to maintain close communication with our ecumenical partners.”