

Dear Clergy, Lay Readers, Vestry Secretaries and Diocesan Secretaries

The Advisory Group of the Scottish Episcopal Church met yesterday and considered the implications of Scottish Government announcements earlier this week. It draws attention to the following developments: –

- As had been anticipated, the Government has confirmed that all of Scotland moves to Level 3 in the tiered framework and the cap of 50 attending places of worship is being removed with effect from Monday 26 April. From that point, the maximum number able to attend a service in church is to be determined by the physical capacity of the building, ensuring the necessary 2m distancing between individual worshippers or household groups. Children under 5 are excluded for this purpose. In many cases our church buildings have, in any event, been too small to accommodate 50 worshippers socially distanced and, therefore, for many the removal of the cap may not make any difference.
- The maximum number permitted to attend funerals and weddings, however, will increase from a cap of 20 to a cap of 50, increasing again when we reach level 1 (cap of 100) and level 0 (cap of 200)
- There have been indications from Government that in the coming weeks there may be more detailed guidance being produced about how the maximum capacity of a building is to be computed and there has been some draft guidance published by Government. It would apply not only to places of worship but also to other sectors including hospitality venues and more generally. We have made representations to Government on that draft guidance and once there is any clarity on its final form, the Advisory Group will issue further comment. A possible requirement may be to advertise at the entrances to Places of Worship what the maximum capacity is but we suggest that churches wait until there is further clarity on such matters.
- Separately, the Government has also been updating its specific Places of Worship guidance and we understand that that will be available on the Government website from Monday 26 April. As before, those responsible for operating places of worship need to "have regard" to the Government guidance. The current guidance is available at the following link and we assume that the updated guidance will similarly be available there from Monday: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/>
- The updated Government guidance, although in a slightly different format, will be broadly similar in terms of its overall content to previous guidance. We continue to discuss with Government certain issues that remain unclear. However, in the meantime, that new guidance will contain certain developments which we draw to your attention as follows:
 - subject to 2m physical distancing, indoor hospitality will now be permitted in places of worship so that, for example, food or drink may be offered after (or before) a service. People must be seated, continue to wear face coverings when not seated, and guidance for the hospitality sector must be complied with (but the 2m distancing requirement will override the 1m distancing requirement applicable in some hospitality premises). (The Advisory Group recognises this as one example of inconsistencies across a range of Government guidance for different sectors.)

- the new guidance will permit more than one room or hall to be used for worship at the same time. Care will need to be taken to manage movement within any common circulation areas and facilities such as toilets.
- Up to this point, children attending Sunday School or similar activities during the morning service have counted towards the cap on numbers. From Monday, if children enter the main worship space with the rest of the congregation at any time, they must be included within the maximum capacity figures (except children under 5). However if the children use a separate self-contained space with its own entrance and exit and do not join the main service then the relevant maximum capacity would be that for that self-contained space.
- As before, the use of churches/church halls for other purposes such as support groups, indoor fitness groups etc is subject to the relevant guidance applicable to, and the timescales for resumption of activity in, those other sectors.

Kind regards

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