

Church Buildings Closed to Public Until Further Notice

The College of Bishops has taken the “difficult and painful” decision that the church and cathedral buildings of the Scottish Episcopal Church should now be closed to the public until further notice.

A letter to all Clergy, Lay Readers, Vestry Secretaries, Diocesan Secretaries and Diocesan Offices states:

“The College of Bishops sends you our heartfelt thanks for the way that you have responded to the advice we have issued during this pandemic. The reports of the imaginative ways people have been kept together spiritually have been heart-warming.

“The information we have is that the increase in Coronavirus cases has followed the expectations of the medical officers. Unfortunately, because people are struggling to self-isolate or to maintain a distance from each other the threat to people is growing.

“The College of Bishops has therefore taken the difficult and painful decision that our churches and Cathedrals should now be closed to the public.

“There are several reasons for this decision.

- People are travelling to get to our churches and that may put them at risk.
- The staff or volunteers who are keeping the buildings clean are being put at risk by the genuine desire to be thoughtful and caring to those who come into our buildings.
- Trying to keep churches adequately disinfected etc is in itself a significant demand if people are continuously coming and going in and out of our churches.
- Many of those who have charge of our churches are themselves in the vulnerable group and we need to protect them.

“Perhaps the most pressing reason is that we should set an example – to ask people to stay at home but then offer them the opportunity to come into our churches while they are out and about sends a conflicting message. Being out and about without very good reason is directly against government advice, and we need to keep people safe.

“This advice does not exclude clergy from continuing to offer daily prayers and worship in our churches, but these activities must be restricted to one member of the clergy or lay readership team and we should not be inviting others to physically join us. Those who feel unable to use the church because of personal health reasons or who would have to travel by public transport to the Church should simply stay and pray at home.

“The question we must always ask ourselves is whether anything we are doing encourages people to leave their homes and/or gather unnecessarily? If so, we must stop and find another way.

“Please put clear signage on your church noticeboard/doors. We suggest that any notices which might be put up outside churches shouldn’t simply read “closed until further notice” but rather something along the lines of “Our church **building** is closed for the time being, but **our people** continue to meet virtually. Details of online services will be posted at <https://www.scotland.anglican.org/coronavirus-updates/>” (or your own church website as appropriate).

“We are aware that a number of churches are offering their own online worship. We ask that in arranging such worship, those involved be kept to the bare minimum so as to avoid the risk of infection transmission.

“The College of Bishops continues to hold the Province in prayer, and we ask you to keep us in yours. We also ask that the practice of lighting candles at 7pm on Sunday evening be continued throughout the current pandemic.”

Blessings

+Mark Primus, and Bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness and Acting Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway

+Kevin, Bishop of Argyll and The Isles

+John, Bishop of Edinburgh

+Anne, Bishop of Aberdeen and Orkney

+Andrew, Bishop of Brechin

+Ian, Bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane