

As you will know the First Minister has announced changes to **Level 4** restrictions which cover most of Scotland. The regulations for these will be published on Wednesday and will come into effect on Friday although the legal requirement to stay at home (with exceptions) comes into force at midnight. The restrictions will last for four weeks in the first instance. You can see the first page of Scottish Government material by clicking [here](#).

Those island places currently in **Level 3** remain there and the restrictions are as they were in relation to worship, use of church buildings etc. – in these areas there are no changes to the law but in planning your activities you may wish to take into account the new variant of the virus and its increased transmissibility.

For the “enhanced” Level 4 the main impact on us is that from Friday 8th church buildings must be closed for worship or private prayer but available for funerals and weddings. They can also be used for the purposes of recording or broadcasting a virtual act of worship but those present should only be the person leading worship and the absolute minimum numbers of other people i.e. one person recording, if necessary

As for funerals, we are told that the maximum attendance will be twenty and I have sought clarification if that number includes or excludes the minister, funeral director, organist etc. Services such as internment or scattering of ashes can also continue to take place subject to the same maximum numbers. Ministers, deacons and others conducting funeral services might wish to remind families that the maximum numbers apply for inside church, crematorium or funeral parlour, **and** outdoor spaces such as cemeteries.

In relation to marriages and civil partnerships, the restrictions mean that no more than 5 people can attend (or 6 if an interpreter is required). The five people are:

- The religious or belief celebrant (or the civil registrar).
- The couple
- The two witnesses required by marriage and civil partnership legislation.

People can still travel beyond the bounds of their local authority to attend a funeral, scattering/internment of ashes or wedding.

I am presuming that “places of worship” can also be used for the other purposes which you will remember from the lockdown last Spring – food banks, support of the homeless, the education or regulated childcare for the children of key workers. I will seek further confirmation that this is the case.

Those providing key voluntary services such as food banks, community support etc. are able to leave the home under the ‘reasonable excuse’ criteria. This should mean that churches can continue to provide community support. In the initial stages of lockdown I issued each Presbytery Clerk with a template letter that ministers could receive to offer some comfort if they were travelling and were stopped by the authorities. If you think this would be helpful in your context, please speak to your Presbytery Clerk.

The Church’s Covid-19 group are meeting on Wednesday afternoon and I may well be in touch with further advice and information after that.

One thing we will be discussing is the resourcing of on-line worship for the Sundays in January. I know that

many people are more than capable of producing their own material but that others find this more challenging so there will be discussion about how we might share our resources in these times of emergency.

As you will have heard the FM say, the vaccines are on the way. On that front, I know that some churches are looking to offer their premises for use as a vaccination centre. If you are going down this road please contact the Law Department who are working with some congregations on producing a simple agreement. The relevant Scottish Government civil servants are aware that churches would be willing to discuss how they might work with the health service to achieve a successful and quick roll out of the vaccines.

Best wishes

George



The Church of Scotland

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