



# The Minister's Desk

13<sup>th</sup> March 2020



Dear brothers and sisters,

I am sure that your prayers, like mine, are with all of those families throughout the world who have lost a loved one as a result of the Coronavirus and with those who are being treated for this illness, or who have been isolated or are self-isolating, wherever they may be. Please also pray for those who have the onerous responsibility to make the right and timely decisions in order to try to keep us all safe. That's the wonderful thing about prayer: it gives us hope as we take our concerns to God, and He knows of whom we speak even if we can't name names!

At a time when people throughout the world are concerned about the virus, which has now been declared to be a pandemic by WHO (World Health Authority), I want to update you as best I can as to the advice we are being given by The Church of Scotland regarding Sunday services and other Church (and premises) activities:

## **Coronavirus Task Group**

A daily meeting of the Church's Coronavirus Task Group has been taking place since the beginning of this week, and regular briefings have been issued to Presbytery Clerks over the last few weeks. The Task Group membership covers the Office of the General Assembly; Facilities Management; the Law Department; Catherine Skinner, coordinating, from the Office of the Assembly Trustees; Ruth MacLeod from Communications; Elaine McCloghry, Head of HR; and Angus Mathieson from Faith Nurture.

The Church intends to issue briefings via the website and email on a regular basis, given rapidly changing circumstances and announcements from Health Protection Scotland and the Scottish Government. The most recent advice from Health Protection Scotland can be found [here](#).

## **Worship and gatherings**

There may be formal moves to limit large gatherings and the Scottish Government will issue its decisions in response to developments; early indications in the First Minister's comments yesterday afternoon are that Church gatherings will be excluded from this, as they don't require the same level of resource from police, NHS, and Paramedic Resource, as, say, large football matches or concerts. Our advice with regard to public worship is to continue to hold services, while observing the practice outlined in the guidance above, and to take care to practice rigorous hygiene, e.g. including handwashing guidance.

## **Funerals**

With regards to funerals, undertakers have been issued with guidance by the Scottish Government, and further information can be found at [this location](#) as to the guidance they have been given.

## **General Assembly**

The Assembly Business Committee meets next week and contingency planning around the General Assembly is a key item on the agenda. Contingency planning for the Heart and Soul Festival is also taking place.

## **Pastoral Care**

With regards to pastoral visiting, hospitals, care homes, and other institutions may limit access, and your first point of contact should be with the institution concerned. You may be interested to know that Crossreach is limiting access to its residential homes with effect from Monday 16 March.

The general advice to individuals about self care, and observing relevant advice, applies to ministers and their household. Ministers – and the general population - are advised to avoid direct physical contact with those who have underlying health conditions and those who have symptoms. Please also avoid contact with those who are self isolating (seven days is the recommended period for self isolation). Avoid physical contact, but maximise virtual contact – email, skype, letters, greetings cards, and try to put together telephone trees or short life online groups, perhaps using Facebook to maintain contact and minimise isolation. Telephone trees are a good way to keep in touch, and mean that it's not just one person's responsibility – and it doesn't need to be the minister.

## **Other Church Activities**

Please refer to the pages on the Church of Scotland website (above.) For questions regarding social events, e.g. holiday clubs, coffee mornings, the following points, and others can be found there.

- Coffees and teas should be dispensed by a small number of individuals and either placed on a table for collection, or cups and saucers are used to reduce hand contact.
- All cups, saucers and plates must be washed thoroughly using a dishwasher if available
- Individually wrapped biscuits and cakes are suitable, but please avoid sharing plates of open cakes and biscuits.
- Use best hygiene practices when handling hymn books, collection plates or money

As further information from Health Protection Scotland and the Scottish Government, and the UK Government emerges, we shall seek to update you as required.

It follows that our Services and other activities will continue to take place however this may change depending on the advice we receive. I will endeavour to ensure that our members and church users are kept up to date in order to make any necessary alternative arrangements. You may call me at any time to ask if there have been any changes to this advice which may affect your church-based activity.

Your brother in Christ, *Terry*

# **UPCOMING EVENTS**

## **March**

**Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup>**

**The Filling Station at the Aroma Café. 7-9pm**

**Speaker: Dez Johnson, National Director of Alpha**