



## DIOCESE OF GALLOWAY

### **Covid-19 Update** 22 October 2020

Dear Parish Priests and Parish Co-ordinators for the Re-opening of Churches,

I write to you with a further update in times which are becoming more challenging for everyone. Some of this guidance is particular to priestly ministry, however it seems appropriate to share it with the lay people supporting their parishes and the clergy.

#### **1. The collaboration of faith communities with the Government in Scotland**

At a recent meeting between the Government and representatives of the faith communities, the Government recognised the importance of keeping places of worship open and acknowledged, as far as they are aware, that no outbreaks have been linked to places of worship. The Government wishes to thank the stewards and disinfection teams and faith leaders for their commitment to keeping our places of worship safe to gather. It was also acknowledged that places of worship play a role in tackling social isolation and supporting community cohesion. These messages are worth sharing with volunteers and also at a wider level through parish bulletins and other channels of communication.

This positive Government response also emphasises the need to redouble all efforts to keep our parishes safe through the present strict hygiene control measures.

The cap of 50 of a congregation remains.

I encourage parish priests to regularly review the practical workings of infection control and stewarding with volunteers. The commitment of volunteers has been exceptional throughout Galloway diocese. This commitment is likely to be necessary for, at least, a further six months. Care of the volunteers and the good will which proceeds from all they do are important. Making opportunities available to expand the volunteer team, to lessen the burden of commitment, or to schedule Masses according to the volunteer capacity are all prudent.

### **Covid-19 Re-opening of Churches**

Telephone: 01563 521832    Email: [stephen.mcgrattan@gallowaydiocese.org.uk](mailto:stephen.mcgrattan@gallowaydiocese.org.uk)

## **2. Further Restrictions within Galloway Diocese**

While further restrictions have recently been introduced throughout Scotland, the Ayrshire and Arran area of Galloway Diocese is subject to more rigorous restrictions which prohibit house visits (with certain exceptions) and have closed hospitality venues.

## **3. Visiting homes**

Throughout Scotland, clergy (and where required, a lay delegate) can still undertake necessary visits to houses in their capacity to care for the vulnerable. Necessary visits would include those to people reaching the end of their life or to those who are particularly vulnerable because of isolation or for another reason. Other routine visiting of houses by priests or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should not take place. It will be some time before routine visits are the norm.

Visits can be made by priests and deacons to arrange a funeral. Alternatively, the bereaved family can visit the parish house, although it may be better for such meetings to take place in the church or parish hall.

A record of visits made by the priest, deacon or layperson should be kept for Test and Protect purposes.

## **4. Hospital visits**

Pastoral care and hospital visiting remains a matter of judgment for priests, and should be reserved for end of life care or situations of particular vulnerability. This can still take place, when possible and appropriate, using a video call etc. Physical visits can be made at mitigated risk by wearing the mandatory NHS personal protective equipment of a mask, gloves and an apron (all of which will be available and must be used). The guidance of hospital staff should always be sought before any visit. End of life visits to Covid-positive patients is discouraged because exposure to this environment alongside the other interactions with multiple households at worship and in pastoral ministry is a serious risk to public health.

Professor Jason Leitch has written to faith leaders and says: "Faith representatives should be permitted to visit more than one patient in hospital where necessary, as long as it is safe to do so and all necessary hygiene measures are observed." The Government and the NHS have put these principles in place.

The following principles have been developed and shared with NHS Boards to support spiritual care provided by the NHS in Scotland.

- i. The Spiritual Care Service in each health board area exists for the delivery of safe and effective, person-centred spiritual care to all patients, family/carers and members of staff.
- ii. When particular spiritual care needs are identified that are associated with a patient's faith/belief community, the Spiritual Care Team should be informed. This will usually involve the Healthcare Chaplain responsible for the patient's ward, or, in an emergency, the Healthcare Chaplain on call.
- iii. After assessing the situation, the Chaplain will decide whether this need can be addressed by the board's Spiritual Care Team, or whether the patient's own faith/belief community should be involved.
- iv. If the patient needs to be supported by a representative from the patient's own faith/belief community, the Spiritual Care Team should arrange for this to happen.

## **Covid-19 Re-opening of Churches**

Telephone: 01563 521832    Email: [stephen.mcgrattan@gallowaydiocese.org.uk](mailto:stephen.mcgrattan@gallowaydiocese.org.uk)

- v. Pastoral support is part of the person-centred spiritual care being given to the patient while in hospital. Therefore a faith representative should not be classed as a patient's designated visitor.
- vi. In some health board areas, requests for spiritual care from a specific faith/belief community are so common that separate arrangements have already been made for contacting and accessing support from that community, so that the board's own Spiritual Care Team is not involved in the continual delegating of this aspect of their work. Where such arrangements are in place (and have, perhaps, been suspended during lockdown) such faith/belief community support can now be accessed as previously, according to local protocols.
- vii. When a patient's faith/belief community representative is supporting that patient, the ward's standard infection control measures should be observed. A faith/belief community representative may only support a number of patients in the hospital if it is safe to do so and standard infection control measures are observed at every stage.
- viii. Physical distancing should still be observed, and physical touch restricted to that which is absolutely necessary for spiritual care, observing strict hand hygiene protocols while doing so.
- ix. Where spiritual care involves the sharing of objects (e.g. printed material, food and drink associated with rites, anointing oils) the same procedures should be in place as in local faith/belief community gatherings, to ensure effective infection control.

Further principles to support spiritual care and visits by faith representatives is included in the guidance:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-hospital-visiting-guidance/>

## **5. Care home visits**

Clergy are permitted to visit residents in care homes. Clergy are also recognised in their capacity of providing spiritual care and not as designated visitors. This only applies to care homes where there have been no cases in the last 28 days. Similarly, visits can only be made by those who have been Covid clear for 28 days. Appropriate personal protective equipment must be provided and used, and advice of care home staff must always be followed.

I do not recommend care home visits at present, partly because of the level of risk to residents and also because all care home staff, even when asymptomatic, are tested weekly and clergy are not. The provision for regular testing of clergy as essential staff for care homes and hospitals is not in place. I have asked the Bishops' Conference Infection Control Committee to seek advice on the regular testing of clergy from the Government and will report back on this.

## **6. Housekeepers and parish staff**

Parish workers can still go to work in the parish house being especially careful to follow all the guidance. However, working from home, where at all possible, is the Government's advice.

## **7. Parish halls**

Thank you for the three responses regarding my request from the previous update about the use of parish halls in Galloway diocese. There seems, therefore, to be little demand to open halls, and those who have made these requests have recognised that the time to open, especially to outside groups, is not now. This situation will be kept under review.

## **Covid-19 Re-opening of Churches**

Telephone: 01563 521832    Email: [stephen.mcgrattan@gallowaydiocese.org.uk](mailto:stephen.mcgrattan@gallowaydiocese.org.uk)

As has always been the case during the pandemic, essential services like food banks and charitable support can operate from church halls. The number of households gathering should be as small as possible, all guidance should be followed, and distribution of food should be undertaken by a doorbell system that brings parcels outside as required and placed on the ground to be collected at suitable distance. Hands should be sanitised after every encounter.

## **8. Marriages**

From 16th October, in recognition of the significance of the event to couples, **an exemption from wearing a face covering** has been introduced for the couple getting married for the duration of the marriage ceremony provided the couple are physically distanced from any other person.

There is also a specific exemption for the celebrant.

This exemption for the couple does not apply to the wedding reception.

Any other person present at the ceremony or registrations is still be required to wear a face covering.

The wearing of face coverings is mandatory for anyone who enters or remains in an indoor public place where a marriage ceremony or civil partnership registration is taking place unless an exemption applies.

## **9. Use of separate rooms for worship**

The use of different rooms in the same building for acts of worship (and having a max of 50 people in each room) has been discussed further with the Government. The Government is evidently happy to explore this point further and might be willing to build in some flexibility, but not right now.

Separate buildings are not an issue, and these can be used to accommodate another 50 people for an act of worship. The issue is with separate rooms in the same building. So, if your parish hall is a separate building from the church, and you can guarantee separate entrance and exit and avoid clustering of people in the church grounds, there is no problem using the hall.

The issue under discussion is about rooms off the church, but essentially integral with it with for example the same entrance/exit as the church.

## **10. Use of loudspeakers at funerals**

Placing loudspeakers outside a place of worship to allow more people to take part, especially at funerals, is prohibited in order to avoid multiple household outdoor gatherings.

## **11. Children's activities**

The Government acknowledges that there is still a lot of confusion around which guidance to use for children's activities, with Youth Link Scotland guidance being the default. That will remain the case for now though the Government is looking to deal with the confusion in the coming weeks.

## **Covid-19 Re-opening of Churches**

Telephone: 01563 521832    Email: [stephen.mcgrattan@gallowaydiocese.org.uk](mailto:stephen.mcgrattan@gallowaydiocese.org.uk)

## 12. November Lists

We are still discouraged from distributing items from the church. Perhaps the faithful could be invited to download, print and complete a pdf November List file from the parish website and return it to the parish house or collection box placed on entry and leaving the church, or simply send names by email for prayer. I attach a template in case this is helpful.

Alternatively, they could simply complete their list on a sheet of paper, as many already do, and place it in an envelope.

The November Lists could be returned by placing them in boxes provided at the doors of the church or they could be placed through the door of the presbytery. They should be opened in a safe sanitary way (waiting 72 hours is recommended).

## 13. Blower heating systems

As these systems will cause the air to circulate there is an increased risk of airborne virus particles being carried around the church.

In order to reduce this risk and the spread of the virus parishes should carry out the following additional safety procedures when operating blower heating systems:

- Use the blower system to heat up the church in advance of allowing people into the building;
- After the system has been shut down wait at least 20 minutes to allow airborne particles to settle and **then sanitise all surfaces of areas that will be occupied;**
- Only then should people be allowed to enter the church.

## 14. Cemetery Masses during November

While there had been Government provision for outdoor gatherings, including acts of worship, they are prohibited in the Ayrshire and Arran part of Galloway diocese until 2 November. Thereafter, we have to await advice on such gatherings.

There is a thorough risk assessment required for outdoor acts of worship which includes providing seats for all attending and placed at household social distance. This is available on the Scottish Government website.

It does not seem necessary at this time to host a Cemetery Mass with a congregation. Priests may consider livestreaming Mass from the cemetery celebrated alone with a small number of required assistants. This should only take place with permission from the Council for these specific arrangements, especially when "an understanding" is in place from previous years to continue to celebrate Mass in the cemetery.

## Covid-19 Re-opening of Churches

Telephone: 01563 521832    Email: [stephen.mcgrattan@gallowaydiocese.org.uk](mailto:stephen.mcgrattan@gallowaydiocese.org.uk)

### **15. Places of Worship Security Fund**

The Scottish Government is introducing a new £500k places of worship security fund scheme. The funding is directed at places of worship most vulnerable to hate crime and will be for security equipment. The scheme should be up and running by the end of the year with applications considered early next year.

Thank you for the work you continue to do in your parishes during these circumstances.

Rev Stephen McGrattan  
Diocesan Co-ordinator for the Re-opening of Churches

### **Covid-19 Re-opening of Churches**

Telephone: 01563 521832    Email: [stephen.mcgrattan@gallowaydiocese.org.uk](mailto:stephen.mcgrattan@gallowaydiocese.org.uk)