

December 2021: Pastoral Letter from the College of Bishops

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

Matthew 11.28

As we approach the second Christmas of this pandemic, the College of Bishops remains committed to supporting and guiding all of the churches of the SEC in their pastoral and liturgical ministry as the pandemic continues. Guidance on the specific actions that apply to use of our buildings continues to be provided by the Advisory Group for the SEC, who have issued [guidance](#) as the government responds to the 'Omicron' variant of the virus.

All of the Bishops in the College would like to thank you for all the care and attention that you have shown as church leaders in some of most complex and difficult years our church has had in living memory. The faith and skill you have brought to church leadership in complex and changing circumstances is extraordinary and wonderful. The pressure of that work is immense, so we would repeat, as we have said before: in all church life, please be kind to yourselves and to each other.

The highly successful testing and vaccination programmes in Scotland have changed the nature of the pandemic as we approach 2022, and we hope and pray that the link between 'Omicron' virus transmission and serious illness or death will prove to be weakened. But as we receive new advice this December on reintroducing some restrictions and avoiding household mixing, we repeat the message that:

- we all should take extra care with face coverings and hand hygiene
- we should use LFT testing before we mix with others
- if we show any symptoms or are in contact with any Covid cases, we take a PCR test and follow the self-isolation rules
- we should encourage all to receive their booster dose of vaccine.

The rules and advice remain complex and there will be much disappointment and anxiety that, as Christmas approaches, more restrictions are appearing on our lives as church communities and some activities may not be possible. As anxiety may lead to anger: please hold on to the need to be kind and careful as you lead and guide your church communities. It would be wise to carry out some careful contingency planning in case key people have to self-isolate.

In 2022, we hope and pray that the ongoing public health work in this country and globally will continue to change and reduce the impact of the pandemic. The Scottish Episcopal Church remains resilient and well placed to recover well in the post-pandemic world: that is due in large part to your efforts in leading and supporting our churches. Well done, and bless you in your ministry.

In previous notes we have provided pastoral guidance for the lives of our church communities—there are no significant changes to pastoral activities not already described by the Advisory Group or contained in FAQs at

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<https://www.scotland.anglican.org/coronavirus-updates/>. Please do contact your diocesan bishop for any clarification or other guidance on pastoral matters.

Please continue to be careful in all you do as you lead the pastoral activities in the life of our churches and respond carefully to this tightening of restrictions on our shared pastoral life. In Province, Diocese and Charges: please do all you can to protect all those in your care. We must support those who wish churches to operate as much as restrictions allow. We must support and care for those who remain anxious and wish to be more careful than the government guidance might allow. The pandemic has changed life for nearly two years now: it will take a long time for life to return to a way of being together in which all can be comfortable.

Please take to heart the key message to be kind to yourselves and each other in the hard ongoing work to support and sustain our church life to grow and develop as, God-willing, the pandemic passes and our life becomes safer and consistent.

+Mark, Moray, Ross & Caithness and Primus
+Kevin, Glasgow & Galloway
+John, Edinburgh
+Anne, Aberdeen & Orkney
+Andrew, Brechin
+Ian, St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane
+Keith, Argyll and The Isles