

Revision date 7 May 2021

Frequently Asked Questions for Scottish Episcopal Churches in Scottish Government Pandemic Easing

The following questions and answers amplify and give examples of what is permissible in the present phase of the Scottish Government Covid pandemic easing. This is a complex time for all in Scottish society as well as for churches and there will inevitably be areas that are subjective and require local contexts to be judged.

Matters may also change quickly as regulations change—please check that this is the latest version of guidance and has not been superseded. For more detailed queries please contact your Diocesan Bishop/office or the Advisory Group via GSO.

The latest Scottish Government guidance for Places of Worship can be found at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/>.

The latest SEC guidance can be found at: <https://www.scotland.anglican.org/coronavirus-updates/>.

Churches Re-opening for Congregational Worship

Q: Are SEC churches allowed to be open?

A: Churches have been able to open from 26th March but do not HAVE to. Each vestry will judge when to open, based on the nature of the building, the usual size of congregation, the age and health of the clergy and congregation and many other factors. The mitigations required for re-opening are the same as in 2020: [guidance here](#).

Q: Do clergy or people have to take a Covid test before attending church?

A: This is NOT a requirement for any clergy or lay people to attend church. Hand hygiene, spacing, face-coverings and other mitigations keep church safe.

Q: Should we ask for evidence of vaccination for people to attend church?

A: No. Vaccination is a key part of the population-wide programme to limit the virus but hand hygiene, spacing, face-coverings and other mitigations keep church safe for all people, whether vaccinated or not. All people should behave the same way, whether vaccinated or not.

Q: How many people are allowed in church buildings for Sunday or midweek worship?

A: The maximum number allowed for worship is based on calculating capacity with 2m spacing between households. There is [new SEC guidance](#) being released on calculating the required 'Physical Distance Based Capacity'

(PDBC) number. This is a theoretical maximum for the building, which must be displayed on a sign at the entrance of church. This is not the actual capacity, which will be lower and based on actual numbers and households attending.

Q: Can we offer post-service refreshments?

A: The Scottish Govt guidance for places of worship says that refreshments CAN now be offered, but the Scottish Government [rules for hospitality](#) must be followed.

- 2m physical distancing must be applied.
- All people should be seated to receive refreshments which should be brought to them by 'serving staff' wearing face coverings.
- Two households, up to a total of six people can sit at the same table, but the guidance suggests that 2m distancing should be kept between the households.

The congregation could remain seated as they were for worship and be served refreshments by a serving team (noting that post-service fellowship is hard to achieve at 2m distancing). Hygiene controls for food service including Covid care are required.

Q: Is travel to attend worship services across local authority boundaries permitted?

A: Yes: travel across local authority boundaries for attending a usual place of worship is permitted at any level.

Q: When will we be allowed to sing in church?

A: One singer (cantor/band leader etc.) can sing at present, from behind a screen. For congregational or choir singing, the Scottish Government guidance has not changed. This remains really hard and has drastically changed the nature of worship. This is especially hard when this appears to change in other parts of the UK but not Scotland. This is being discussed with government and any change will be shared as soon as possible.

Q: How many singers are allowed to sing for worship?

A: Some churches are safely using more than one singer, as solo singing for entire worship services is such a demanding role. Only one singer can sing at any one time, to comply with the guidance. Singers should be spaced apart and sing behind screens.

Q: When will we be able to receive the consecrated wine as well as the consecrated bread?

A: The Bishops' guidance remains to only receive in one kind, i.e. the bread. The Government Guidance on this still says:

“the consumption of food and drink is avoided where it is not essential to the act of worship. Where it is essential to the act of worship, the use of communal vessels is avoided”

The College of Bishops is well aware of the breadth of theological and ecclesiological views that a broad church like the SEC holds and differing views on what might constitute 'full communion'. Once the Scottish Government guidance removes the current mitigations, a return to a common cup may be possible.

Q: Can church children's and youth groups now meet?

A: Children's and Youth work is now permitted with restrictions, in Level 3.

Guidance on safe operation can found at

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-organised-activities-for-children/>

and

<https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/5974/youth-work-covid-19-guidance-framework.pdf>

Other Activities in Churches & Church Premises

Q: Can church meetings like vestries now take place in church buildings?

A: The latest [Scottish Government guidance](#) says: “Managing a place of worship involves a range of activities that will be common to many businesses or organisations, such as committee meetings, recruitment of staff or physical maintenance of the building. Those responsible for the place of worship should consider these activities in line with the general guidance and restrictions for the current protection level. The general expectation is that everyone should work from home if possible and meetings should be held remotely. Places of worship which are run by a registered charity should refer to the [OSCR guidance](#) on charity meetings and governance.” This OSCR guidance is from March 2021.

There may be some exceptional circumstances where e.g. a vestry cannot meet online or activities require in-person meeting: all safety mitigations such as hand hygiene, physical distancing and face-coverings should be used for such in-person meeting that does take place in such circumstances.

Q. Can non-SEC hall/church tenants/users restart their activities in SEC church buildings or halls?

A: Yes. User groups/tenants who are permitted to restart under Scottish Government guidelines (e.g. nurseries, businesses, youth groups) may resume

their activities with physical distancing and hygiene measures in place. A clear agreement must be made between the vestry and the tenant/user over who will manage hygiene/contacts etc. around the specific activities.

Pastoral Visiting & Housegroups – activities in private homes

At present no social visiting in private homes is permitted. It is anticipated that from 17th May four people from two households may meet indoors.

Q: Now Scotland is all in level 3, can a cleric or lay pastoral visitor make pastoral visits or take home communion to church members?

A: Yes. Visits to vulnerable or isolated people, made by clergy or trained pastoral visitors and following strict hygiene and distancing protocols, are allowed by the Scottish Government regulations. These visits (classed as for 'work purposes, or for the provision of voluntary or charitable services') must be judged as essential and no cleric or pastoral visitor should make any visit when they are concerned about their own health or wellbeing.

Q: How many pastoral visits per day can we make?

A: The latest (4th May) Government Guidance on meeting others says "...minimise the number of meetings you have with people from other households each day." A cleric or pastoral visitor should use their discretion.

Q: Can housegroups or other small church meetings take place yet?

A: Limited outdoor meeting or indoor meeting in public spaces (e.g. cafés) is now possible and from 17th May limited indoor meeting in private homes should become possible. Any housegroup or small group should follow the government guidance for meeting (indoors/outdoors & public/private spaces) as given in [the current Government guidance](#).

Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals, Ordinations etc.

Q. How many people can attend weddings or funerals?

A: This varies by level and is based on 2m distancing. The lower of the capacity cap achievable with physical distancing or the following figure (revised in 2021) can attend:

Level 4:	20 people
Levels 3 and 2:	50 people
Level 1:	100 people
Level 0:	200 people

The officiant and other ‘staff’ at the venue (e.g. musicians, welcomers) are not included in the total. The same constraints on physical distancing and hygiene also apply. Specific guidance is given on this in the [Pastoral Guidelines](#).

Q: Can baptisms take place?

A: Yes: as long as they “form part of a wider congregational service”, with the appropriate limits on numbers and with distancing and hygiene. The [Government Guidance](#) states some specific issues to take into account with e.g. water in rituals and full immersion.

There also is specific guidance on hand hygiene for e.g. anointing candidates in the Bishops’ current [Pastoral Guidance](#).

Q: Can ordinations take place?

A: Again, yes: in the context of a church service, with the appropriate limits on numbers and with distancing and hygiene. The same specific guidance applies for e.g. anointing and laying hands on candidates. Theologically and canonically, the bishop is required to lay on hands for ordination. For priests or bishops, it will not be possible for all the priests or bishops present to lay on hands. Guidance is given in the Bishops’ current [Pastoral Guidance](#).

Q: Can we take photographs at such special occasions?

A: Physical distancing, face coverings and hand hygiene should be maintained at all times in a place of worship in accordance with the guidance/regulations. If less constrained photographs without these restrictions are wanted, they can be taken by congregation and/or participants gathering (still paying attention to physical distancing between households) outwith the church buildings.