

17<sup>th</sup> of March, 2020

To: All Ministers of Congregations, Vacancy Conveners, Stated Supplies, those in Specified Ministries, and Clerks of Presbytery.

Dear Colleagues,

Following on from yesterday's Pastoral Letter from the Moderator, and in light of evolving Government advice both in the United Kingdom and in the Republic of Ireland, we today issue the following formal advice to all Ministers and Kirk Sessions:

**1. Until further notice, all congregational organisations and activities should cease until further notice.**

If some meetings are required (for example a urgent meeting of Kirk Session), or deemed very important to hold, these should follow current Public Health guidance:

- those who display symptoms such as a high temperature and/or a new continuous cough, or have been advised to self-isolate, should not attend;
- those in vulnerable groupings should be discouraged from attending.

'Virtual meetings', including decision taking by e-mail or other similar means, are permissible (and indeed encouraged) in the current circumstances.

**2. Until further notice, all Sunday gatherings for worship should also cease until further notice.**

- Please note the emphasis on 'gatherings' ceasing - creative means of enabling members to avail of worship resources should be sought.
- In the interim, some colleagues may be able to provide resources themselves or could perhaps liaise with colleagues and 'sign-post' resources provided by others.
- An e-mail later this week will highlight some central resources and, if possible, give some additional guidance regarding other resources.

**3. Until further notice, steps should be taken to ensure that numbers attending funeral services and weddings are kept as low as possible.**

- Consideration should be given to all funerals being private (for close family and friends only), with no public announcement of the funeral arrangements.
- Where there are formal government restrictions on numbers attending indoor or outdoor events, these restrictions should be strictly adhered to in all situations, including both weddings and funerals.
- In weeks to come, if additional restrictions are brought in regarding the funerals of certain categories of people, these should be followed.

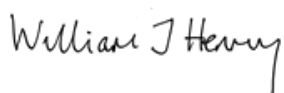
Please note:

- At this stage, it is not possible to ascertain a realistic end date for the above restrictions, hence the phrase 'until further notice'. However, be assured that this formal advice will be withdrawn as soon as government guidance permits.
- Similar advice is being issued today by the General Secretary of the Methodist Church and by several Dioceses of the Church of Ireland.

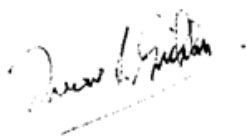
These are deeply uncertain times, with almost every day bringing challenging news and announcements. As the Covid-19 pandemic continues daily to grow in severity, we sense fear is also growing. However, God remains sovereign over all things and continues to be at work in the world, often working out His purposes both in us and through us. We continue therefore to pray that all would know and feel God's love and close presence at this time and that the Church, scattered throughout our communities, would continue to be salt and light pointing people to the Lord Jesus Christ – the hope of world.

As previously indicated, this weekend's "Let's Pray" guide will focus on the immediate needs of this crisis, and we encourage you both to make this resource available to your congregations and to encourage members to join in intercession with their fellow Christian across this island. We continue to look to the Lord who is our refuge and our strength – Psalm 46 vs. 1-5.

Yours in the Lord's Service,



Moderator of the General Assembly



Clerk of the General Assembly