

MESSAGE TO CLERGY

FROM THE INFECTION CONTROL WORKING GROUP

The Bishops' Conference of Scotland has established a Covid-19 Infection Control Group. This group will be responsible for drafting infection control protocols and liturgical norms. It has established a working group which includes Sir Harry Burns, the former Chief Medical Officer, which is now drafting the protocols. The goal is to provide guidance to our parishes and confidence to the Government in our approach. We are doing everything possible to support the negotiations with the authorities on the reopening of our churches. While we do not know what the eventual time frame for relaxation of measures will be, we do know that it will come.

In order to be prepared to act on changes in the legislation from the government as well as guidance on infection control and liturgical norms from the BCOS, there are some things you can do now to prepare yourself and your parishes. We want to support you and are very aware that you know the situations within your own parishes. We are also aware, that you will have questions and be in a position to offer advice to others from the practices that you have employed in your own situations.

1. **An important first step that you can take now to prepare for the re-opening of churches is to source the materials that you will need to do this safely.** These include:
 - a. Materials for cleaning and disinfecting your buildings;
 - b. Masking tape to mark out areas of your church for physical distancing;
 - c. Hand sanitizer and face coverings for you and your staff;

Guidance on specifications for each of these is attached so you will know what to look for.

2. **Another important preliminary step is to consider how you might “density check” your churches for a physical distancing of 2m.** Our general rule of thumb is that this typically results in about 20 -30 percent of total capacity. There will also be challenges in keeping to this 2m distancing when entering and leaving buildings. So, begin to consider the structure of your churches. For some churches this may be more straightforward. For example, if you have the possibility of using a separate entrance and exit, as well as both a central aisle and side aisles, you may feel more confident working out the density. If you have a more complex structure you may need assistance. Further guidance will be issued from the national group on using your space in due course. But you can start thinking ahead about the numbers who attend typical Adoration and Masses and estimate how many people you will be able to accommodate at any one time. We are preparing guidance and strategies to support you to manage numbers.

3. **Finally, it is important for you to begin to gather together a parish “support network”.** You could be supported, for example, by:
 - a. A person in your community who has technical skills. This will be useful if you think an electronic booking system might be used to facilitate low density activity and it will also help to keep your community connected;
 - b. A person who is well connected with active adults of your parish. This will be useful especially if you want help to increase the volunteer pool so that there are people to facilitate good practice and cleaning;
 - c. A person who may have connections to the more senior members of your community to ensure they are made aware of the changes taking place;

- d. A person with sewing skills. Guidelines will very likely require the use of face coverings. It is likely that your parishioners will have their own face coverings and they will be asked to bring them and wear in the church buildings. We may be able to help parishioners who are unable to procure their own face coverings, or who come along without one. There is solid evidence based advice on how to sew home-made face coverings (click here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>), and there may be volunteers willing to sew these;
- e. A creative person. Protocols will involve the use of hand sanitisers and face coverings, and they may be able to prepare signage that will work within your parish to alert the faithful to these expectations. We hope to provide templates soon for you to use, but it's likely you will want to tailor them to your community and building, and someone to help with that would be an asset.

While it is likely that you will still have a lot of questions, keep in mind that this is a staged process and that, when we are able, we will resume limited activities slowly. Accordingly, for the time being, we should remain focused on what we will be able to do at this time. There will be further work to do as we move through the stages. As matters progress, be assured that we will be able to give you appropriate guidance.

BCOS Infection Control Working Group

Initial practical advice for parishes

Cleaning & Disinfecting:

Cleaning refers to the removal of germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces. It does not kill germs, but by removing them, it lowers their numbers and the risk of spreading infection.

Disinfecting refers to using chemicals, for example, disinfectants, to kill germs on surfaces. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs, but by killing germs on a surface after cleaning, it can further lower the risk of spreading infection.

If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.

Wear disposable gloves when cleaning and disinfecting surfaces. Gloves should be discarded after each cleaning. If reusable gloves are used, those gloves should be dedicated for cleaning and disinfection of surfaces for COVID-19 and should not be used for other purposes. Wash hands with soap and water immediately after gloves are removed.

Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces daily in common areas (e.g. tables, hard-backed chairs and pews, doorknobs, light switches, phones, tablets, touch screens, remote controls, keyboards, handles, desks, toilets, sinks) etc. Estimates for survival times suggest it can last from 3-7 days on plastic and metal surfaces. Wooden surfaces seem to carry the virus for up to 2 days. Paper, including bank notes, are thought to be infectious for up to 4 days. Fabrics can keep the virus alive

for a variable time. Ideally surfaces would be cleaned and disinfected after each use. So for example if you were to open for private prayer, requiems and nuptial liturgies initially in a distanced way (which seems likely) you would look at clean the Church after each service, or the individual seat where a faithful might sit for private prayer. Research in this area continues.

For disinfection, many common household disinfectants should be effective. While most of these disinfectants will not have been tested directly against the novel coronavirus, the virus will have the same kind of lipids in their outer surface, which can be removed by commonly used disinfectants and soaps. Studies have shown that disinfectants and bleaches containing ethanol, hydrogen peroxide or sodium hypochlorite are most effective as they virtually destroy all of the virus' pathogenic particles. Make sure to follow manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products for (concentration, application method and contact time, etc.). Additionally, diluted household bleach solutions (at least 1000ppm sodium hypochlorite) can be used if appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer's instructions for application, ensuring a contact time of at least 1 minute, and allowing proper ventilation during and after application. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted. The solution should be mixed new every day, to make sure it stays strong - so don't use the same solution overnight. The recipe for an effective cleaning solution is:

1:50 household bleach solution for intermediate to high level disinfection:

For spray bottles – 20ml household bleach to 1000ml water

For buckets – 100ml household bleach to 5000ml water

Hand Sanitiser: Your hands are one of the main routes that viruses make their way from surfaces to your respiratory system, so keeping them clean is one of the most effective things you can do to stop yourself contracting the virus. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water where possible and if you can't get to a sink, an alcohol-based hand sanitiser is a good option. The coronavirus has an envelope structure which alcohol can attack. Hand sanitisers with 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol are most effective at killing microbes. Keep in mind these sanitisers are flammable and need to be stored safely and care should be taken until hands have dried.

Face coverings: Guidelines will require the use of face coverings. It's likely that your parishioners will have their own face coverings, and they will be asked to bring them and wear in the church buildings. It may also be that you might want to help parishioners who are unable to procure their own face coverings or come along without one. It might be a good idea to have a small supply of your own. There is good evidence-based advice on how to sew home-made face coverings at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html> and there may be volunteers willing to sew these.