

New Freedoms, Same Responsibilities

As the Governments in England, Scotland and Wales move towards reducing or ending Coronavirus restrictions on Places of Worship, the Synod Moderators offer the following guidance to congregations of the United Reformed Church.

1. We remind churches of the Great Commandments: to **love God with our whole being and love our neighbour as we love ourselves**. All our actions must therefore be aimed at glorifying God and showing continuing care for others. We cannot cast off all restraint and still fulfil those commandments. It is therefore fully appropriate for us to continue some of the practices with which we have become familiar.
2. Elders' Meetings (and equivalents) must **regularly review their Risk Assessment** and put in place mitigations appropriate to their current circumstances, context, and activities, which might include continued social distancing and/or wearing face coverings amongst other measures. You must maintain a safe workplace for Ministers, staff and volunteers. This could usefully become a standing agenda item.
3. **Remember those who remain clinically vulnerable or anxious** – what measures will you put in place for them – hybrid worship, separate services where current restrictions are maintained, “safer zones” in church (with social distancing and face coverings), or something else?
4. We encourage everyone to **continue the practice of washing or sanitising hands** when they arrive for worship and other activities. We would expect this to apply to external users as well as for church activities to reduce the possibility of virus transmission through touch points.
5. Similarly, **maintain a careful cleaning routine**, especially at touch points such as doors, hand rails, switches, etc.
6. These hygiene measures were shown to be effective at reducing a range of respiratory viruses (colds, ‘flu), not just Covid-19. It will be a good thing to **show love to others through minimising risk to their health**, however minor the illness might be for most people.
7. As legal requirements to wear face coverings in public buildings (which include churches) are ended, we ask churches to **consider whether it is appropriate to encourage their continued use inside our buildings**. Many churches are difficult to ventilate effectively. We know that the longer we are in closed rooms, the greater the build-up of the virus and therefore risk of transmission, even to those who are vaccinated.
8. The scientific evidence on the risks of Covid-19 transmission from singing is not finally settled. Preliminary data show that singing inside, especially in rooms without adequate ventilation, DOES increase the build-up of aerosol particles. Singing together is one aspect of worship that most have us have missed greatly. Therefore, we encourage churches to continue with **a risk-managed approach to congregational singing**. Consider singing whilst

wearing face coverings. If infection rates increase locally, it will be better to keep to shorter acts of worship and include less congregational singing or if necessary, pause congregational singing again.

9. The Moderators respect every individual's right to choose whether they be vaccinated. However, **we encourage people to get fully vaccinated unless there are medical reasons why they should not.** Vaccination massively reduces both the risk of illness and that of passing the virus on to others. Vaccines are not, however, 100% effective. There are known cases of people contracting Covid-19 even after receiving two doses of the vaccine. We must therefore **each take responsibility to do our part in keeping other people safe.**

“For you were called to freedom...only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.” (Galatians 5:13 NRSV)

The Synod Moderators
July 8, 2021