

Friday 2nd July 2021

To all ministers and Circuit Stewards serving in the Republic of Ireland

Warmest greetings.

Following consultations with the Taoiseach's office we are able to bring an up-date as to how the regulations in place from Monday 5th July apply to the life and work of the church. You will see as you read this that there has been significant movement, for example, we can now gather on church premises for meetings other than worship and there is provision for outdoor gatherings and indeed outdoor catering.

As always, as you navigate these changes your District Superintendent will guide and support you.

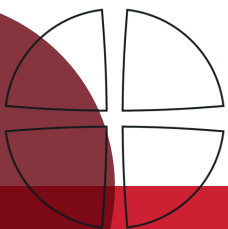
We are deeply aware that each easing of regulations, while welcome, brings work for you and for your leaders. As was made clear in the President and Lay Leader's letter of thanks yesterday we are so grateful to you for the way in which you have sacrificially and unstintingly served the Lord through this Pandemic.

I also want to let you know that, along with the Presbyterian Church, we made a strong case that vaccination status would not be used as a criterion for attendance at church activities. It is a matter of principle for us that all are welcome because God's love extends to all people, and that to exclude any group on the basis of their vaccination status runs counter to our theology and ethos. We have been assured that there is no differentiation between vaccinated and non-vaccinated people with regard to access to places of worship.

From 5th July

All of the basic public health provisions with which we are now familiar remain in place for all church activities, these include 2 metre social distancing, wearing of face coverings when indoors, provision of hand sanitiser, cleaning regimes, risk assessments, ventilation etc.

In this context:



Pastoral Visiting: Can continue to take place in homes under the provisions for gatherings in private homes.

(i) There is no limit on the number of people taking part in household visits if all are fully vaccinated or have a confirmed case of Covid-19 in the previous 9 months

(ii) Unvaccinated households may have visitors from one other household.

We continue to encourage garden visits and it is advisable to arrange visits in advance so that you are assured that the individual is happy to receive a visit.

Weddings: cap of 50 at Service and Reception. The only people exempt from wearing face coverings being the officiant and the bride and groom.

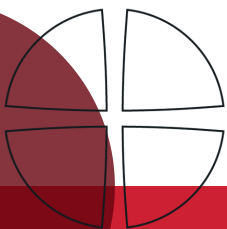
Funerals: cap of 50 at the Service (with no provision for 'pods')

Organised indoor events: Meetings apart from church services may now take place, with a maximum of 50 people and all public health mitigations in place.

Organised outdoor events: Outdoor Services and other events can take place under this provision with a maximum of 200 people.

Catering: Outdoor catering may recommence in accordance with strict public health guidance which includes:

- Risk assessments must be carried out and must include clear reference to the type of catering proposed. This is to ensure that all reasonable measures are both identified and put in place to limit the risk of transmission of covid. These measures will include:
- Normal 'pre-covid' hygiene requirements should continue to be met.
- Numbers using the kitchen should be kept to the minimum required.
- Hand sanitiser should be generally available and those serving food/drinks should be careful to sanitise their hands regularly.
- Individual disposable cups/plates should be used where possible and care taken when disposing of empty cups etc and generally when cleaning up.
- When food is 'shared' it is best served on individual plates rather than taken by different people from one plate/box. This applies, for example, when pizza is brought in for a youth group, or when there is catering after a funeral.
- Queues avoided as much as possible – consider 'serving' people when they are seated. Social distancing should apply if queuing does have to take place.
- Individual disposable cups/plates should be used where possible and care taken when disposing of empty cups etc and generally when cleaning up.



Singing: Worship groups may now lead from the front, as long as a 4 metre distance is maintained between them and the first row of the congregation. Congregational singing is not permitted. Please be assured that we are continuing to make the case for this with the relevant authorities.

Use of premises for other rental activity is permitted in line with applicable sector specific guidance.

Face Coverings: face coverings must be worn at all times when on church premises, unless a person is exempted or leading worship.
Face coverings do not have to be worn outdoors, given that social distancing will be in place.

Baptisms: may continue to take place in careful accordance with the guidance already circulated, and with the provision that parties and family gatherings afterwards are not encouraged.

Social Distancing: 2 meter social distancing should be maintained at both indoor and outdoor church activities, with 4 meter distancing between those leading worship and the first row of the congregation.

Food Banks: Church premises may be used, within public health guidance
The link to the full HSE Guidance for Places of Worship can be found [here](#)

I pray that you will know God's blessing, peace and joy as you continue to serve Him and that the Summer months will provide an opportunity for rest and refreshment.

Yours

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