



baptist union
of scotland

Advice for Churches - 17 March 2020

Yesterday the Government announced radical new measures to slow the spread of the Coronavirus and prevent a massive peak in cases that would overwhelm the NHS. The new advice includes:

- Stop all non-essential social contact and stop going to places with a high concentration of people such as pubs or cinemas
- Avoid using public transport as much as possible
- Work from home if you can
- Anyone living in a household with somebody who has either a persistent cough or fever must now also isolate themselves for 14 days

The Health Secretary, Matt Hancock, confirmed in Parliament that 'with the deepest of regret and the heaviest of heart' faith groups are included in the advice to avoid all non-essential social contact. Nicola Sturgeon has said that the latest measures will 'significantly change life as we know it for a considerable period of time'.

Take A Breath

Before we consider the implications for churches of this significant advice, it's natural for us as disciples of Jesus to pause, remember that he is Lord and affirm our trust in him. Amidst the unremitting conversation and concern about Coronavirus, his promise is: 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid' (John 14.27). Whatever gift we bring to our churches and communities at this time, it is from a position of Christ-like trust in the Father's care. From this place we can resist the temptation to anxious fretfulness, which itself is infectious, and instead practise humble love and be wise guides to others.

Church Gatherings

In the light of the new Government advice, the Baptist Union of Scotland recommends that church gatherings should be suspended until further notice. This includes Sunday worship and other meetings and events on church premises. We need to play our full part, along with the whole community, in reducing the rate of infection. At this moment, this is what it means to love our neighbours as ourselves.

This decision will be upsetting and difficult to accept for some people so it is important to understand that this does not mean our churches are closing. The three core activities of *worship, community and mission* will continue in different ways. It is an opportunity for extraordinary creativity as we discover how the Lord is leading us to be churches in these days.

a. Worship

Many churches will be able to live stream or record Sunday worship and make it available to the congregation. It might be recorded in a home or in a church building with a minimal number of people present. In the absence of mid-week gatherings, small groups may choose to connect using Skype, Zoom or other communication tools (though it is important to be especially attentive and make special arrangements for those who don't have access to this). There is some helpful advice on live-streaming on the [BUGB website](#).

b. Community

Keeping in touch and supporting one another in the church will not happen through face-to-face contact so churches are recommended to make a plan for using phones and social media to keep people connected and offer practical support and help.

c. Mission

Our mission at this time is to witness to Jesus by being a generous, caring presence in our wider communities, giving particular attention to people who are struggling or at risk of being forgotten. Some churches have already linked up with other local support groups or are offering their own helpline, for example to provide shopping for people who are isolated, phone contact or advice for people who are isolated, and additional help for people who regularly rely on Foodbanks. This is an opportunity to use our networks to find the places where God is calling us to serve our neighbours.

Weddings and Funerals

People who have planned weddings in the near future may decide to postpone them. If they go ahead, our current advice is that the number of attendees should be reduced to a minimum and they should sit with space between them. It would be wise to postpone any receptions to a later date.

Similarly, although this may be distressing for some grieving relatives, attendance at funerals in a church building should be kept to a minimum number of close family or friends. If the funeral is at a crematorium then the advice of the local crematorium should be sought regarding who can attend.

Action Plan

The following steps are recommended for urgent action:

- Leadership team makes a decision about the future of gatherings (by virtual meeting, phone or email – not meeting in the same room).
- Inform the congregation of the decision, explain the reasons, by personal message, social media and website
- Inform other users of the building of your decision. (NB the advice is to cease ‘non-essential social contacts’, so you might make exceptions here, for example for a Foodbank or possibly an ‘anonymous’ group or other recovery support group.)
- Make plans for how you will sustain worship, community and mission for the foreseeable future

Looking Ahead

This is a major crisis in our country and our world, but it is also an immense opportunity for the church to reflect on what it really means to be God’s people, the community of his kingdom, in these days, and rise to the challenge of demonstrating his love and hope.

The Baptist Union team will continue to do all we can to support churches at this time and will produce further briefings and advice as needed. We recognise there is much more to say.

Please let us know of examples of good practice, creative ideas or testimonies of God at work in all this so we can share them widely.

BUS Office

In line with the new guidelines, the BUS staff team are working from home. Any calls to the office will be automatically re-directed to one of our team at home.

Martin Hodson

17.3.20