

COVID-19

Implications for Avoch Church of Scotland

Introduction

The following is a response to guidelines that have been issued by the government and the Church of Scotland in recent days by the Kirk Session of Fortrose and Rosemarkie Church of Scotland.

(Such responses will be updated as necessary in the days to come.)

The challenge that faces us is this: how we can function as a worshipping caring and praying Christian community in fellowship with others when we are not able to meet together normally and how to point folk in our congregation and our community to God at this time.

In the midst of this crisis, we need to remember that God is sovereign and to put our trust in God.

As the Psalmist reminds us in Psalm 46 (in a version that we can freely cite):

1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed,
and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

3 Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled,
though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.

[King James Version – Public Domain]

In light of UK and Scottish government directives, we are advised that

"... the Church of Scotland Task Group has agreed to ask, in the strongest terms, that all gatherings for worship should cease until further notice, with effect from Wednesday 17th March 2020, or earlier if possible. ... This obviously includes Easter services. Some Presbyteries have already instructed this action. This will include, but not be restricted to, house groups, meetings for youth work, and church cafes."

(email from Church of Scotland Task Group Tues 17th March 2020)

In short, there will be no Sunday Services, no public worship, no groups, no meetings, and no pastoral visitations in person over the next two months (subject to review.)

However, this does not mean that we cease to function as a worshipping community, a praying community, a pastoral community or, indeed, a caring community.

A Worshipping Community

As a worshipping community we intend to take a number of steps. These will include putting a simple order of service on the church website for Sundays (and for special services over Easter) that can be followed at home. (These will also be available as printed sheets on request through elders).

Avoch Parish Church

<http://www.avochchurch.co.uk>

Given the elderly demography of our congregation and certain technical limitations we are not thinking of live-streaming at present.

We would encourage those who would like to use internet and other media to look at the following links which may be useful:

The Church of Scotland

<https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/worship/services-online>

The Free Church of Scotland – local church in Inverness

<https://smithtonchurch.com/live-sunday-services/>

The Church of England

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>
section on "Digital Resources - includes "live streaming" "TV & radio" and "resources for Lent"

A Praying Community

Church Buildings Open for Prayer

The Church of England has suggested:

"Consider keeping the church open as a place for prayer and contact, with appropriate signage to remind people of the need to keep at least 2 metres apart."

Prayer

The Free Church of Scotland has issued the following reflection on "prayer":

"It will seem very odd not being able meet with each other for prayer. But again, I remind you that although we may be suspending mid-week prayer meetings that is not the same as suspending prayer.

We will pray together but in a different way. It is a lovely thing to pray with someone on the phone, or on Skype, Facetime, WhatsApp, or any of the social media apps."

Day of Prayer

Many Christians in the United Kingdom will set aside time for prayer on Sunday 22nd March 2020.

The Church of England has suggested the following:

"So today we, together with our fellow bishops and other church leaders, call for a National Day of Prayer and Action this coming Mothering Sunday (22nd March)

- light a candle at 7pm and put it in your window
- ring someone who is isolated and vulnerable
- buy an extra item and place it in your local food bank ..."

The Free Church of Scotland will also observe this time of prayer:

"We will in particular seek to join other churches that intend to set time aside from 7pm this Sunday [22nd March 2020] to bring the current crisis before the Lord. A little virus has reminded us of just how weak we are, and how much we are dependent upon an Almighty God."

The moderator of the Free Church of Scotland has offered a range of prayer topics:

"We also ask that you spend a time each day praying privately for the situation we are currently facing.

Pray for those who have contracted the virus, pray for those who are scared of catching the virus, pray that people would take the right precautions not to spread the virus.

But I would ask you also to pray for those who have to treat those who have, or are suspected of having, the virus.

Pray for our doctors and nurses and all our medical services. They already have a tough job, but it is potentially going to get much tougher."

A Pastoral Community

During this time the Elders of the church will contact members and adherents in their District by phone.

Those who are in need of practical help or support are encouraged to contact their Elder (or Session Clerk or Minister) and they will coordinate a response.

A Caring Community

Prayer and Support

Those who are in Districts who want to connect for prayer and support - please intimate this to their Elder who will arrange that they can be in contact with others in the group.

Caring for the Wider Community

Those coming to the Church when open for prayer are encouraged to bring items to the Food Bank so that Blythswood can continue their contributions to the community.

In summary

At present, our societies in Western Europe and beyond are having to respond week by week and even day-by-day to this crisis. Let us continue to support one another and to pray for those who have responsibility in government, local government and those in the frontline in medical professions.

The book of Hebrews (ch4) reminds us of the fact that the God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in whom we believe and to whom we come in prayer is not unaware of our frailty and the human predicament:

14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

[King James Version – Public Domain]

Appendix - Medical Information

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>

this NHS website has up-to-date advice on self-isolation, social distancing and the special needs of “at risk” groups