

Nicola Sturgeon MSP
Bute House
6 Charlotte Square
Edinburgh EH2 4DR

4 January 2021

Dear First Minister

CLOSURE OF PLACES OF WORSHIP – COVID REGULATIONS (4 January 2021)

Please let me express my gratitude to you for the tireless work of your administration in tackling Coronavirus over the past 10 months. Along with many others I'm grateful for the efforts of your government to protect Scottish society from the worst effects of this unforgiving disease.

The FIEC network of churches and pastors across Scotland have been mindful of our own responsibilities at this time. We have been pleased to contribute to the welfare of our Scottish compatriots through the provision of many social and community services throughout the pandemic. As Christians we have prayed for you and your Government knowing that your success is key to the wellbeing of the nation. As you have noted yourself, faith is a vital aspect of many people's lives and is never more important to them than when in a time of crisis.

It was therefore with great disappointment and some puzzlement that we learned of the decision to once again shut down all places of worship in Scotland from this Friday. Over recent months churches have made great efforts to adhere to guidance on hygiene, social distancing etc – and we are not aware of any churches being identified as significant transmission points. Further it feels somewhat draconian to shut down services already subject to a minimal 20 Cap on attendees. The sense of this being an unnecessary measure is exacerbated by the absence of such restrictions in England in their own heightened lockdown measures.

Thus it would be helpful to know the rationale behind ordering the closure of churches at this time. Indeed, if there is a particular threat posed by church services it would be good for churches to consider how they might mitigate it.

In all events it would be helpful to be reassured of the Government's intention to lift these restrictions within the shortest possible timescale.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew T. Hunter
Scotland Director
The Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches.