

## Guidance from the Synod Moderators on closing church buildings for public worship

Since our last guidance was issued (October 2020) it is clear that the new variant of the virus has caused a rapid and alarming increase in Coronavirus infections. In light of this, **the Synod Moderators strongly recommend that churches should cease to meet for in-person worship** and move exclusively to on-line or paper-based worship material. You are reminded that the URC, through the Daily Devotions team, continue to produce Sunday services which can be listened to online and followed on paper, in addition to any local worship provision. Whilst it is vital (literally, life-giving) to maintain our habits of worship, this cannot depend on meeting in a church building.

The Synod Moderators remind the United Reformed Church of our previous advice: **because something is allowed does not necessarily make it wise; it is better to do the right thing.**

In 'The Message,' Micah 6:8 is rendered in this way:

*"But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do,  
what God is looking for in men and women.  
It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbour,  
be compassionate and loyal in your love".*

No church wishes its building to be the site of a spreading event, which puts lives at risk.

Consequently, **our advice is now that even when permitted in law during a time of National Lockdown and at the appropriate level 4 of restrictions, our churches should close for public worship.** Weddings/Civil Partnerships and Funerals may continue, subject to legislative restrictions.

This recommendation also permits the minimum number reasonably possible to meet in the church building to allow recording/broadcasting by internet or telephone an act of worship, provided that they continue to follow the regulations to maintain a Covid-secure building and as long as it doesn't conflict with any legal restrictions against this when the law takes precedence over our advice.

If, despite this advice, an Elders' Meeting (or equivalent) decides that they should continue to offer in-person worship within the relevant legislation, they must review their Risk Assessment and rigorously apply it in order to maximise the protection afforded to those who will attend. A failure to do this may result in a breach of Health & Safety law. The Elders will need to record their decision and the reasons that lead them to that decision. They may well find that Ministers, Lay Preachers and others are not willing to lead worship in-person while the risk of infection is high, and the Elders must be ready to make alternative arrangements. The refusal to lead in-person worship because of the risk to a Minister and others would not be considered a disciplinary issue by any Synod Moderator.

We also want to remind you that **the work of the church will not cease even if we are not meeting for in-person worship.** We encourage all churches to think about how to care for their community, and support people who may be dealing with mental health issues or facing domestic abuse, whilst minimising the risk of spreading Coronavirus. This period is also a missional opportunity.

We rejoice at the speed of development and deployment of the Covid vaccines. We pray that our current situation will be temporary although we cannot know for how much longer we will have to be very cautious. We believe that we will end 2021 in a much stronger place than we enter into this new year. Until that point, we urge churches to continue to show love to one another and treat others gently.

The Synod Moderators  
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