



Nicola Sturgeon
First Minister
The Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
EDINBURGH
EH1 3DG

29th April 2021

Dear First Minister,

Again, I write to you on behalf of the Covid Group of the Free Church of Scotland.

We wish to thank the Scottish Government and those who assist and advise the Government, for all the efforts made to protect our communities during the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been a difficult year for everyone, and it is our prayer that we are beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel and a return to a semblance of normality. However, we are conscious of the ongoing need for vigilance.

The easing of restrictions over the past few weeks has been very welcome. Many of our congregations have enjoyed gathering for in-person services again. We are also grateful that the cap of fifty has been removed to allow larger gatherings where a church building can safely accommodate more people while still observing social distancing guidelines.

As our congregations gather for worship there has been an essential element of worship that under the current restrictions remains prohibited. The guidelines issued by the Scottish Government still advise against communal praise, and our understanding is that such guidelines will apply even if we find ourselves at Level 0. For Christian churches praise is much more than communal singing; it is an expression of our love for, and faith in God. This is very much at the heart of our worship. It is our belief that we are instructed to meet together, pray together, study the Bible together, but also to sing God's praise together.

We understand that all necessary precautions need to be in place to allow us to safely come out of this pandemic, and we are keen to observe the social distancing rules, hand hygiene measures, and the wearing of face masks, as laid out in the current guidelines for in-person worship. However, we do wonder about the necessity of restricting the practice of praise. It seems to us that the science behind this particular restriction is unconvincing and unnecessarily places restrictions on our acts of communal worship. We therefore ask that your Government consider lifting this particular restriction from worship services, or at least to amend the guidelines to permit sung praise with the use of face masks.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "D. G. MacDonald".

Rev Donnie G MacDonald
Moderator