

SHAWBOST FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

CHURCH SERVICES DURING COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

The Church will re-open for public worship on the Lord's Day at 12.00noon on Sunday 17th January 2021. The use of the building for Church services will be subject to meeting all the public health and Scottish Government guidelines and restrictions.

The Church Building

We want to assure you that the Deacons Court has prepared the building in accordance with the guidelines and carried out the appropriate risk assessment. Suitable signage has been put in place to assist intending worshippers conform to the guidelines and restrictions. The Scottish Government guidelines for places of worship states that 'where possible, doors and windows should be opened to improve ventilation but that fire doors should remain closed.' Those who plan to attend the services should bear in mind that the requirement to ventilate the building will result in lowering the overall temperature inside the building during the service.

Arrival at the Church

The Church will be open from 11.30am. We recommend that you arrive early in order to ensure that you are seated and settled to allow the Service to commence at the appointed time of 12.00noon.

Entering the Building

Two metres physical distancing should be observed in the Church Car Park and in your approach to the Church door. The Office-bearers on duty will be at the door to guide you but there will be no physical contact or handshaking. Sanitising liquid is available at the entrance of the building. Please ensure that you sanitise your hands when you enter the Church. Please also follow the 2-metre distancing marked out on the floor as you enter.

Givings & Weekly Offerings

According to Church guidance documents, cash giving is to be discouraged and avoided. Standing orders and online giving should be encouraged. Weekly Free Will Offering envelopes may be handed in at the Church door in the closed donations box positioned near the entrance door. The box will be situated in the one place and should not be handled communally.

Face Coverings

The use of face covering is mandatory for all Church services. Please ensure that you are wearing your face covering before you reach the Church door. The face covering should be worn for the duration of the service and until you are outside the building at the end of the service.

Face coverings must be worn within places of worship. Those who are leading an act of worship do not always need to wear a face covering provided they can maintain a distance of at least 2 metres from others and/or remain behind a protective screen. Everyone else in the building must wear a face covering, with an exemption for children under the age of 5, and for any person who is "unable to put on, wear or remove a face covering either because of any physical or mental illness or impairment or disability, or without severe distress".

Bible & Psalm Books

The Bibles and Psalm books normally available at the Church door will be removed in accordance with guidelines issued by the central Church. People attending the services should bring their own Bibles and Psalm books.

Seating Allocation

Attendance at Church services is currently limited to 50. This includes children if they are in the same part of the premises. It does not include children who are attending Sunday School if they are in a separate part of the premises with its own entrance and exit. The maximum of 50 is also subject to the need to ensure 2-metre physical distancing between households.

The Church pews have been marked out to assist in the allocation of seats and to ensure that 2-metres physical distancing is observed during the service. Your seat will be pre-allocated, and you will be designated a pew in which you can sit with your household or group. The Office-bearers on duty will guide you to your allocated seat on entering the building.

Attendance Records

To support the Government's Test and Protect Strategy, it is recommended that congregations keep a temporary register of worshipper contact details for a period of 21 days. As part of efforts to reduce the impact on public health from Coronavirus, NHS Scotland's Test & Protect works by identifying who has Coronavirus and who they have had close, recent contact with to break chains of infection and stop the spread of the virus.

Keeping a temporary record of all individuals attending church services is important for the protection of the individuals themselves and for the community. Data should be collected by congregations to support Test & Protect, and in doing so they should comply with data protection law.

In order to process personal data, organisations require to have a "lawful basis" for doing so. Because congregations hold religious services, it potentially identifies people in attendance as holding a religious belief, which is 'special category data' under data protection law. The Information Commissioner therefore recommends that the explicit consent of the individuals concerned is used as the lawful basis for collecting and storing the contact details of people attending places of worship.

During the Service

The guidelines state that Congregational singing is to be avoided. Arrangements may be in place to allow a recording of Psalm singing to be played through the public address system so that we can listen to pre-recorded singing of the Psalms.

Exiting the Building

Sanitising liquid is available at the exit of the building. Please ensure that you sanitise your hands as you leave the Church. Worshippers are encouraged to move on promptly from the place of worship. The appointed stewards will supervise departure from the building. Hand sanitiser should be available at the exit.

People should leave the building one at a time and the 2-metres physical distancing should be observed as you leave the Church building and until you reach your car. For the time being there should be no social gatherings for tea/coffee etc.

Sunday School

The Sunday School will continue to meet virtually using Zoom audio-visual technology until such time as the restrictions on school attendance announced on Monday 5th January 2021 are relaxed. The plan in the future is that Sunday School will meet in the Church Hall at the same time as the Church service. The teachers will ensure 2 metres physical distancing for all adults and children over 12 years old. Children over 12 years of age will wear a face covering in the same way as adults. There will be no physical sharing of Bibles, books or other resources. The Sunday School children will enter and leave the Church Hall using separate doors to that used for the Church services to ensure that there is no overlapping when entering the building and when leaving the building.

Conclusion

We look forward to joining together for the public worship of God for the first time since March 2020. We trust and pray that the Lord will bless us and keep us safe as we do so. We do hope that you feel comfortable with all the above arrangements and we look forward to welcoming you to our services. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the Minister or any member of the Deacons Court.

Rev. M Macleod

Minister