

# Stirling Free Church

Please note that **all our services and meetings are suspended until further notice.**

This is in line with government and denominational advice.

However:

- ! We plan to live stream a service of worship at 11 am on Sunday mornings. You will find this on our Stirling Free Church page on facebook. If you miss the live-stream, you can still catch it later!
- ! We also plan a time of prayer at 7 pm on Sunday in line with the National Day of Prayer for each of us in our own homes. Items for prayer will be posted below, on facebook and on our website: [stirlingfreechurch.co.uk](http://stirlingfreechurch.co.uk)
- ! We will intimate subsequent prayer meetings later.
- ! Please help each other, contact one another, pray for one another. Let us know if you are unwell or have any other needs.

Our hope is not in man, but in the Lord of hosts.

See below a pastoral letter from the Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland, Rev Donnie G Macdonald.

God bless each one of you.

Items for prayer:

- ! those worried about Covid-19, especially the elderly or those with diabetes, heart problems, respiratory problems or other concerns, that they will escape the worst effects of the virus;
- ! protection for your neighbours and community from this disease, that many will not be infected and for those who are, that they will recover quickly;
- ! wisdom, health, strength and energy for Governments and officials having to assess the rapidly evolving situation - that they will take the right decisions at the right time;
- ! health & social care workers who are on the 'front line', for protection for them and their families and for relief from the stress and anxiety during this crisis;
- ! for opportunities to pray with anxious folk and to talk about Jesus - that many will choose to turn to God and find rest and comfort in Him.

## **Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

**A Pastoral Letter – 17 March 2020**

**Rev. Donnie G. MacDonald (Moderator of General Assembly)**



This is a very strange time for everyone. The spread of the coronavirus, Covid-19, has impacted the nations of the world and increasingly is impacting our day-to-day lives here in Scotland. Over the past 24 hours the advice that we have been receiving from our politicians and our health authorities has changed, and we as a church have had to consider how to respond to that advice in order to be responsible, and to show Christian love and care to our congregations and our communities. The Free Church has its equivalent of a COBRA committee which has met, and will continue to meet on a regular basis, and we will seek to give you weekly updates as the situation develops.

We have had to make big decisions today which will make the way we operate as a church different to what we have been used to. But we consider all the measures we have taken to be absolutely necessary, and I promise you they have been taken very carefully and prayerfully, guided not only by medical advice but also by God's Word. We believe that the decisions we have made are in keeping with the sixth commandment as we seek to actively protect others from harm. In addition, Jesus tells us to love our neighbour as ourselves; these measures seek to do that. We are instructed to have the mind of Christ and to put others interests before our own; these measures also seek to do that. We are told to love one another; we believe that these measures express that.

So, what is it that we have decided to do in response to this current situation?

### **Church Services**

You will be aware that we have been advised to avoid large gatherings and to reduce social contact. This advice now includes gatherings of faith groups. We therefore have no option but to suspend all church services throughout the Free Church of Scotland, both for Sundays and mid-week meetings. This includes fellowship meetings, Bible studies, youth groups, everything that would normally be held in church halls or people's homes. I cannot stress enough however that although we may be suspending our normal worship services, we are not suspending worship. We will have to 'do church' in a different way. We will miss



physically gathering together, but we can still gather together in worship as we tune into services online. Many churches are able to broadcast their services and will continue to do so even in the absence of a congregation, and the Mission Board will collate details of congregations that have that facility so that you can join in worship with them each Sunday. We would also encourage local Kirk Sessions to think of ways in which technology can be used to minister the Word to the congregations under their care. This is also an opportunity to realise anew the beauty of family worship, holding services together at home. And if you are alone, use the phone or social media platforms to worship together with a friend, even if it is to read the Bible and pray together.

## Pastoral Care

We are also advising that pastoral visitation be suspended. This will be very difficult for ministers and elders who instinctively want to visit the elderly, the sick and the bereaved. But it is no kindness to visit someone if you are possibly carrying a virus that could seriously compromise their health. In these circumstances it is an act of love not to visit. However, remember that even if we are suspending pastoral visitation, we are not suspending pastoral care. We just have to do it in a different way. This is a time when, more than ever, we need to look out for each other and look after each other. We all have a role to play in this. Phone each other, message each other, use emails and Facetime to interact with each other. Modern technology has its downside, but in these circumstances, it can be a tool for great good as we seek to love one another as Christ commanded.

## 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. 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. In addition, we have appointed Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March (this Sunday) to be a Day of Prayer. Use that day to call out to God. We will in particular seek to join other churches that intend to set time aside from 7pm this Sunday 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 next few months may prove to be very difficult. We may find our activities restricted and we will largely be confined to our homes but use the time wisely and well. Often we complain about not getting time with loved ones. Use this time to enjoy their company. Think of the folk that you meant to be in contact with over the years but have always been too busy, use this time to give them a phone. But also think of all the times we have wished that we had the opportunity to read our Bibles more and to pray more. Spend the time in the company of Jesus and grow in your relationship with God.

I'll finish by reminding you of the words written to the church in Philippi during a time of uncertainty:

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:4-7)*

Every blessing to you all and we will speak again soon.