

## **Statement from the Church of Ireland Bishops in Northern Ireland in relation to Public Worship**

Following the Northern Ireland Executive's decision to extend the current Covid-19 restrictions to Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, representatives of the Churches met earlier this week with Ministers from the Executive Office, the Minister of Health and the Chief Medical Officer. At that meeting the Chief Medical Officer stressed that it would make a significant difference and be of huge benefit to public health and safety, if churches were willing to continue, for the time being, not to gather in-person for services and other meetings.

In the light of the Executive's extension of the current restrictions, and on the basis of the continued and unequivocal public health message that people should continue to *stay at home*, we have agreed that all in-person Sunday gatherings for worship, along with all other in-person church gatherings, should remain voluntarily suspended for the time being in all Church of Ireland parishes in Northern Ireland until Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 - with the exception of weddings, funerals, arrangements for recording and/or live-streaming, drive-in services and private prayer (as permitted by regulations).

We have also agreed to further assess the situation immediately after the next NI Executive review of current lockdown provisions on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021, in the cautious anticipation that, from Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> April (Good Friday) onwards, our parishioners in Northern Ireland could return to in-person gatherings for worship, with all necessary precautions and mitigations in place. This recognises the importance of Easter, the significance of which was acknowledged by the Minister for Health and the Chief Medical Officer at their most recent meeting with Church representatives.

We welcome that a similar approach is also being taken by the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church and, in a slightly different form, by the Roman Catholic Church.

+John Armagh  
+Andrew Derry and Raphoe  
+David Down and Dromore  
+George Connor