

# Faith leaders give official backing to vaccine

The Church of Scotland is urging that anyone who is offered the vaccine takes up that offer. Reverend George Whyte who is Principal Clerk of the General Assembly said that it is imperative the people keep themselves and others safe.

Rev Whyte and six other faith leaders have signed a statement showing their support for the government's vaccination programme which aims to vaccinate around 400,000 people a week in Scotland by the end of February.

The statement reads: "We faith leaders in Scotland understand the difficulty that our communities are facing during this pandemic.

"We urge all faith communities to take measures that will ensure their safety and the safety of others.

"Furthermore, we support the COVID-19 vaccination programme across the community and we encourage people to be vaccinated so that they keep themselves and their neighbours safe."

The statement has also been signed by Bishop Hugh Gilbert, President of the Bishops Conference of Scotland, Imam Hassan Rabbani, Imam of Zia-Ul-Quran Mosque, Muslim Chaplain at Heriot-Watt University, Chair of Scottish Muslim Forum, Imam

Sayed Razawi, Chief Imam – Director General, Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society, Dr Muhammad Rafiq Habib, Convenor, Muslim Council of Scotland, Rabbi Moshe Rubin, Giffnock and Newlands Hebrew Congregation, Senior Rabbi Of Scotland, and Most Reverend Mark Strange, Bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness, Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church

Church of Scotland buildings across the country will be used as vaccination centres including Morningside Parish Church in Edinburgh and Dunfermline East Church in Fife.

The Scottish Government has said it aims to ensure that care home residents, NHS staff and people over-80 by the first week of February.

The over-70 group would be treated by mid-February and over-65 and vulnerable groups by March – a move that would see 1.4 million people given the jab.

Dr Whyte said: “The Church of Scotland is working with the Scottish Government to ensure that local churches continue to be part of the effort to suppress the Coronavirus outbreak by following the advice to stay at home as much as possible.

“We fully accept that the latest pandemic restrictions mean that we have to close churches again for the time being.

“While recognising that communal worship is an essential element of our faith, we also know that the Church remains present and active in our local communities even while buildings are closed.

“We will continue to work with the Scottish Government to ensure that reopening churches will happen as soon as it can be done safely.

Dr Whyte said the vast majority of members understand and support the temporary restrictions and people are looking forward to the day when they can meet in person once again.

He continued: "In the meantime, we are encouraged by the many church congregations across Scotland who are offering essential support -both spiritual and practical – to their local communities."