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## Message to Scotland's Faith and Belief Communities

I am writing to Scotland's diverse faith and belief communities about the new regulations instructing places of worship to close for both communal and individual worship (as part of the latest Covid Level 4 restrictions). I appreciate how hard this is for faith communities and want to assure you that places of worship will be amongst the first sectors to be seriously considered for any easing of restrictions.

I would like to thank you all for the measures you have put in place to protect and support your congregations since the first lockdown in March 2020, and for all of the work you continue to do to help your communities through these difficult times.

Our response to the COVID pandemic has been guided by the principles set out in our [Framework for Decision Making](#), and throughout we have always sought to reduce broader health, economic and societal harm. But we must focus on the necessity to suppress the virus, and this has led to some difficult decisions. The latest and perhaps hardest of these decisions in relation to places of worship was the First Minister's announcement on 04 January that at this critical moment in the pandemic, rates of transmission in Scotland are such, particularly given the virility of the new strain of Covid, that places of worship would be required to close altogether for congregational worship and prayer.

Throughout the pandemic we have engaged with representatives from different faith and belief groups to discuss their concerns and frustrations about the impact of restrictions. We will continue to keep this important engagement in place, and to work with you all on how we can eventually lift restrictions and worship together once again.

We believe the latest public health measures, combined with the ongoing rollout of the vaccine are vital to our efforts to prevent our health services becoming overwhelmed, limiting loss of life and ultimately accelerating a the return of our country to some level of normality.

I understand and appreciate the significant role communal worship plays in supporting people's mental and spiritual well-being, and its importance as a lifeline for many in preventing social isolation and loneliness. We do not want to keep these measures in place a minute longer than is necessary.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aileen Campbell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'A' and 'C'.

**AILEEN CAMPBELL**