

# COVID-19: Church lockdown worship ban is unlawful, Scottish court rules

Churches leaders say they believe it is the first successful legal case against coronavirus regulations in the UK.



**James Matthews**

Scotland correspondent @jamesmatthewsky

🕒 Thursday 25 March 2021 09:40, UK

COVID-19

CORONAVIRUS

SCOTLAND



The legal challenge was brought by the Free Church of Scotland, the Church of Scotland and independent churches. Pic AP



Why you can trust Sky News

**A judge has ruled that a Scottish government ban on church worship during lockdown was unconstitutional, disproportionate and an interference with human rights.**

The legal challenge was brought by the Free Church of Scotland (continuing), the Free Church of Scotland, individuals from the Church of Scotland and a number of independent churches.

Their challenge was made in response to restrictions announced by First Minister [Nicola Sturgeon](#) on 8 January, which made it a criminal offence for churches to hold in-person services.

Nicola Sturgeon announced new coronavirus restrictions on 8 January, which made it a criminal offence for churches to hold in-person services. Pic: PA

### Live COVID updates from across the UK and around the world

Following a judicial review at the Court of Session, Judge Lord Baird found that to criminalise communal church worship during the current lockdown "disproportionately infringed" the freedom to express religious beliefs secured in the European Convention on Human Rights.

Advertisement

Advertisement

He also ruled that forcing church closures was unconstitutional.

Responding to the ruling, Rev. Dr William Philip, Senior Minister at the Tron Church in Glasgow, said: "From the outset, we have recognised the serious decisions the Scottish ministers had to take in response to the pandemic.

## More from Covid-19

[COVID-19 cases surge in India: Warning over variants and social distancing as cases exceed 100,000 a day](#)

[COVID news live - latest UK updates as Boris Johnson makes coronavirus passports and international travel announcement](#)

[COVID-19: 'Hundreds' found and several arrested at illegal raves in Essex, Edinburgh and Kent over Easter Bank Holiday](#)

[COVID-19: Zoos, safari parks and their animals prepare to reopen on 12 April](#)

[COVID-19: Rapid, twice-weekly coronavirus tests to be offered to everyone in England - including home delivery](#)

[COVID-19: UK reports another 10 coronavirus deaths - and lowest cases since September](#)

---

"However, its approach to banning and criminalising gathered church worship was clearly an over-reach and disproportionate and if this had gone unchallenged it would have set a very dangerous precedent.

"However well-intentioned, criminalising corporate worship has been both damaging and dangerous for Scotland, and must never happen again."



Subscribe to the All Out Politics podcast on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Google Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#), [Spreaker](#)

The legal challenge was brought by leaders of the Free Church of Scotland, the Church of Scotland and a number of independent churches.

In a statement, they said the Scottish government's restriction had been the first attempt to close churches in Scotland since the "persecution of the Presbyterian church, instituted by the Stuart kings, in the 17th century".



About Sky News



Sky News Services



---

Sky Channels



---

More Sky Sites



---

[Terms & Conditions](#)

[Privacy & Cookies](#)

[Privacy Options](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Contact Us](#)

© 2021 Sky UK