



### **Coronavirus: Guidance for Church Officers on public worship in our buildings**

We give thanks to God that the pandemic in many places is beginning to show signs of being controlled, and that some governments in our diocese are permitting, with a varied series of precautions and instructions, the public worship of the Church in our buildings. After such a time of suffering, pain and death, with continued serious social and economic challenges, it is vital that we hold as paramount the safety, protection and well-being of all.

In any country, the advice of the national government is of the first importance and must be consulted. Clergy and chaplaincy councils need to pay close attention to national/provincial regulations, as well as drawing on the advice of our church partners. Where **Public Church Services** are again permitted by local law or state guidance, these can be celebrated either in church buildings or in the open air. However, our advice is that services should only be held if principles of hygiene and physical distancing can be firmly adhered to as follows:

#### Hygiene practices for individuals attending Church

- Those with symptoms of COVID-19 or other respiratory or flu-like illness, or an elevated temperature, or who are particularly vulnerable to infection should not attend public services, but join worship, as available, through online streaming or other media broadcast.
- For individuals attending church: carrying of tissues and using them to catch coughs and sneezes, and binning the tissue continues to be important. In addition to this, it is recommended that each individual or each family carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer.
- The use of face masks by the clergy and the lay faithful is highly recommended to reduce transfer of respiratory droplets into the environment.
- Disinfectants and hand washing/sanitizing facilities should be provided at the church entrance; door handles and hand railings need to be disinfected on a regular basis.
- Where possible, entrance and exit doors should be secured in an open position from before the time when people gather for the service until after the last worshipper has left.

#### Welcoming at Church

- All sidespeople/welcomers should wash their hands with an alcohol-based sanitizer. There should be no handshaking or other physical touch. The ministry of welcome now assumes additional importance and consideration should be given to ensuring responsible lay people such as churchwardens are directly involved in it.
- Attendance on arrival at the service should be noted by each person in a registration book, with a personal, not shared, pen or pencil. This measure is needed only to facilitate any contact tracing.

## Seating in church in accordance with physical distancing requirements

- **Seating arrangements in churches should ensure that there is a two-metre distance** between persons in all directions during a service, whether this is standing or sitting. This is the recommendation and is safest, though the law and practice in some jurisdictions may allow for a smaller distance. This is the requirement that should also determine the seating capacity of a church, where more specific national/regional instruction on capacity is not available.
- The seating areas will need to be marked in a way to aid ‘distancing’.
- Families and individuals who live in the same household can sit together if they are living together.
- Church balconies should not be used, as they are difficult to keep safe.

## Music: singing & instruments

- An organist or other musician or a small group of musicians safely distanced is possible
- Congregational singing is problematic because singing appears to increase significantly the transmission of potentially infected droplets. A cantor or small choir (3 to 5 people) could sing, keeping greater distance from each other and the congregation. If congregational singing is envisaged, it should be very softly, and even greater physical distancing will be necessary.
- Again, to reduce the possibility of transmission of potentially infected droplets, wind instruments should not be used to provide music or musical accompaniment.

## General Liturgical Instructions and guidance

- Liturgy and hymns should be shown on screen or printed and made available to be picked up rather than being distributed by hand. Use of worship and hymn books will need to be avoided.
- A slightly shorter liturgy may be appropriate in order to keep the service to a maximum of one hour. Increasing the number of services may be helpful in addressing the safety and capacity questions.
- Do consider ‘hybrid worship’ (where services with a congregation are streamed live) especially for the benefit of those who are afraid or reluctant to enter church buildings too quickly, though such arrangements may not always be practically possible.
- Readers, preachers, leaders of intercessions etc., should take care not to touch lecterns or pulpits.
- There should be no Gospel procession.
- Instead of shaking hands with neighbours at the peace, a sign of reconciliation can be conveyed in a different form, such as, bringing together the palms of one’s hands and bowing to the other with a smile, as in the Indian Namaste greeting. This greeting should continue at a distance.

- Our continued guidance is that Holy Communion is distributed in the form of bread/wafer only. Both elements will be consecrated, but the wine should not be distributed. It is a clear principle of Anglican theology that the sacrament of Holy Communion is present and complete in either of the consecrated elements.
- For the time being, it is preferable that only the presiding minister handles the vessels and administers Holy Communion. Given that it will be in one kind for now, and in most places for not more than 50 persons, it is much easier to control hygiene if this is one person's responsibility.
- There should be no offertory procession with the elements.
- Priests presiding at the Eucharist should wash their hands in soap and water, or with an alcohol-based sanitizer, just prior to commencing the liturgy of the Sacrament.
- The bread to be consecrated for the whole assembly should remain covered during the eucharistic prayer.
- The words of distribution of the consecrated bread should be pronounced by the priest to the whole assembly corporately, so that the actual distribution of communion happens in silence.
- Our continued guidance is that Holy Communion is distributed in the form of bread/wafer only. Both elements will be consecrated, but the wine should not be distributed. The Church of England has always maintained the teaching that the whole sacrament is received even if it is administered in one kind only.
- We emphasize the need for the priest to use a face mask (except perhaps when preaching, for the sake of the hearing impaired) and clean, latex-free, gloves. If the priest, for theological reasons, finds using gloves difficult, extra measures in terms of hygiene just prior to the administration of communion to the people need to be adhered to, by hand washing in soap and water, or using alcohol-based sanitiser. At all times, the priest in administering the sacrament must avoid contact with the hands of the communicants.
- The bread/wafer is safest distributed with communicants approaching in a single line standing with a sensible distance between them. Church wardens will need to make appropriate and feasible arrangements for this.
- Holy Water stoups remain discontinued.

### Offerings/Collections

- Offerings are to be placed on a tray at the exit. Those who count the collection at the end of the service should either wear clean gloves, or ensure they have hand-washed beforehand with soap and water. Better still, use this as an opportunity to encourage online giving and direct debits.

### Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals

- The celebration of Holy Baptism will require special precautions. Only one candidate should be baptized at a given service. The font should be emptied and disinfected before any subsequent baptism service. The presiding priest should wear a mask and clean gloves. An infant should be held by his or her parents – the minister should not take the infant into his or her own arms. Water should be poured over the head of the candidate, using a shell or other such vessel, and no physical contact should be made between the priest and the candidate. Pre and Post baptismal anointing can be done with a cotton swab

("Q-tip"), again avoiding physical contact between the minister and the candidate. If there are any questions related to these measures, please contact the lead bishop.

- The celebration of weddings or wedding blessings will require special precautions. The rings should be handled only by the couple. Use of candles should be by the couple alone. Care should be taken in the signing of any registers by the couple or witnesses, and in the handing over of any documentation.

### Churchwardens' guidance - Booking/ticketing systems - Pre- and post-service gatherings

- A system for booking or ticketing for services is advised, where named seating cards/places can be requested, issued, and assigned in advance. It is recognised that limiting or refusing entry to a church is always undesirable and difficult for chaplains and councils.
- Churchwardens are requested to ensure that ordered entry, seating, movement for communion, and exit is maintained. If church is filled to permitted capacity, no further entry is possible.
- Pre- and post-service gatherings for fellowship and refreshments should not happen.

### Sunday school and other gatherings

- Sunday School and junior church gatherings must adhere to the current national norms for gatherings of children in schools and day care centres. Leaders of these events will need to be appropriately briefed on how to ensure distancing between children and more leaders than normal may be required.

### • Cleaning – arrangements and briefing/training

- We emphasize that scrupulous cleaning of churches will need to be arranged *before and after* each use. Cleaning personnel should be carefully briefed/trained, supplied with proper gloves and disinfectants and (if working more than singly) equipped with masks.
- Particular attention should be given to cleaning vessels, shared vestments and cloths used in the service.
- In some chaplaincies, depending on location, it may be appropriate to air the building by opening a window(s) ahead of the service.

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