



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

Revision January 2021

Covid-19 remains a serious health risk across Europe, and the new variants pose additional risks as they are more easily transmitted. It is vital that we continue to hold as paramount the safety, protection and well-being of all. This Guidance is therefore a restatement of the Guidance issued in May and September 2020, with additional advice or clarification indicated in blue.

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 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.
- All those joining in worship (clergy and laity) should wear a mask to reduce transfer of respiratory droplets into the environment. Those who have a formal part in the liturgy (presiding, preaching, reading, interceding) may remove their face mask when they are actually speaking. Be careful where masks are placed to avoid cross-contamination.
- 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, [whilst being careful to observe physical distance](#).

- 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.
- **Informal gatherings of people before worship should be discouraged.**
- **Clergy should avoid standing at the door to greet the congregation on arrival.**

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.
- **In view of the possibility of the presence of the more easily transmissible variants of Covid-19, two metre distancing between people should be rigorously observed.**
- 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 softly and behind a mask, or one may prefer just to hum. Note that national Church of England guidance for churches in England does not permit congregational singing.
- Again, to reduce the possibility of transmission of potentially infected droplets, use of wind instruments to provide music or musical accompaniment should be avoided. If used on an exceptional basis, e.g. a trumpet at Easter, then especial care must be taken with physical distancing.

General Liturgical Instructions and guidance

- Liturgy and hymns may be shown on screen or printed and made available to be picked up. Alternatively, liturgy can be e-mailed and worshippers encouraged to bring the liturgy

on their mobile phones, using the phone in silent mode. If worship and hymn books have to be used, then people may be encouraged to bring their own service books and bibles and take them home with them. In circumstances where worshippers cannot bring their own books, churches should keep a selection of clean books for individuals to use. Clean books should be quarantined for 48 hours since previous use and quarantined for 48 hours afterwards. Churches must avoid the distribution of books and service sheets by hand.

- 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.
- We emphasize the need for the president to wear a face mask when physical distancing cannot be maintained (for instance when moving around) and at the distribution of Holy Communion. Hygiene rules 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. The bread should only be administered into the hand with care being taken not to touch communicants’ hands. If this does happen, both the priest and the communicant should sanitise their hands straight away.
- 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.

- Each communicant should extend their hands to receive Holy Communion, with face covering in place. They should then lower or unloop the face covering, consume the consecrated bread and then replace the face covering before moving back to their place in the congregation.
- 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.

No After Service Social Gatherings

- **The minister should withdraw from the congregation after worship. Pastoral care to individuals should be offered in other ways than the usual ‘meet and greet’.**
- **The congregation should be encouraged to disperse after the service. The usual after service mingling or gathering for coffee should not take place.**

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.

Updated: 7 January 2021

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