



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

**Revision May 2021**

Across Europe, national and regional authorities are preparing and announcing measures that are progressively liberalising the regimes needed to control Covid-19. However, at present Covid-19 remains a serious health risk. The generally accepted target rate of vaccinations needed to provide an acceptable level of control of the virus is 70%. Whilst the rate of vaccinations is increasing in an encouraging way, at present the average proportion of populations in Europe that have received one vaccination is 30% and the proportion that have received two vaccination averages about 11%. For the time being, therefore, our Guidance remains cautious. It is vital that we continue to 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 ecumenical partners.

Where local law or state guidance is more liberal than Diocesan Guidance, chaplains and chaplaincy councils are free to adopt local rules after consultation with the Area Dean or Archdeacon. Responsibility for these decisions rests with the chaplaincy council.

Thankfully, rules are continuing to liberalise. In particular, intra-country travel restrictions are much reduced, open air events are increasingly permitted and the numbers permitted to gather are gradually increasing.

### **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, online.
- 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.
- We continue to advise against informal gatherings of people before worship .
- Clergy should continue to 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 conform with all national or regional official guidance related to social distance and building capacity. Where this is not available, or unclear, the current Church of England guidance is to maintain a two-metre distance between persons in all directions during a service, whether this is standing or sitting. This is still a safe practice in view of the possible presence of more easily transmissible variants of Covid-19, even though the law and protocol in some jurisdictions may allow for a smaller distance.
- The seating areas may 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.

## Music: singing & instruments

- An organist or other musician, a small group of musicians, a cantor or a small choir, safely distanced is possible.
- Congregational singing is problematic because singing appears to increase significantly the transmission of potentially infected droplets. If congregational singing is envisaged, it should be softly and behind a mask. Note that national Church of England guidance for churches in England does not permit congregational singing.

## 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. Worshippers may be encouraged to bring their own service books and bibles and take them home with them. Where they are needed 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.

- Do consider streaming services online where this is possible especially for the benefit of those who are afraid or reluctant to enter church buildings 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. Please be aware that Church of England canons do not permit the use of individual communion cups and we as your bishops are not able to give permission for this.
- 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

This is a great time to encourage people to give online and via standing orders and direct debits. The normal passing of the plate is not possible. Collections in church should be conducted using a tray at the exit. Those who count the collection at the end of the service should wash their hands before and after doing the counting. This is a good time to investigate acquiring equipment to enable ‘contactless giving’.

## Baptisms and Weddings

- The celebration of Holy Baptism requires 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 requires 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

- Managing numbers within national guidelines is an important responsibility. A booking system may continue to be appropriate to achieve this. Signing-in can assist with ‘track and trace’ procedures. Churchwardens have a key role in the ministry of welcome. Nonetheless, if the building is filled to capacity, the Churchwardens have a primary responsibility for ensuring the national safety rules are observed.
- Pre- and post-service gatherings need to observe national guidelines. It is recommended that any gatherings are outdoors, in private space and in small groups.

## 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.

## After Service Gatherings

- The minister should consider whether remaining to meet and greet people following the service would risk compromising social distancing norms, and if so, should withdraw from the congregation after worship.
- Any gathering of the congregation for refreshments and/or conversation must be able to be compliant with national or local regulations. It is preferable that any gathering is outdoors, in private space and in small groups.

## Cleaning – arrangements and briefing/training

- We emphasize that scrupulous cleaning of churches will need to be arranged *before and after* each use. Cleaners 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: 18th May 2021

+Robert Innes

+David Hamid