

THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF THE CHURCH IN WALES
CORONAVIRUS – COVID19
GUIDANCE ON CONDUCTING MARRIAGES AND FUNERALS

Introduction

The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020 were amended on the 22 June 2020 so that whilst churches must remain closed, they can re-open for certain limited purposes

- for the solemnization of a marriage
- for funerals,
- for prayer (but not communal worship) by an individual (and, if necessary their carer), and members of the same household
- to broadcast an act of worship (without a congregation)

All reasonable measures must be taken to ensure a distance of 2 metres is maintained between every person in the place of worship (except between two members of the same household, or a carer and the person assisted by the carer).

Welsh Government guidance on marriages under Covid-19 restrictions is clear that the solemnization of a marriage can only consist of its essential aspects. Welsh Government Guidance on marriages is available [here](#). Thus, the ceremony must inevitably be much simpler and shorter than a traditional service.

Separate guidance has been prepared on how to open your church for private prayer and is available [here](#). This guidance note is to help local churches consider how to organise weddings and funerals under current restrictions.

As for re-opening for private prayer, opening your church building for a funeral or marriage service must be based on a robust risk assessment. A risk assessment template, similar to that for private prayer, is attached at Appendix A. It is recommended that you prepare a generic version for funerals and weddings, submit this to your Archdeacon for approval and then adjust the risk assessment as necessary for the particular circumstances of each funeral or wedding. It is useful to have an event specific risk assessment as this can be shared with the organisers of the wedding/funeral. The event specific risk assessment does not need to be approved by the Archdeacon if it essentially follows the approved generic version.

Physical Distancing

The most fundamental part of any Covid-19 risk management strategy is the maintenance of physical distancing. At the time of writing, this is 2 metres between persons not of the same household.

In considering, opening for a funeral or wedding, you should assess the capacity of your church to ensure 2 metre distancing at all times including when people are moving around.

- 2 metre distancing is necessary in all directions around someone.
- For a church with pews, this could mean one person in every three or so rows. You will need to carefully measure your church's layout to plan where people sit and the numbers of people your church can hold accordingly.
- Take into account the movement of people along aisles especially in a marriage or funeral service.
- Households can, of course, sit together. A pew or row of seats filled by a household may throw out your calculations over distance to other seat places.
- Seating positions will need to be clearly marked. You could place signs on pews, use labels or perhaps space hassocks on pews to mark where not to sit
- If you have moveable chairs, it will be easier to plan positioning of seats to maintain distancing.

In placing seats or marking pew seat positions, you will need to think about how people will move to and from the seat.

Assessing capacity with physical distancing will dictate the maximum number of people that can attend a funeral or marriage service. You should, however, review this with the organiser of the funeral/marriage as household groups may throw out your calculations. It would be sensible to draw up a plan of the seating positions to help you plan accordingly.

Remember only people from the same household can be closer to each other than 2 metres. The father of the bride and the best man (to take one example) are unlikely to be from the same household and this will fundamentally alter the format of the marriage ceremony. Mourners will want to comfort their close relatives so physical distancing will be challenging.

The Welsh Government Test, Trace, Protect strategy sets out the approach to tackling coronavirus, testing people with symptoms in the community, tracing those who have come into close contact with people who have tested positive for coronavirus and protecting family, friends and our community by self-isolating.

If it is possible to maintain a distance of 2 metres the Test Trace Protect strategy does not require a record of those who attend to be kept.

However, there will be occasions, for instance as part of a marriage or baptism and at the distribution of Holy Communion, where this cannot be maintained. In those situations, Welsh Government is requesting that a record of the time and date of the event and the names and telephone contact of those who have come within 2 metres of other households are kept. These records must be handled in accordance with GDPR to protect the individuals' privacy. These records should be kept for 21 days after the event and then destroyed.

A consent form can be found [HERE](#)

You should also provide a revised privacy notice and templates can be found [HERE](#). There is a version if you collect this information in advance online rather than 'at the door'. The 'online' privacy notice should be made available on your website, and the 'at the door'

privacy notice should be available for inspection (perhaps on the table where people are completing forms and on the church noticeboard)

Further Welsh Government guidance [can be found here](#) on how to maintain records and on compliance with GDPR.

Further information [about Test, Trace, Protect](#) is available here.

Common Issues to Consider for Funerals and Marriages

Although marriages and funerals can happen, Welsh Government guidance indicates that, as for re-opening for private prayer, the service should be kept as simple and short as possible.

- The regulations are clear that attendance at both funerals and weddings should be by invitation only. This must be made clear to the organisers of the event from the outset.
- Welsh Government guidance states that activities such as singing or chanting should not take place given the increased risk of infection from these activities. Recorded music may be appropriate as an alternative to hymn singing. Music should not be at a volume that makes normal conversations difficult.
- Welsh Government guidance also states that no blown instruments should be played; this includes organs (other than electronic organs). Another instrument such as a guitar or violin could be played. A pipe organ may be played for practice or maintenance purposes when the building is closed to the public. We are working to convince Welsh Government that organs may be safely played in connection with services too.

- It is permissible for an individual to sing at a service where it is an essential part of the service. Such a singer should sing behind a plexi-glass screen to protect guests. Physical distancing should be observed at all times. It is possible for more than one individual to sing over the course of the service, but this should not be more than one at a particular time and there should be separate arrangements to protect from transmission e.g separate plexi screens or cleaning of screens between each use.

- Bell ringing is permissible, but bell ringers should observe two-metre physical distancing and hygiene and cleaning regimes should be implemented. Careful consideration of how bell ringers will access the building suitably distanced from other attendees needs consideration e.g different entry points or staggered arrival times. Bellringing arrangements should comply with guidance available from the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers at <https://cccbr.org.uk/coronavirus/>
- The priest can lead the service with spoken words and readings can be included but the readers must observe very strict social distancing. A eucharist service (even non-communicating) should not be included at this time.
- Anyone who is showing symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) (a new continuous cough, a high temperature or loss of taste and smell) should not attend the funeral or marriage due to the risk that they pose to others; remote participation should be considered, for example live streaming.

- Attendance at funerals is highly sensitive and there are specific suggestions below for self-isolating or vulnerable mourners who wish to attend.
- Service books should be avoided. Use single use printed service sheets.
- Organisers of the funeral/wedding should be reminded that the legal basis for allowing the solemnisation of the wedding does not extend to any associated social gathering such as a reception or wake.
- The church should be fully cleaned before and after the event.
- Cash giving is discouraged at this time. You may be able to ask for donations by bank transfer through the organisers or use card readers. If cash payments are made, they should be handled wearing gloves and regular cleaning and hygiene maintained.

Specific Issues for Marriages

There is no current lawful way of calling Banns of Marriage in church and any Banns Certificates issued prior to lockdown have now expired. This means that marriages may only take place as follows:

- Marriages by Surrogate's (Common) Licence can take place where a party has a qualifying connection to a church.
- Marriages pursuant to a Superintendent Registrar's Certificate (again, where a party has a qualifying connection) will be possible once Register Offices have reopened to allow couples to give notice of marriage. Superintendent Registrar's Certificates are valid for 12 months, so there will be some certificates issued prior to lockdown which are still valid.
- If a couple wish to marry because of a pastoral emergency or other compelling circumstances, it may be possible to obtain an Archbishop of Canterbury's Special Licence for a wedding either in church or at another venue (such as at home). Clergy should discuss the matter with their diocesan bishop before then contacting the Archbishop of Canterbury's Faculty Office at faculty.office@lthesanctuary.com.
- In all circumstances, if you receive a request, you should approach your Archdeacon for approval. Such approval will be based on a demonstration of a robust risk management strategy.

Services for the Blessing of a Marriage are not permitted at this time.

You should consider the following practical issues:

1. Prior decoration of the church is possible but participants should observe social distancing and hygiene precautions. This should take place when the church is otherwise closed to avoid undue contact. Cleaning of surfaces and handles after such decoration activity is necessary.
2. For the purposes of the marriage, the two individuals forming the union should be considered as part of the same household even where they have previously lived in separate households.

3. Guests to the wedding must be by invitation only up to the maximum capacity of the building to maintain physical distancing. It is advisable to have door stewards to welcome guests and remind them of the requirements as necessary.
4. If anyone wishes to lodge an objection to the marriage, they are legally entitled to do so, and provision must be made to enable them to make their point while observing physical distancing. While this is likely to be a very rare event, it emphasises the importance of having some control over access to the building during the service. Door stewards should be briefed accordingly.
5. As for re-opening for private prayer, ensure sanitiser is available and signage is in place to remind people of physical distancing requirements. You should ask the couple to remind their guests in advance.
6. The choreography of the event will need to be worked out with the couple. For example, it is not going to be possible for 'father and daughter' to walk down the aisle together unless they are from the same household.
7. Clearly, there are essential elements to the marriage service where priest and couple must breach the 2-metre distancing e.g for the joining of hands. This is permissible though careful consideration should be given as to do this as safely as possible. Please note that the priest does not have to touch the rings to bless them, nor does he or she have to touch the couple's hands as part of a prayer or blessing. Whilst the wearing of facemasks and gloves for these close-proximity elements would be unattractive, it is advisable.
8. The exchange of rings could be problematic. This traditionally involves the 'best man' passing these to the priest and for these to then be picked up by the couple and exchanged. Alternatives should be considered to minimise the numbers of people handling the rings. For example, the priest could ask that the rings remain boxed, are placed on an adjacent table 2 metres away, blessed, and then collected by the couple. Hand sanitiser should be available for this element of the service.
9. The signing of the register needs to be undertaken in a place where the participants can keep at a safe distance. Many vestries will be unsuitable. All those signing the register should sanitize their hands before signing, complete all the signatures necessary for them and then sanitize them again. Apart from the bride and groom, all those signing should maintain physical distancing and, where available, individual pens for each signatory can be used. If a shared pen is to be used, have wipes available to clean after each use.
10. Group photographs at church cannot take place. The attendance by a photographer/videographer needs to be carefully considered as their activities can cause crowding and grouping. Limited photographs of the couple may be feasible in an area with sufficient space or outside the church.
11. It is permissible for an individual to sing at a marriage to support the sense that the marriage is a sacred occasion. Such a singer should sing behind a plexi-glass screen to protect guests. Physical distancing should be observed at all times.

Specific Issues for Funerals

The Regulations (regulation 8(2)) require that those attending a funeral are invited by the person responsible for arranging the funeral. This needs to be made clear to the organisers as it is very different from the traditional position.

It is easiest to manage physical distancing and other precautions at a graveside funeral. This should still be the preferred option, where possible. A maximum of 30 people can now attend such a funeral outdoors. The funeral must still comply with 2 metre physical distancing requirements and hygiene arrangements as if the service were within the building. A risk assessment should still be prepared accordingly.

Some practical issues to consider are:

1. Any interaction with the bereaved should be done safely; this may mean by telephone or video link. It is important not to share documents, books, photos etc.
2. It is vital that detailed planning takes place with the funeral director and/or family so that the limitations of the service can be fully understood. Advertising of the funeral should be avoided as attendance is by invitation only.
3. If you anticipate that the funeral will attract significant numbers of people wishing to pay their respects (beyond those specifically invited), you should think carefully before agreeing to host the funeral. You would need to consider, with the family and funeral director, whether you can manage the situation adequately and what measures you could put in place accordingly. One option might be a notice at the church gate stating, *'In accordance with Covid-19 Regulations, attendance at this funeral is by invitation only'*
4. The maximum number of invited mourners needs to be clearly communicated and understood. Clergy should communicate carefully with funeral directors, to confirm that the funeral director will, where possible, assume responsibility for compliance with the Regulations, including inviting mourners to be present and ensuring that social distancing measures are observed.
5. However, it may be necessary to also have stewards in attendance and the guidance for re-opening churches should be followed in this respect. The funeral should be kept brief, omitting optional parts of the funeral service.
6. Careful consideration needs to be given to any procession. It may be safer to have the coffin arrive in advance of the funeral starting. Depending on your church, it may be possible to plan different routes inside the church or a one-way system.
7. Traditionally, people will queue to meet and express condolences to next of kin. This should be avoided to prevent crowding.
8. Key mourners of the deceased person may include those who are self-isolating due to another member of the household being unwell with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). Where the funeral is scheduled before the period of household isolation has been completed (14 days from the first person in that household showing symptoms) mourners who are self-isolating should be facilitated to attend but should:
 - not attend if they have any symptoms of any kind, even if these are very mild
 - maintain a distance of at least 2 metres between themselves and others
 - advise the other mourners that they are otherwise self-isolating at home, and communicate that their presence means that others who are extremely clinically vulnerable should not attend
 - practise careful hand and respiratory hygiene:

- washing their hands more often - with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds or by using a hand sanitizer.
 - avoiding touching their eyes, nose, and mouth.
 - covering their coughs or sneezes with a tissue, then throwing the tissue in a bin which should be clearly sign-posted and readily accessible.
 - Mourners who are from a household that is self-isolating are advised to use their own transport where possible.
9. Mourners who are in an extremely clinically vulnerable group should be facilitated to attend, should they decide to do so. They should have received a letter telling them they are in this group or been told by their GP. Mourners who are in an extremely clinically vulnerable group have been advised that they should minimise their contact with others for their personal protection. However, they may decide to attend a funeral despite the additional risk this poses to them and should be facilitated to do so. Actions to reduce their risk of infection could include:
- advising other attendees that there is an extremely clinically vulnerable person attending and reiterating the need to stay at home if they are unwell, and to be respectful of the vulnerable person's need to avoid close contact at any point
 - advising the mourner to travel to the venue via the safest route possible, preferably in a car by themselves, or with someone from their household
 - considering the additional risk involved if attending the funeral requires travelling by public transport
 - ensuring that mourners who are in a clinically vulnerable group do not attend the same ceremony as mourners who are in household isolation.

16th July 2020

Appendix A: Funeral or Wedding Risk Assessment Template

Use the template below to plan your Covid-19 precautions for a funeral or wedding. Prepare a generic assessment for approval by your Archdeacon but it is recommended that an assessment be completed for each specific event to reflect specific details and enable sharing with the organisers.

You should review the general re-opening guidance to plan your arrangements more generally.

Name of Church:	Address:		Date:	
Funeral/Wedding Details:			Date of Event	
Area of Focus	Control Measure <i>These are the main themes from the checklist and guidance. They may not apply in each case.</i>	Detailed arrangements <i>Set out below the detailed arrangements you will implement under each control measure. The boxes will expand as you complete them.</i>	Action by?	Completed
PREPARATIONS	Assessment of Capacity with 2 metre distancing			
	Discussions with organisers including communications with attendees			
	Special arrangements for potentially vulnerable attendees			
	Plan for non-invited attendees			
PHYSICAL DISTANCING	Staffing/stewarding arrangements			
	Signage			
	Entry and Exit points			
	One-way system/processional routes			
	Seating arrangements			
	Arrangements for household groups			

	Restricted areas			
	Arrangements for blessings, exchange of rings etc			
	Arrangements for Music			
	Arrangements for readings			
	Arrangements for bell-ringing			
HYGIENE	Hand washing/sanitising			
	Service sheets			
	Shared objects			
CLEANING	Cleaning team			
	PPE			
	Cleaning regime			

