

**THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF THE CHURCH IN WALES**  
**CORONAVIRUS – COVID19**  
**GUIDANCE FOR THE CARE AND USE OF CHURCH BUILDINGS**  
**Fourth Edition 15<sup>th</sup> July 2020**

This note is intended to give simple, clear guidance for the care and use of church buildings at this time when Covid-19 restrictions apply. The guidance applies to churches, church halls and other similar buildings and their grounds. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list of every possible scenario but a set of guiding principles to aid decision making. The provincial property team will continue to offer advice about specific situations to archdeacons and diocesan teams at this time.

### **The Starting Point**

The Bench of Bishops published the following pastoral guidance on the 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020:

#### **Church buildings: wider re-opening**

*Welsh Government has announced that places of worship may be re-opened for individuals or households for communal led worship from Monday 13<sup>th</sup> July.*

*This phase of re-opening (the amber phase) gives the legal right for churches to be opened for individual or households to now visit places of worship for:*

- *Private prayer*
- *Communal worship including led prayers, devotions or meditations*
- *Holy Communion subject to appropriate risk mitigation measures (see checklist below)*
- *Baptisms subject to appropriate risk mitigation measures (see checklist below)*
- *Funeral and marriage services (for invited guests only) can be undertaken and separate guidance on this is available at <https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/clergy-and-members/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/covid-19-guidance-conducting-marriages-and-funerals/>*

*The Bench remains of the view that a cautious approach to re-opening, based firmly on Welsh Government guidance, is essential. What has been announced is the giving of permission. There is no requirement, from Welsh Government or the Bishops of the Church in Wales, to re-open at this time.*

*Any church contemplating re-opening must first undertake a detailed risk assessment. [Guidance on what this involves is available here](#). This includes a template risk assessment form. This will need to be submitted to your Archdeacon (or other nominated person) in advance of any re-opening. **Following such approval, worship services may begin again from Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July.***

*Whilst we rejoice that we can now return to worship in our churches, we urge local churches not to rush re-opening. Only consider re-opening if you can do so effectively and safely within the guidelines. Match your opening arrangements to your capacity to address necessary safety measures. Our primary concern must be the health and wellbeing of our clergy, staff, volunteers and visitors.*

### **Use of buildings**

*The Welsh Government Regulations continue to permit a cleric to record or broadcast a service (with or without a congregation) from church buildings. Any such events should be held in accordance with diocesan guidelines, or otherwise with the explicit permission of the diocesan Bishop.*

*The Welsh Government Regulations also permit clergy to visit their churches, and for other church officers and volunteers to visit churches only to undertake a voluntary or charitable duty, where it is not reasonably practicable to undertake that duty from home. Site inspections can be undertaken by clerics, or by another person nominated by the Incumbent, Ministry/Mission Area Leader, Area Dean or Archdeacon. We ask that such visits are still kept to a reasonable minimum.*

*The trustee body responsible for the church building can also now consider allowing contractors and local volunteers to undertake essential and necessary works to their church and churchyard subject to suitable distancing and hygiene arrangements.*

*The use of church buildings for essential voluntary services (such as existing foodbanks, soup kitchens and homeless shelters) is permitted by the Welsh Government Regulations. Church buildings may also, upon the request of the Welsh Ministers or a local authority, be used to provide urgent public services. All reasonable measures should be taken to ensure that social distancing practices and other hygiene precautions are followed while those services are provided. Any new use of a church building for essential voluntary / public services should be expressly supported by the incumbent or Area Dean and the diocesan bishop.*

*It has also been announced that Community centres (including Church halls) can be re-opened from Monday 20<sup>th</sup> July and Welsh Government will publish guidance to support them to restart more public services at the discretion of local authorities. We will need to see the details of this provision and will issue further guidance on how to re-open these safely in coming days. It is clear that permitted activities in such halls will be limited to vital public services as defined by local authorities.*

*This guidance from the Representative Body follows the latest statement from the Bench of Bishops and takes account of the regulations on the use of church buildings included in The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020.*

### **How should re-opening be planned?**

*Re-opening for these wider variety of activities must be based on a careful risk assessment to ensure appropriate measures are put in place to prevent the transmission of Covid-19.*

*The most fundamental part of a Covid-19 risk mitigation strategy is the maintenance of 2 metre distancing between persons. The key thing churches need to do is consider their space and assess how many people can be accommodated whilst maintaining 2 metre*

distancing. This is quite complex as you need to consider the movement of people as well as where they may sit.

*If you are re-opening your church for private prayer/communal worship:*

- Guidance has been prepared to help you consider the appropriate strategy for your church when re-opening and this is available [HERE](#)

This includes specific guidance on organising holy communion and baptisms and how a breach of the 2 metre distancing should be managed.

There is a link to Welsh Government guidance and a template risk assessment document.

*If you are planning to conduct a wedding or funeral:*

- These can now take place in church (or with up to 30 people outdoors at graveside). Specific guidance is available here [LINK](#).
- It is important to note that attendance at weddings or funerals is by invitation only and subject to a limit based on your calculations of the building's safe capacity

*If your church remains closed or until you have organised your re-opening:*

- Ecclesiastical Insurance have issued the following guidance:

*In the context of a temporary closure, here are the top priorities to help you keep your church property safe:*

**Protect against electrical fires - turn off and unplug electrical equipment**

*Electrical equipment should be turned off and unplugged, and electrical systems isolated at the main fuse board, with the exception of any: intruder alarms, fire alarms, security or other risk protection systems or devices. These should be maintained to ensure they continue to fully and effectively protect the property at all times.*

**Guard against escape of water losses**

*Where there will be no need to re-enter church property during the period of temporary closure turn off any water supplies at the mains (and where reasonable to do so drain down water systems).*

*We recognise it may not always be appropriate to turn off or drain down water systems. Where this is the case a minimum temperature of 7°C (45°F) should be maintained within the property if possible.*

**Protect your property**

*Securing the property against unauthorised access. Remove any internal waste and position external bins as far from church property as possible.*

*Ask any neighbours in the vicinity of church property to report any suspicious activity.*

**Try to periodically check the property**

*If possible, arrange for someone to visit the church property on a weekly basis to check it remains secure, whilst following the latest government guidelines on travel/movement of people.*

*Could people taking their permitted daily exercise or shopping for essentials pass by the church?*

### **Review your health and safety arrangements**

*Review your health and safety arrangements, focusing on any additional precautions that might be necessary to secure the premises and protect people from danger.*

## **What about care and maintenance of the building?**

### *1. Review your current arrangements*

Whilst the immediate focus of risk management is on Covid-19 related risks, the general issues around Health and Safety and keeping people safe still apply. You need to consider your whole premises to make sure it is a safe place and review your risk assessments accordingly. Ecclesiastical Insurance has a host of resources on its website to help you with this work.

The Covid-19 guidance gives a variety of suggestions for you to consider in preparing to re-open but generally make a careful inspection of the whole premises to check for things that may have arisen since closure.

- Fallen branches
- Blocked gutters and downspouts
- Overgrown vegetation obscuring hazards.
- Lead roofs and flashings
- Heating oil

### *2. Consider your volunteers*

Volunteers can visit church buildings and churchyards to undertake necessary duties including maintenance work to the building or grounds. Please note:

- No one should feel obligated to return to a place of worship, even if they have a volunteering role that they would normally fulfil.
- PCCs/MACs should assess the vulnerability of volunteers/staff to Covid-19 using the Government's advice at: [Covid 19 Extremely Vulnerable People](#) and [Social-distancing-guidance](#)
- Those in the Extremely Vulnerable Group are advised not to consider employment or volunteering outside their homes.
- Those in other 'at-risk' groups should discuss their situation with the PCC/MAC to decide the type of work or voluntary activity they are able to perform. If the vulnerable person (e.g someone over 70) feels they are in good health and would wish to volunteer, it is reasonable to accept their service but careful thought should be given to appropriate duties, PPE etc These might include roles that have maximum social distance or minimal direct contact with people.

- Undertake a careful risk assessment for such work to ensure two-metre physical distancing and appropriate hygiene provisions are in place at all times and communicate this to all involved.
- Avoiding the sharing of equipment, but if not possible, ensure rigorous cleaning routines for all equipment.
- Keep activity to the minimum necessary to address essential and necessary issues

### 3. *What about contractors?*

Access can be permitted for maintenance and repair work by contractors. Building and maintenance contractors are legally able to work on site on the basis that their work cannot be undertaken from home. However, we advise the following issues are addressed before permitting work to take place:

- The Parochial Church Council/Ministry Area Council/Mission Area Conference/Dean and Chapter should approve any such access being permitted for agreed works
- Churches/Cathedrals should approach this as they would other health and safety matter through careful hazard identification, risk assessment and reasonable mitigation measures
- Contractors should prepare a risk assessment and/or safe system of work documentation to show how they will take reasonable precautions to prevent the spread of Covid-19. These should comply with Welsh Government guidance at:  
<https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-maintain-physical-distancing-workplace>
- All contractors and their staff should be well and have no symptoms of coronavirus
- There should be a clear plan for provision of hand-washing/sanitising and the cleaning of surfaces including door handles, keys etc
- There should be minimal contact between contractors and church/cathedral staff or volunteers and two-metre distancing should be maintained at all times.

### 4. *Can organs be played and maintained?*

Maintenance work to organs can be undertaken at this time. A pipe organ may be played for practice or maintenance purposes when the building is closed to the public. Organs cannot at this time be played as part of public opening, services, marriages or funerals. We are lobbying for a change in this provision.

Organists must get permission to enter the building from the PCC/MAC, and access must be carefully coordinated with other activities especially cleaning and opening. The organ's touched surfaces should be cleaned before and after use. Hygiene precautions should be in place.

If the organist will be on their own in the building then a lone working assessment should be completed. The best time for this work is during gaps in other activity in the church.

## **Churchyards**

Churchyards and burial grounds remain open to the public but those who visit are subject to regulations regarding social gathering. If a churchyard is likely to be heavily visited, a discussion could be held with the police over how to manage the situation. Graveside funerals or other worship can be conducted subject to social distancing and a limit of 30 people.

## **Church Halls**

Church Halls, like other community buildings, can re-open from the 20 July 2020 but only where there is a local need for an essential voluntary or public service and that the local authority approves it accordingly. Please note that there are many activities that will not be permitted (e.g social gatherings).

Welsh Government Guidance will be issued shortly but opening of church halls will need to be based on a risk assessment approach by both the manager of the hall and the organiser of the activity. This should be based firmly on arrangements for social distancing, hygiene and premises cleaning. The PCC/MAC must be able to demonstrate that the risk mitigation measures are implemented so detailed monitoring is vital.

Specific consideration needs to be given to checking the building over after a prolonged period of closure especially water supplies and potential for legionnaires disease etc. You should also consider how this limited opening will be communicated to the wider community who may perceive the hall is open to all again.

## **Faculties**

The faculty process remains in operation at this time. Applications can be made on the Online Faculty System. List A and B applications should be able to be processed without difficulty. Full faculty applications will be harder to process because of the current restrictions and chancellors and registrars will decide, in each case, whether any proposal has been adequately considered and consulted upon and meets the spirit of the constitutional rules before deciding whether to grant or refuse a faculty.

## **Representative Body of the Church in Wales**

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