

THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF THE CHURCH IN WALES
CORONAVIRUS – COVID19
GUIDANCE FOR THE CARE AND USE OF CHURCH BUILDINGS
Third Edition 19th June 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 19th June 2020:

Church buildings: re-opening for private/personal prayer

Welsh Government has announced that places of worship may be re-opened for individuals or households for private (personal) prayer only from Monday 22 June.

- *Places of worship cannot actively organise activities such as services and prayers that will encourage people to gather.*
- *Furthermore, religious activity involving physical contact, speaking in unison, singing or chanting and activities which utilise shared equipment will not be permitted*
- *A person cannot act as a leader of devotions, a form of service or prayer of any sort*
- *A Covid-19 risk assessment must be completed by each place of worship before opening.*

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.

Whilst we all look forward to the day that all our churches can open safely, we urge local churches not to rush reopening. 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 permit a cleric to record or broadcast a service (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 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.

Church halls must currently remain closed although Welsh Government is considering whether some relaxation may be permitted particularly in relation to nursery school provision. We will update this guidance as soon as this is clear.

Further guidance on the care and use of church buildings is being issued by the officers of the Representative Body.

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 church buildings be managed at this time?

If you are re-opening your church for private prayer:

Guidance on what to consider in re-opening your church for private prayer is available [here](#).

This includes a link to Welsh Government guidance and a template risk assessment document. Following approval of your detailed Covid-19 risk assessment, regular inspections of church premises can be arranged as part of your re-opening 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 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

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.

You may like to consider posting a notice outside your church with key contact details and any on-line or other services you are providing.

Who can visit the church building during this period?

The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020 do now (as of 1st June 2020) permit people to be outside, in their local area (taken to mean 5 miles from home). The trustee body responsible for the church building (including halls) can now consider allowing local volunteers to undertake works to their church and churchyard.

Trustee bodies should:

- Check that none of the volunteers are in a vulnerable group or are self-isolating
- You should put in place arrangements to confirm that each person involved in the opening of the church confirms they are (a) symptom free and (b) not subject to UK or Welsh Government advice to self-isolate.
- 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, to ensure rigorous cleaning routines for all equipment.
- Keep such visits to the minimum necessary to address essential and necessary issues

It might be helpful for the person travelling to carry a letter or email of authorisation from the Incumbent, Ministry/Mission Area Leader, Area Dean or Archdeacon so that this can be shown to the police if requested.

Can work be undertaken to the church, hall or church grounds?

Generally, we would discourage work (building work or maintenance of grounds etc) being undertaken at this time unless the work is essential and urgent or cannot be postponed.

Building and maintenance contractors are legally able to work on site on the basis that their work cannot be undertaken from home. Whilst the regulations have required churches and halls to close, access can be permitted for maintenance and repair work. 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.

Churchyards

Churchyards and burial grounds remain open 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.

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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