

Risk Assessment for Opening Church Buildings to the Public

Version Control

Issue Date	Version Number	Issued by
22 nd May 2020	1	The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group
8 th June 2020	2	The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group
12 th June 2020	3	The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group
1st July 2020	4	The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group

Churches and cathedrals have been legally permitted to open for purposes of individual private prayer from 13th June. House of Bishops guidance provided for churches to open for funerals from 15th June. Public worship, with measures in place for social distancing, are allowed from 4th July. Other activities, except for a few still prohibited by law, may also take place in churches, subject to the government guidance in place for the relevant sector.

The [government guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic](#) requires a COVID-19 risk assessment to be carried out for every building and site open to the public. This document provides a template risk assessment, with links to the relevant advice notes. It relates to opening up church and cathedral buildings to clergy and members of the public entering for any permitted purposes. As well as offering guidance on best-practice, it is also intended to help parishes make a decision on whether to open for any or all of these purposes or not, based on their local circumstances, resources and context. You should read the advice on re-opening buildings and the guidance on public worship before completing this assessment. Both are available on the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](#).

Future versions of this document will be produced when there is any substantive change to the guidance on the safe use of places of worship.

A separate risk assessment relating to contractors and construction workers is available on the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](#).

Carrying out a risk assessment

1. Agree what activities you are planning for:

- Private prayer (clergy only)
- Livestreaming services (clergy only)
- Private prayer (general public)
- Public worship
- Rites of passage services
- Opening for visitors and tourists

2. Consider the hazards:

- Transmission of COVID-19
- Hazards arising from the temporary closure of the church
- Hazards arising from now using the church in a different way

Read the guidance and think about how it relates specifically to your church. What constraints are there? Consider how people will arrive at the church, including if they will need to wait or queue outside; how people will enter and leave the church; circulation inside: from the entrance to the worship space and out again; circulation within the worship space; also access to other areas including the toilet(s).

3. Consider who might be harmed and how? Read the guidance and think about how the activities you are planning will affect different groups of people. The risks are not different for larger churches so long as they are properly managed, but having more people coming through your building makes the possible impact – for example of someone with COVID-19 coming into contact with others – higher than in smaller venues with fewer people. Consider your particular circumstances and adapt the checklist below as appropriate.

4. Using the risk assessment checklist below as a template:

- add in mitigations for any risks that are particular to your circumstances that may not be on the list;
- record what you need to do for each activity to go ahead safely;
- consider any equipment you need and any temporary changes you might need to make to the church;
- check back against your list of activities to confirm which ones can go ahead and when.

Risk assessment template

Church: St Olave's, Gatcombe	Assessor's name: Gatcombe PCC	Date completed: 02-07-2020	Review date: August 2020
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Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
Access to church buildings for clergy for purposes of private prayer and/or livestreaming General advice on accessing church buildings can be found here.	One point of entry to the church building clearly identified and separate from public entry if possible	Main entry door as usual, as the vestry door is inaccessible from outside.	Clergy	
	A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant.	The church's Lone Working Policy will be in effect.	CW	
	Buildings have been aired before use.	Ensure that there has been either a 72-hour gap since anyone else entered the building, or that it has been cleaned.	User	
	Check for animal waste and general cleanliness.		User	
	Ensure water systems are flushed through before use.	Taps and water system flushed through on 4.7.2020.	n/a	
	Switch on and check electrical and heating systems if needed. Commission system checks as necessary.	Not necessary at present time. PAT testing to follow usual procedure.	n/a	
	Update your website, A Church Near You, and any relevant social media.	To be done once arrangements are trialed and a pattern agreed.	Churchwarden	

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services	Not required – but sign-in book provided to log visits/opening.	Churchwarden	4.7.2020
Preparation of the Church for access by members of the public for any permitted purposes, including worship and tourism	Confirm that all steps (above) for access by clergy have been carried out before anyone else accesses the building.		CW	
	Review C of E guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the ‘cleaning’ section of this risk assessment (below).	The church will be closed for over 72 hours between each service.	PCC & CW	
	Choose one point of entry into the church to manage flow of people and indicate this with notices, keeping emergency exits available at all times. Where possible use a different exit.	Main door to be used for entry. West door to be used for exit.	CW	
	Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside).	This should not be needed.	n/a	
	Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation.	The West door could be opened for ventilation and exit weather permitting	CW	
	Remove Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets	Special ‘one-off’ use service booklets and readings sheets may be provided, with people told to take them home with them after the service.	PCC	
	Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on)	The rope across the sanctuary should remain in place, to prevent unnecessary access.	CW	

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance	Not necessary as Church remains closed for a minimum of 72 hours following services.	N/A	
	Remove or isolate children’s resources and play areas	Resources removed. Un-necessary to cordon off.	PCC	
	Walk through the church to plan for physical distancing in seats, aisles, at the altar rail, including safe flow of visitors. Remember 1m in all directions from each person (or 1m with risk mitigation if absolutely necessary).		PCC	
	Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing.	Chairs should be marked by signs to prevent people sitting within 1m of each other.	PCC	
	Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements.	N/A applicable as not opening to the public.	PCC	
	Limit access to places were the public do not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon in needed.	Back half of church should not be used (cordoned off), as it does not have a single directional flow.	PCC	
	Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use.	Bottle placed on entrance to church. Each person should be asked to use it on entering the building.	Sides-person/CW	
	Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing	The chairs could be rearranged to ensure 1m distancing between rows?	PCC	

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	Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc.	Government and church recommended poster are already up.	PCC	
	Where there are toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available.	Toilet not to used during current crisis – keep locked during services.	PCC	
	Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them.	Kitchen bin to be taken out of service for the current crisis.	PCC	
	If possible, provide safe means for worshippers and visitors to record their name and contact details; retain each day’s record for 21 days	Log book already in place	CW	4 th July 2020
	Give due notice of the resumption of use of the building to congregation, ensuring that worshippers will know what to expect when they come.	Via weekly e-mail.	Marcus	
Cleaning the church before and after general use (no known exposure to anyone with Coronavirus symptoms) Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here.	If the church building has been closed for 72 hours between periods of being open then there is no need for extra cleaning to remove the virus from surfaces.	Check signing in book to ensure 72-hour period.	PCC	
	Set up a cleaning rota to cover your opening arrangements.	N/A applicable at present as not opening to the public	CW	
	All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable).		CW	
	Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned.		CW	
	Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. gloves) from the site.		CW	

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. gloves) from the site – suggested daily removal.	Suggest that this should be done by the person doing the cleaning, unless it is part of the monthly deeper clean.	CW	
Cleaning the church after known exposure to someone with Coronavirus symptoms	Close the church building for 72 hours with no access permitted.		PCC	
	If the building has been quarantined for 72 hours, then carry out cleaning as per the normal advice on cleaning.		PCC	