

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: Sts. Simon & Jude, Castlethorpe	Assessor's name: Michael O'Shea	Date completed: 15/07/2020	Review date: 15/08/2020
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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	The church layout doesn't make this practicable – Appropriate signing is displayed	Michael O'Shea	07/07/2020
	A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant.	Health & Safety Risk Assessment on church website		
	Buildings have been aired before use.	Church will be aired at the same time of cleaning is carried out. Also the church is now open for 1.5 hours twice a week for private prayer.	Melissa King	19/06/2020 M King
	Check for animal waste and general cleanliness.	Church will be cleaned prior to use.	Melissa King	19/06/2020 M King
	Ensure water systems are flushed through before use.	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Switch on and check electrical and heating systems if needed. Commission system checks as necessary.	Electrics have been used and checked during security visits Heating is currently switched off.	Michael O'Shea	Various dates throughout lockdown – Last checked 14/07/2020 Michael O'Shea

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Holy water stoups and the font are empty.		Michael O'Shea	Fonts/Stoups have been empty since March 2020 Michael O'Shea
	Ensure safe use of equipment needed for live streaming: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets, cables/tripod causing trip hazard	Not applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Deciding whether to open to the public	Discuss with nearby venues and businesses to ensure that the timing and practical arrangements for using the church are compatible.	There are no nearby venues or businesses that will cause an issue	Michael O'Shea	07/07/2020 Michael O'Shea
	Update your website, A Church Near You, and any relevant social media.	Information via the church website, Facebook page will be posted & group email will be sent to all those who have subscribe to email updates	Fr. Gary	11/07/2020 Email sent/ Posts done on Facebook Fr Gary Website updated D Gordon
	Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services	Village leaflet drop has been arranged with instructions on how to book a seat. The leaflet gives one point of contact either by phone of email.	1. Produce and arrange printing. 2. Arrange leaflet distribution. 3. Maintain booking in list	11/07/2020 1. Fr Gary 2. Melissa King 3. R & M Wilson

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	If opening to tourists consider applying for the Visit Britain 'Good to Go' standard mark	Not applicable	Michael O'Shea	07/07/2020 Michael O'Shea
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.		Revd. Canon Gary Ecclestone SSC Michael O'Shea	11/07/2020 Revd. Canon Gary Ecclestone SSC Michael O'Shea
	Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the 'cleaning' section of this risk assessment (below).	Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here . Guidelines are at the bottom of the assessments	Michael O'Shea	19/06/2020 Michael O'Shea Melissa King
	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.	The church layout makes it necessary to use the same East Porch door for entry and exit. Signs are in place to remind everyone of the 2m social distancing. As the opening is for worship at set times there should be no issues	Michael O'Shea	11/07/2020 Michael O'Shea
	Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside).	The driveway leading to the only access is of a considerable length affording all attendees the opportunity to maintain social distancing	No action required	11/07/2020 – Michael O'Shea
	Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation.	All Porch doors are to be fastened open	This will be as ongoing matter for each Sunday Mass depending on weather conditions	11/07/2020 Michael O'Shea

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Remove Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets	1. Book stand to be removed from usual location, placed in an area closed section. No books will be used. 2. New Service sheets for each Mass will be produced and placed on pews and seats that have been marked for use.	Michael O'Shea	1. 19/06/2020 Michael O'Shea 2. Prior to each Mass. Fr. Gary/ Sidesperson
	Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on)	Nothing Applicable	No actions needed	11/07/2020 Michael O'Shea
	Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance	All removed 19/06/2020	Michael O'Shea	19/06/2020
	Remove or isolate children's resources and play areas	All soft toys and carpets cordoned off. All chairs stacked.	Michael O'Shea	14/07/2020 Michael O'Shea
	Walk through the church to plan for physical distancing in seats, aisles, at the altar rail, including safe flow of visitors. Remember 2m in all directions from each person (or 1m with risk mitigation if absolutely necessary).	People will only go up for Communion when directed. People will be directed one at a time to the steps to main Altar where they will receive communion in one kind. They will then return to their seat maintaining a social distance at all times.	Fr Gary Michael O'Shea	11/07/2020 Fr Gary and Michael O'Shea

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing.	All available seating is positioned safeguarding the 2m distancing.	Michael O'Shea	14/07/2020 Michael O'Shea
	Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements.	There is only one point of entry and exit, but as this is a Mass the natural flow will be persons entering prior to the Mass and leaving after the Mass without any socialising in the church	No action required	No action needed
	Limit access to places where the public does not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon if needed.	Chairs are stacked in areas where the public do not need to go.	No further action required	No further action needed
	Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use.	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.	Hand sanitiser will be available on a table at the entrance to the church & persons will be reminded to use it.	19/06/2020 Michael O'Shea Melissa King
	Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing	Consult advice on gaining temporary permissions .	None required	No action needed
	Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc.		Notices to be placed at the entrance to the Church	23/06/2020 Diane Gordon Melissa King
	Ensure high-risk surfaces and touch points have been wiped with appropriate sanitiser spray	Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here .	As there will be 2 masses on a Sunday morning all high risk surfaces and touch points will	Michael O'Shea

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	or disposable wipes		be sanitised after the first mass as set out in the govt. guidelines.	
	Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels.	This applies to the Sacristy only	Prior to the Mass the Sacristy will be checked to see if there is adequate soap and hand towels. Bin is already in place.	Sacristan to check prior to Mass and report to Michael O'Shea if new supplies are needed
	Where there are toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available.	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them.		Measure already in place	11/07/2020 Michael O'Shea will ensure that all bins are emptied each Wednesday
	If possible, provide safe means for worshippers and visitors to record their name and contact details; retain each day's record for 21 days	One person will be responsible for keeping a log of all worshippers and visitors. For those on the electoral role their contact details are already on file.	Responsible person will be positioned near the Church entrance. If they notice newcomers then they should be asked discreetly for contact details . Lists must be kept secure and destroyed after 21 days	Will normally be Michael O'Shea for each Mass.

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	Give due notice of the resumption of use of the building to neighbours, congregation and wider community, ensuring that visitors and worshippers will know what to expect when they come.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Information via the church website, Facebook page will be posted Village leaflet drop is being arranged with instructions on how to book a seat. The leaflet gives one point of contact either by phone or email. 	2a. Produce and arrange printing. 2b. Arrange leaflet distribution.	11/07/2020 Facebook updated Fr Gary Website updated D Gordon 10/07/2020 2a. Fr Gary 2b. D Gordon
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.	There will be 2 masses each Sunday at 9.00am & 10.00am and the church will be open for private prayer between 10.00am & 11.30am on Thursdays. The church will be cleaned after the 9.00am mass each Sunday.	Responsible person, Sidesperson	
	If 72-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating.	Ongoing action and communication with all relevant persons	Michael O'Shea	Michael O'Shea 14/07/2020
	Set up a cleaning rota to cover your opening arrangements.	See above	Michael O'Shea	Michael O'Shea 14/07/2020
	All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable).	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.	disposable gloves in place	No action required

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned.	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.	Bacterial spray and wipes in place	No action required
	Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site.		Michael O'Shea	Each Wednesday Michael O'Shea
	Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal.		Each Wednesday all materials will be dealt with by Michael O'Shea	Each Wednesday - Michael O'Shea
Cleaning the church after known exposure to someone with Coronavirus symptoms	If possible close the church building for 72 hours with no access permitted.	Church will be closed immediately	Fr. Gary Michael O'Shea	
	If 72-hour closure is not possible then follow Public Health England guidance on cleaning in non-healthcare settings.	Public Health England guidance available here.	Not Applicable	No action required at this time
	If the building has been quarantined for 72 hours, then carry out cleaning as per the normal advice on cleaning.	Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here. Guidelines are at the bottom of the assessments	If cleaning is required then it will be arranged	No action required at this time

General Questions

I have heard that we need to deep clean our church building before we re-open, or disinfect it between uses. Do we need to do this?

If your building has been closed and nobody has been in it for at least 72 hours, it is unlikely the virus is present. Your building will therefore not need to be disinfected for the virus. This includes fogging or misting treatments of biocidal solutions for disinfection. The contents of these treatments may adversely react with fixtures and fittings in the church building. Please see the Risk Assessment template for more information on opening your church building.

What do we need to do to keep the church buildings clean?

For routine cleaning, frequently clean those areas that are used using your usual cleaning products. Pay particular attention to objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, and to busy areas. For advice on cleaning historic parts of churches please see below.

What if someone with symptoms has attended the church building?

If you are cleaning after a known or suspected case of COVID-19 then refer to the specific guidance.

Is there any way we can reduce the amount of cleaning we need to do?

You may want to consider restricting access to certain parts of the church to reduce the area of cleaning required. To reduce the amount of cleaning of door handles you may want to consider propping open doors if this is appropriate.

How often should we clean?

This will depend on the local situation and your local risk assessment. You will want to consider things like footfall, the nature of your building, whether you have restricted access to some parts, the need to clean those parts that are more frequently used more often e.g. door handles, toilets. If a church is closed for more than 72 hours, this will reduce the need for cleaning.

Who can clean?

Anyone who is considered vulnerable and with an underlying health condition should be encouraged to stay at home and not assist in cleaning at this time. Whilst churches are only open to ministers for private prayer and live streaming, only the minister or a household member should be regularly entering the church, other than for maintenance or building work. At this time, cleaning should be proportionate and depend on the use of the building.

Once others are allowed to enter individual prayer, then cleaning will become essential. Numbers going in to clean should be kept to a minimum, and social distancing complied with at all times.

What about cleaning the historic elements of church buildings?

If historic fixtures and fittings have been restricted from access, they should not need to be cleaned. If they form part of the accessible areas that will be touched by the general public, such as pews, the following advice should be followed.

Historic England advises the following when cleaning historic parts of buildings:

Metal/wood/stone/glass/ceramic/modern painted surfaces can be cleaned with a dilute solution of non-ionic conservation-grade detergent or sensitive washing up liquid and distilled water, rinsed with distilled water and dried immediately with white paper towel or soft cotton cloth. Follow manufacturer's instructions for dilution, application and contact times (a minimum contact time of 20 seconds is currently advised by PHE) for all detergents.

Getting hold of conservation grade materials may be difficult. If you can't get hold of conservation grade materials, try to use products with as few additives as possible but that will still clean a surface, such as detergents with no added perfumes and no harsh chemicals. The Ecover range, for example, has few harsh chemicals but will be effective if used correctly. Other examples include Boots Sensitive, and SurCare Sensitive Washing Up Liquid.

Distilled water is preferable. This is water that contains no salts, so that there are no residues or corrosives to interact with delicate surfaces. However, distilled water may be difficult to obtain, so in these circumstances tap water or filtered tap can be used instead.

If there is no water source in the church, bringing in spray bottles filled up at home may be useful. Spray the cloth with the detergent and not the object, to ensure the detergent goes exactly where it is meant to.

