

## Archdeacons' guidance regards worship services from 4 July

Following Government advice published 9.00am Monday morning, 29 June, further detailed guidance from the national CofE Recovery Group has been issued.

The CofE Birmingham comments, below, highlight key considerations for us all and are intended to help with the necessary preparations in your parish. Your Bishops and Archdeacons encourage us all to remember the core advice from the CofE Recovery group, in particular Bishop Sarah's words, *'We will not be returning to normality overnight - this is the next step on a journey.... guidance is permissive, not prescriptive.'*

The Recovery Group's detailed guidance further states, *'All clergy are encouraged to consider continuing to stream worship or other events, both to avoid large gatherings and to continue to reach those individuals who are self-isolating or particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, as well as to those who have joined worship for the first time online during the lockdown period. Whatever is decided, please consider how to communicate this to your congregation and community.'*

We are keen that, across the CofE Birmingham Family, everyone takes time to reflect and grow.

What has changed? What do we want to recover again? How are we being transformed by God to better be his beloved community, worshipping to God's glory and serving God's world?

### 1. Key Principles

- Permissive not prescriptive: 'church' is much more than public worship, though worship is a key public window that communicates and reassures
- Go at your local pace, acknowledging the speed of trust and safety for your community
- Make sure it is very clear offline and online that you remain in business, even if your opening date is later than 4 July. We encourage every parish to be physically open for worship as soon as practically possible.
- Find the right balance between the new and old 'norms': consult on sustaining any online or new communication or services you have started. Look to keep going within your capacity with things that are fruitful, not expecting one person to do everything, instead growing team capacity beyond the priest.
- Continue to make good communication a constant priority

## 2. Starting Now

As prayerful planning continues about scheduling for opening, these are key things to bear in mind:

- If you do not open from 4 July, how will you communicate loud and clear that you are in business and serving your community?
- Where, when and with whom will you reflect spiritually about the crisis:
  - What things have come out of the crisis that you wish to keep, change or discard?
  - What needs do your communities have (lament, grief, justice, celebration, inclusion, worship...) and how will you plan around those?
- Consider implementing Government suggestion for '*set days or times when places of worship are open solely for those particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, such as those over 70 or clinically vulnerable.*'
- How should you co-ordinate start times, access, capacity and transport routes in relation to our faith centres (Christian and otherwise) who may be physically located close to you to take account of section 3 of the government guidance? All parishes should consider this. Andrew Smith and the Presence & Engagement group are available for further advice.
- Make sure your decision is a PCC decision and not just the Incumbent or Church Leader. The transition should not be a process of further burdening for a few.
- Contact your Area Dean, Archdeacon or relevant Diocesan Team for support and advice.
- Sacraments - there are clear details on the national CofE website. In brief: only the bread or wafers must be distributed and administration preceded by handwashing for the celebrant, with administration using short words of distribution.
- Practicalities:
  - Ensure you have completed a local risk assessment to gauge the capacity of the building, allowing for safe entry and exit points and communal areas in line with the new Government requirements for all places of worship.
  - Given the diversity of our city and congregations, including the particular vulnerability of high-diversity communities, we recommend the number of people permitted to enter at any one time should be limited to ensure at least 2 metres (or 1 metre with risk mitigation where 2 metres is not possible) between households. This applies to all CofE Birmingham public spaces, including all our churches. This combines best protection with maximum safe capacity in our regional context.
  - At present, there is no government requirement to wear face coverings in places where 2 metre social distancing can be complied with. However, people may wish to do so, and this is a personal decision.
  - No refreshments to be served.
  - Create clearly signed, separate entrance/exits if possible.
  - Cleansing and cleaning arrangements, especially in historic buildings
  - Observe maximum numbers in services as stipulated by the Government advice and referenced in the National CofE guidance issued later today.

- Reference material which Archdeacons & Ben Smith have circulated on physical/equipment/buildings changes needed for online worship after lockdown
- HM Government document states: *The opening up of public places following the COVID-19 outbreak is being supported by the NHS Test and Trace service, in line with other government guidance for other venues including in the retail and hospitality sector. The advice of the Director of Public Health for Birmingham is that you should assist this service by keeping an accurate temporary record of visitors for 21 days, in a way that is manageable for your place of worship, and assist NHS Test and Trace with requests for that data if needed for contact tracing and the investigation of local outbreaks.* Further details on recording specifics will be provided by the Recovery Team in due course.
- Weddings, baptisms and funerals will all be allowed but in reduced form, so bookings can be taken but inform them of possible changes ahead
- Hall/church use by other bodies needs to be considered, including other churches. If at all possible (other than Foodbank or service ministry), give your own worship the priority on first use of your building.

### 3. Occasional offices

*Baptisms: person limit depends on liturgical setting*

Book them in but wait for CofE advice in full for the nature of the service in terms of numbers etc.

*Funerals: 30-person limit*

Current guidelines apply but watch for the full CofE update.

*Weddings: 30-person limit*

Public worship, as outlined in Government Guidance, from 4 July is in our Registrar's opinion sufficient for the legal calling of Banns. However, if you opt to proceed with Banns, you must ensure any other place where they are required to be read will do so. Parishes may restart public worship from 5 July but are not required by law to do so. If there is any doubt, please continue to use the Common Licence under our existing arrangements.

**It is imperative that incumbents and church leaders also read the Recovery Group's guidance paper in full, from which these key points have been clarified for the CofEB context.**

The National CofE digital team are working hard to have the paper available on their website within the next 24 hours. [Click here.](#)

The new guidance for places of worship issued by Her Majesty's Government can be found on the [Gov.uk website.](#)

As you work things out locally, be assured of our prayers and support.

***The Venerable Jenny Tomlinson, Archdeacon of Birmingham***  
***The Venerable Simon Heathfield, Archdeacon of Aston***