

Ideas and reflections from officers at Church House, Daresbury to help churches and schools respond to the coronavirus crisis.



Being a House of Prayer

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Who or what is a House of Prayer? It is ourselves as individual people* and as the Church** who are the temple of the Holy Spirit and living stones of a spiritual house. Our public places of worship, (church buildings), however, have until recently created a space set apart to help facilitate this, (be a conduit for), times when we gather together for worship, offer welcome, hospitality and support, and provide a reflective sacred space for individuals and group visitors.

What will be the impact of this sudden change to the places and spaces where we usually gather? How much do our places reflect, and how much do they shape, what 'church' means? What do we sense God is revealing to us during this season? May I encourage you to seek God and ask him to show you how he sees your places and spaces. This is a time to seek his will for what to expand into, so more people may know the life-transforming love of God, either for the first time or in a deeper way.

There are times in life when we are forced to change, because our circumstances change beyond our control. We are now in a rare moment when all of us are experiencing this at the same time. Change that is unchosen and abrupt may feel unsettling, disorientating, at times overwhelming, wondering where it will all end; yet also wondering what new things will be forged in the fire of tribulation. It is that powerful reality of seeing and being hope and light in the darkness; bitter-sweet moments that reveal the essence of life – to whole-heartedly love God and to love one another.

As you ever-more become a House of Prayer in your own home and online, and put this into action through loving service where possible, this is a time to thank the LORD for calling us back to the simplicity, honesty, dependency and humility of coming before him in prayer, so we may draw closer to God the Father through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Your church building also continues to have a role to play! Find out how below.

*1 Corinthians 6:19-20 and **1 Peter 2:5

Can your church building still be a blessing and witness at this time?

Yes! Here are some thoughts on how your church building can be a blessing, even when the doors are shut.

If your church building or church hall is permitted to open for providing essential community provision, all the better.

Some suggestions will be more relevant than others, depending on your context. Do send in your ideas too.

1. **Use the noticeboard for the church building and church hall.** Don't leave it empty!
Depending on your location, people may be passing by for their essential shopping or their once-a-day exercise, subject to government guidance permitting this. Therefore:
 - a) Remove any 'temporary' signs of events, activities and additional services that will no longer take place
 - b) Display the official Church of England poster informing people of key information. The template is available here, and also downloaded at <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>
Please also see Security section.
 - c) Add a 'prayer poster' to explain the church is still here to pray for people. Either design yourself or use from such companies as Christian Publishing Organisation (CPO), see 'Coronavirus Resources For Churches': <https://www.cpo.org.uk/catalogue.aspx?cat=80329>
 - d) Add a scripture poster, and refresh it every so often so there is a visible sign of something changing. Available from various companies; one example is <https://www.cpo.org.uk/catalogue.aspx?cat=1070>
 - e) Add a weblink for people to find out who Jesus is, so people have an opportunity to choose to explore their own faith journey. Here is one example that has a useful short video and a prayer to come to faith; there are many others: <https://www.lookingforgod.com/>

2. **Could a prayer poster be displayed in your churchyard?**
3. **Could a prayer poster be displayed in your local shop and, if permitted, Health Centre?** Take the message to where people are still going.
4. **Maintain a visible presence of the liturgical season.** For example, display Easter scripture posters on the church building and church hall noticeboards. In the space where you usually display special service times and events, you may like to take the opportunity to more fully explain what Easter means.
5. **Prayer walk, security walk, and keep-fit walk in one!** Why not encourage members of your parish who are able to, to take a walking route that includes a circuit round your church building and hall? You may like to confidentially share typical times, not to rigidly keep to but to pace it out during the day. Also be mindful of your own security and consider whether it is feasible or desirable to walk with another member of your household. Pray for your parish during these walks. Notice things you haven't noticed before. Invite God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit to join you and speak to you; spending time with the Holy Trinity is the only safe way to gather right now!

All the above are subject to adhering to government guidance.

Managing temporarily closed or less frequently open church buildings and halls

Please take time to read and act upon the guidance below. If you have concerns or need further advice, please contact your insurer or Church House as appropriate.

1. Ecclesiastical Insurance guidance

Managing risk <https://www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/unoccupied-properties-during-covid-19/church/>

Insurance cover <https://www.ecclesiastical.com/latest-news/coronavirus-temporary-cover-enhancements/>

2. Church Buildings Council (CBC) guidance

The Church Buildings Council at the Church of England has recently issued new guidance about managing temporarily closed buildings. You can read about it here: <https://www.chester.anglican.org/news/securing-and-caring-for-your-church-buildings-.php>

3. Security sign

In addition to displaying the Church of England official poster, you may also like to add a sign to say something in the vein of 'This church building/hall is regularly monitored for safety and security purposes to ensure it remains a blessing for all of us in this community. To report anything of concern, please call...'

Regular monitoring may include, for example, encouraging a number of people to take their daily exercise walking past the church, one person visiting for essential checks once a week, asking neighbours to keep an eye on it (with contact details to report anything and also share how the church can support them), and/or CCTV.