



## **A partial return to our church buildings**

12 May 2020

At the present time our church buildings remain closed to the general public, in line with government requirements. This is likely to be the case for this next phase of recovery from Coronavirus in England - and until the beginning of July 2020 at the very earliest.

However, if it is appropriate in your context, parishes may now decide, with certain guidance and practices in place, to enable ONE designated person to enter your church building, for the following purposes:

- Praying the Daily Office
- Live streaming or pre-recording worship
- Celebrating the Eucharist on behalf of the community (if the designated person is a priest)
- Ringing one bell from the ground floor to announce prayers being said
- Checking the fabric of the building in the course of these duties

We would encourage PCCs and Incumbents to consult with one another on this decision - and we suggest some questions on Page 3 of this document that could help you in discerning locally whether this is something that the church and ministers wish to do, and whether you feel that this would be the best way to express your church's ministry in this next phase of our nation's life. It is absolutely fine if you decide that you do not wish to re-enter your building at this stage - no church or minister must feel any compulsion to do so.

In making this decision, please also remember that the virus has not changed - it remains highly contagious and, although many are mildly affected by it, others can become very seriously ill. Please do not take any unnecessary risks, either with your own health or with the health of others. The risk of infection from surfaces (including door handles) is very high and the disease can remain on surfaces for 72 hours.





This is not a role that can be shared - any one church should only be accessed by the same person, although they may be accompanied by members of their household, if necessary. The PCC need to be clear about who is (and who isn't) the designated person for each church building. This may be a lay or ordained person, depending on what makes sense to you locally and why they are entering the building.

If you wish to allow a designated person to enter the church building at this time, to help you to ensure that the environment is kept as safe as possible, please ensure that you use the checklist provided on Pages 4 and 5 of this document, and that you read the more detailed guidance that begins on Page 6.

In all of this, please be assured of our prayers and support for you. While we cannot make these decisions on your behalf, we are committed to ensuring that you have all the help and advice you need to discern what God is calling you to do locally - please do get in touch with your Archdeacon if you need anything more.

Coronavirus is a terrible disease that has caused a great deal of harm and loss, both in our communities and around the world. We grieve with all those who are suffering at this time, and we are deeply grateful for the creative and compassionate ways in which our churches are responding to local need - thank you to each of you for your role in this mission,

*The Episcopal  
Staff Team*

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## Questions to consider

In discerning whether or not to allow one person to enter each church building, we would encourage PCCs, incumbents and lay ministers to prayerfully discuss the following questions. These are not exhaustive - and you may have many more - but we hope they will help you to consider what will make most sense in your context and what will best serve your mission and ministry.

- **What have we learned in this period of being away from our church building? What would we like to retain? What should we let go of?**
- **How do those who may be designated to enter the building(s) feel about this? What may be the risks and advantages for them? How will they be able to keep themselves safe?**
- **How can we best ensure the safety and security of our building(s)?**
- **How can we continue to ensure that our worship is inclusive and community-focused?**
- **What may God be saying to our church at this time?**





## Checklist: Part 1

### **Before using your church building for private prayer, recording worship or live-streaming:**

- If your building has been completely closed for the lockdown period open the doors and any openable windows to air it out.
- Check the building for cleanliness. If there are bat droppings or other animal waste be sure not to touch or go near it until proper cleaning can be arranged.
- If you are going to use the water system or toilets, flush all toilets and run the water from all taps and other hot and cold water-outlets for at least five minutes to ensure the water system has been thoroughly flushed through to reduce the risk of legionella and Weil's disease. If you have any concerns seek appropriate professional help/advice.
- If heating or electrical systems have been switched off then consider if you need to turn them back on, and ensure you know how to do so.
- Take the chance to do a basic visual check of general maintenance items such as electrical systems, emergency lighting and other lighting, fire alarm systems, heating systems, fridges, security monitoring and access systems, water systems and toilets.
- Remove water from holy water stoups.





## Checklist: Part 2

### To use the building safely:

- If services are being live-streamed or recorded, filming should be done either with a fixed camera or by a member of the priest's or lay minister's household.
- Ringing a bell and/or raising of a flag should only be done if access is on ground level.
- If you are using candles then take care not to light them immediately after using hand sanitiser gel, especially if this has alcohol in it.
- If you are not the only person accessing the building (for example, building contractors) then make sure there is a rota in place, with a written record of who has been in.
- Ensure hand sanitiser and/or hand washing facilities are easily available near every entrance.
- Do not distribute Bibles, books, magazines etc from the church.
- If toilets or washing facilities are available, make sure that there are disposable paper towels and that there is plenty of liquid soap.
- After use, surfaces you have touched should be cleaned in line with Public Health England guidance.
- Ensure you close any windows and lock the church when you leave.

These checklists have been taken from the national Church Buildings Council advice, [which can be found online here](#).

**On the following pages you will find more detailed advice on the points above, in case you find it helpful.**





## Detailed guidance from the House of Bishops

### What do I need to consider when re-entering a building that has been closed?

All buildings are different, and you will know your buildings best, but there are some general areas to be aware of:

- If your building has been closed completely for the lockdown period, then it is recommended to leave the doors and any easily opened windows open for at least an hour before spending any time in it. There is a risk of excessive dust and mould spores having gathered during closure, which could potentially be a health hazard. You will need to wait outside the church whilst airing it out, both for your own safety and to ensure that nobody else accesses it.
- If [our guidance](#) was followed then electrical systems may have been turned off. If you did not close the church down yourself, ensure you know how to re-start these systems if they are needed.
- Water systems in the church building will have been dormant for some weeks. There is a risk of bacterial infection in the systems (e.g. leptospirosis (Weil's disease) or legionella) having accumulated in this time. We recommend not using water from the church building until a risk assessment of your systems has been carried out. Detailed guidance on this has been provided by the [Health and Safety Executive](#) and is included in our general guidance for parishes on re-opening and allowing access for professional contractors.
- Consider whether the heating needs to be turned on now that we are entering the summer months. If turning it on, cautious and gentle use of heating should be adopted to slowly bring air temperatures up to the required levels. Sudden increases in heat (with consequent decreases in relative humidity) should be avoided, to reduce the risk of damage to sensitive fabric and furnishings.
- If your church is known to have bats, then hopefully our guidance on covering surfaces will have been taken. Ideally a church building with bats that affect worship areas will not be open to anyone until it has had a thorough clean, which will have to wait until multiple people are able to safely enter, and





appropriate PPE has been sourced. However, if you do wish to offer prayer from a building affected by bats then avoid spending prolonged amounts of time in areas with high concentrations of droppings. If you find a dead or grounded bat please do not pick it up. The Bat Helpline can provide advice on 0345 1300 228.

### **What precautions should I take when using the building to ensure my own safety and the safety of anyone else accessing the building?**

- Do not share Bibles, prayer books etc. This includes lending libraries, Parish Magazines etc. Each person should bring their own books, order of service and take them home with them.
- If toilets or washing facilities are available, make sure that there are disposable paper towels and that there is plenty of liquid soap. Be aware of concerns over legionella etc. before using these facilities or making them available to others. Ensure these facilities are cleaned regularly, particularly commonly touched areas.
- If you are using candles then take care not to light them immediately after using hand sanitiser gel, especially if this has alcohol in it. Wait a full minute after applying gel, then wipe your hands with a disposable tissue. Candles and matches/lighters should be either removed from the building when you leave, or securely locked away – this is to reduce the risk of someone finding materials to start a fire if they were to break in. Candlesticks, especially if made of valuable metals, should also be locked away.
- Remove holy water from stoups.
- Surfaces and door fixtures, light switches etc. must be frequently sanitised in line with Public Health England guidelines, and [Historic England guidance for cleaning of historic and delicate surfaces](#).

### **Can multiple people now enter the building so long as they do so one at a time?**

Please be aware that if someone with coronavirus has been in a building it may contain infection for 72 hours afterwards unless cleaning is carried out[1]. This means in most cases multiple people are discouraged from accessing the space,





even if this is done one at a time. If your church is already being accessed by other people undertaking essential work, ensure that there is a shared calendar so that multiple people being in the space at one time can be avoided.

In cathedrals and larger churches there may be scope for multiple clergy to offer prayer on different days. This sort of rota system should only be used if each person can use a different space which does not need to be accessed by others, such as a chapel. These different spaces should be clearly labelled with the name of the person authorised to use them.

If multiple people are to access a building, even one at a time, then there should ideally be clearly marked areas for each; perhaps the chancel for offering prayer and another route for someone entering for building checks or necessary maintenance. If this is not possible then a risk assessment must be undertaken and written down, and all individuals entering the building must be warned of the risks.

[1] [World Health Organisation, accessed 6th May 2020](#)

### **Should we keep a record of who goes in the building and when?**

Yes. This needs to be done with proper regard for the risk of transmission. A supply of hand sanitiser should be kept with the record near the main entrance to the church. Ask people to bring their own pen to use. A record of who is in the building and when, will reduce the risk of infection spreading if more than one person has a reason to access the building. It will also be invaluable if there is an incident at the church as it will be clear who was the last person known to have been in the building.

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