

## COVID-19 Advice for clergy conducting weddings

Issue Date	Version	Issued by
3 <sup>rd</sup> June 2020	2	The House of Bishops Recovery Group

*The Recovery Group has been set up to support the Church of England as government guidance changes through the COVID-19 pandemic. This document has been prepared with information available by the issue date and is for planning purposes only until present restrictions are lifted. It will be kept under review and updated as the situation develops, with each update issued as a new version. The current version will always be available to download from the Church of England website via the [Coronavirus FAQs page](#).*

*This document should be read in conjunction with '[Access to church buildings during lockdown: advice for incumbents](#)'.*

Many couples will be looking forward to getting married in church when weddings in church buildings are possible once more. At the same time, they might be concerned about what type of service they will be able to have given on-going restrictions. Others will be trying to rearrange weddings that had to be postponed.

Considerations have been made to make weddings as joyful and fulfilling an experience as possible while continuing to follow best public health practice and government guidance.

### **Who can attend the service?**

Government restrictions are likely to limit the number who can attend and it might not be possible to accommodate this number in some smaller churches while adhering to physical distancing requirements.

If this is the case, the limitation on numbers might be very difficult to convey sensitively to couples, but it is important that clergy do not feel pressured into making exceptions. Couples should be encouraged to focus on the significance of the Vows and on other ways in which they can make the moment as memorable as possible including live streaming of the service, some might choose not to go ahead with their wedding until all their guests can be invited to attend.

If 'shielded' or self-isolating non-symptomatic family members wish to be present, the couple should be asked to let other guests know that this will be the case so that they take extra care with physical distancing.

On a legal point: if anyone wishes to lodge an objection to the wedding, they are legally entitled to do so, and provision must be made to enable them to make their point while observing physical distancing. While this is likely to be a very rare event, it emphasises the importance of having some control over access to the building during the service.

### **What special provisions should I make during the service?**

Apart from the bride and groom physical distance should be observed as far as possible. Please note that the priest does not have to touch the rings to bless them, nor does he or she have to touch the couple's hands as part of a prayer or blessing.

No additional people should be required to attend the service, such as an organist, vergers or sound system operator, but they may do so at their discretion as long as they maintain physical distancing and are included in the numbers attending.

Hymns and singing are not advised as this may encourage droplet and aerosol spread. Recorded music should be encouraged as the next best option.

Good public health hygiene should be observed throughout with hand sanitizers available at the door. If the church is to be used again within 72 hours it should be cleaned after the service following the guidelines [here](#).

### **What about signing the register?**

All those signing the register should sanitize their hands before signing, complete all the signatures necessary for them and then sanitize them again. Apart from the bride and groom, all those signing should maintain physical distancing if practicable and, where available, individual pens for each signatory can be used.

### **What about legal aspects of weddings?**

The following should cover most situations, but if in doubt, please consult your surrogate or the diocesan registrar:

- Please make sure that you know where you stand on the banns being read – and on the necessity for attendance to establish a connection if this was required. A Common Licence or a Special Licence may be appropriate in some cases, or a postponement of the wedding for others.
- If a couple want to cancel their wedding, the statutory fees will not be payable and must be refunded in full if already paid. Alternatively, they might wish to postpone their wedding to a mutually convenient date. If issues arise with regard to repayments including deposits, the DBF portion of the statutory fees and any other payments made prior for the marriage, advice should be sought from the diocesan registrar.
- You might wish to suggest that if the wedding goes ahead with restricted numbers, there could be a blessing in the year ahead with all guests present.

### **What is the advice about booking future weddings?**

Given the on-going uncertainties about how COVID19 will progress during the coming months it would be prudent to ensure that when booking weddings for later in 2020 or 2021 couples are advised that there may still be a possibility that their wedding may not be able to take place or that it may be subject to restrictions which are imposed at some future time. It is therefore recommended that you write to or email the couple to make clear that while we hope the wedding can proceed and will do all we can to make sure the day goes as planned we are not in control of the

circumstances. Couples may wish to postpone their weddings and indeed the church may have to cancel dates that have been booked. In these circumstances the provision of extras such as music and bell ringing can only be provisional and couples may wish to consider taking out insurance.

*I very much hope that your wedding booked for [ ] will be able to proceed, but none of us know what the future might bring and therefore you do need to be prepared for the fact that it might be necessary due to government regulations or guidelines for us to cancel your wedding or postpone it.*

*It might be the case that your wedding can proceed, but that restrictions on the numbers who can attend may be imposed. We may find that we cannot conduct the wedding service that you would like because of controls on singing, bell ringing or social distancing measures. As a consequence you may in those circumstances wish to postpone the wedding yourselves.*

*As a church we have no control over what may happen in the future and we therefore reserve the right to postpone or cancel your wedding should it become necessary to do so. We would of course consult you before doing this.*

*Given the cost of wedding preparations you might want to consider taking out wedding insurance which might help you with the financial ramifications of your wedding being postponed or cancelled.*

END