

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION - YOUR CHURCH AS A FILM LOCATION!

Hosting a film shoot by a movie or TV company can be very beneficial to a church. It can bring the church into the public eye and encourage the public to come and visit. It can also be a useful source of additional income.

However, there are potential pitfalls to avoid, including the risk of inappropriate content, unfavourable publicity, damage to the fabric and furnishings, and other risks such as copyright violation.

To maximise the benefits of filming in a church, and to avoid the risks, careful forethought and planning are essential. These guidelines (adapted from the Diocese of London and Diocese of Blackburn) will assist incumbents, PCCs and churchwardens in deciding whether to agree to filming, and in planning and managing the shoot.

If you have refused permission (for any reason) the organisation may try to suggest they have the right to film as the church is a 'public building'. While access to a church is free for all, permission for professional filming and photography (i.e. more than snapshots) is required.

POINTS TO CONSIDER BEFORE AGREEING TO FILMING PROPOSALS

Format

Is this for a feature film or for a television programme? Will the church be used for just a small clip in a larger production, or is the church itself the main feature?

Audience

Which television channel is this intended for and who is the target audience?

Category

If filming is for TV, will the programme be a drama, a news programme, documentary, a soap opera or sitcom? Or will it be used for advertising, either on the TV or in the cinema? The scale of fees you charge will be determined to some extent by the category.

Content

Any television company has to abide by programme codes which are laid down concerning content. You are quite entitled to ask for clear information on content. A written synopsis would be appropriate. Try to elicit the central message the Director wants to put across, which will drive all editing decisions. What is included, or left out, and how it is arranged, can have a surprising effect on the impression conveyed to the audience.

Story

Ask for a synopsis of the storyline in any drama or sitcom. This will give you an overview of the finished programme and allow you to judge whether it is beneficial or harmful to the church.

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Script

If filming is likely to be lengthy, with a lot of action in or around the church, you may also want to see the actual scripts.

It is important for you to see what is going to be said and in what context. For example, double entendres may flag up the kind of programme for which the material is being used.

Advertising

The name and nature of the product or item to be advertised should be obtained, with a copy of the script or advertising copy.

Location

Will filming be inside or outside the church? If on church premises (in the church or churchyard or other curtilage), the church's permission is needed for anything to be done.

Filming of a church or any other building from outside the site boundaries requires no permission. Pictures of buildings are not subject to copyright either.

Time

Ask how long the church is required for. Broadly speaking, a news item should not take more than half an hour. A feature film or drama will take a lot longer.

Church services

It often happens that news crews or documentary-makers wish to film a service, for example a baptism or marriage, for a package they are putting together. They will probably only use it for background.

In the case of a baptism or marriage you clearly need the permission of those involved. A film crew will often offer copies of the film in lieu of fees for the couple. The PCC is still entitled to a fee.

For any service – Songs of Praise, for example – you need to agree what is to be filmed and the camera positions, so that the congregation is not distracted from worship. The service will have to start early, allowing time for rehearsal of congregational singing.

Make sure the above points are covered in the contract.

Facilities

Bear in mind the difference between a small documentary and a major film job. Does the production company need to use other facilities such as the hall or car park? Do they wish to film in the churchyard?

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If filming is likely to be lengthy or for drama, make sure to discuss toilets, dressing room areas e.t.c. Use of your hall or car park for such things can be used as bargaining tools when you negotiate the fee.

Layout

What changes are proposed to the way the church is laid out? Does the film company, for example, wish to move some historical piece, such as the altar?

Fabric and furnishings

If fixed items need to be moved you are likely to need a faculty from the Diocesan Advisory Committee Secretary. Minor temporary changes may be able to be authorised by your archdeacon.

Stock footage

Where it would get trickier is if someone was filming for stock footage that could be used in a variety of contexts. After discussions, if you have **any** concerns about the use of stock footage further down the line (i.e. concerns it could be used in a context not suitable for a church setting) the advice is it would be best to just refuse the request to film ... this is simpler than trying to sort it out later!

CONTRACT

Always insist on a contract! This will spare a lot of trouble later. The contracting party for the church should be the PCC. Permission for filming is a matter for the incumbent and PCC, or in an interregnum, the PCC and churchwardens.

Make sure copyrights are clearly defined. Avoid handing over the right to images of church property (please see the 'Location' section above).

If you are looking at a substantial amount of filming, it would be prudent to ask the Diocesan Registrar to look over the contract.

You should also feel free to request to see a copy of the final edited footage before it is used on television or social media etc. You could even make it a prerequisite of granting permission to film and ask them to pledge to do so in writing in their response to you.

Risk

Make sure the Regulatory Reform (Fire Precautions) Order is followed (see 'In Depth Advice'). Both the church and the film company will have a 'Responsible Person' and must carry out their own fire risk assessment.

It is desirable to have a written risk assessment taking account of all equipment, sets, facilities, special effects, e.t.c.

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Insurance

You must insist that the PCC is indemnified and insured against damage or accident. The church insurance policy may not cover such matters.

Ascertain whether the permanent film or TV company will underwrite any risk. If not, either make sure you are covered by the church's own insurance, or else write into the contract that the film company take on its own special insurance for the job. Inform the church's insurers anyway.

Fees

Time and type of programme are the two main factors determining a location fee. The word 'day' is often used. You should be clear what constitutes one day, so you can charge if time is overrun. An extra half an hour might be reasonable, but more should be charged. Filming at night may also confuse matters. Therefore, it may be simpler to charge per hour, and this is done more and more.

Feature films, TV drama and commercials may well command a fee of £500-600 per hour; photo-shoots and magazine or topical features about a third of that, with documentaries and education programmes lying somewhere in-between. Daily news items are unlikely to be subject to any fee, but they have the benefit of drawing attention to the church on prime-time television. You are also likely not to want to charge to broadcast a service. But for commercial contracts you should always think commercially and be prepared to charge the going rate.

Consider an up-front deposit, in addition to pre-payment of up to 50% of the fee. The deposit need not be returnable.

PLANNING THE FILM SHOOT

The main pressure on crews is the time to get in and out. Therefore, pre-planning is essential. They will happily attend recce meetings with key personnel including Director, Location Manager, Set Designer, Production Supervisor, Photo Director, e.t.c. Then the shoot can proceed quickly and smoothly.

The conclusions of the planning process should be written up as a method statement by the film company and submitted to you for your approval.

Access

Think where to park vehicles.

Equipment

Lighting is usually the main item of equipment. Fittings are improving and getting smaller; wiring routes and the size and spread of tripods e.t.c. are the key thing.

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Lighting may be mounted outside, pointing in through windows, in order to simulate daylight, but any effect on the glazing and metal bars must be appraised in advance.

Be prepared to insist on spreaders e.t.c., tennis balls on equipment feet over valuable or fragile floors. Insist on protection to fittings and furnishings in the church which are not actually being filmed. Avoid taping of polythene, cables e.t.c. In particular, be prepared to ban gaffer tape and avoid Blak-tak like the plague! (Blak-tak is used by film crews, it resembles Blu-tak but leaves a much more stubborn residue).

Special effects

Trial any special effects on a small scale first, especially if fog machines e.t.c. are involved. Naked flames should be banned.

ON AND AFTER THE SHOOT

Supervision

It is advisable to ensure someone is present during the filming. If it is a day-long shoot, or longer, two people may be needed. They need to know what agreements - the contract and the rules - you have made with those filming.

Inspections

Before starting, carry out a walk-round inspection of condition with, say, the Assistant Director. Take lots of digital photos.

Inspect for any damage again immediately on conclusion, and report any issues within hours not days. The company filming may disband very quickly after delivering to whomever commissioned it!

Records

Make detailed notes for future reference. Film companies are likely to return to a good site, and past experience will be invaluable.