



Background

The cost of living crisis, the rise in the cost of energy to heat church buildings, and environmental concerns have made some congregations seek permission to worship elsewhere in the coldest winter months.

The Church of England Environment programme and ChurchCare have produced guidance with practical suggestions to help parishes save energy and money. See [Practical Suggestions to help Parishes save Energy and Money](#). Before any decision to move worship elsewhere is contemplated, the advice in this document should be followed.

Moving non-worship activities outside the church building to a venue easier or less costly to heat can be decided locally by a parish, but is subject to the law on parish worship, and may require the agreement of the bishop (see below).

There are legal, pastoral, missional and reputational issues to moving worship elsewhere so it is a decision that requires careful consideration. Depending on the local situation these may be weighted differently but, whatever the decision, it will have an impact on the perception of the church and its mission in its community.

If there is a smaller area of the church that is heatable that would serve the purpose, consider using this as a first option. The next option is livestreaming worship, so more vulnerable congregants can join from elsewhere.

Moving either some or all worship to another building should be a last option after others are considered. This may be justified by the pastoral and missional, as well as stewardship, benefits of such a move. Any permission to relocate worship will ideally have a timescale for a return to the church, with some monitoring and support over the return to church. A building not used for worship can still be left open to visitors and should be visited regularly – say weekly – to check all is well. The response to churches being closed during Covid has reminded us of the pastoral benefit of the church being open.

If an occasional office, major festival or regular well-attended event that normally happens in the church falls when worship is taking place elsewhere it is almost certainly appropriate to go to church for it as usual (e.g. Advent and Christmas).

The law

You need to consider the requirements of [Canon B11](#), which requires morning and evening prayer to be said or sung in at least one church in each benefice on all Sundays and other principal Feast Days. Those requirements can be dispensed with only in accordance with the provisions of [Canon B14A](#), which authorises such dispensation on an occasional basis as authorised by the minister who has the cure of souls and the PCC of each parish in the benefice acting jointly.

Dispensation on a regular basis requires the authorisation of the bishop. If you are considering this, you should speak to your diocesan office, who will advise whether formal dispensation is required in your case.

Holy Communion must be celebrated in at least one church in each benefice, or, where benefices are held in plurality, in at least one church in at least one of those benefices at least on all Sundays and on principal feast days (Canon 14), although this can also be dispensed with under Canon B14. No minister may celebrate Holy Communion elsewhere than in a consecrated building within their cure or other licensed building, unless they have permission from the bishop of the diocese, or in the case of administering at home to a person who is sick or dying.

Communicating your decision

The community should be kept up to date with where to attend worship, in person, online or both. The information should be available where it is easy found and in more than one format, for example a notice at the church as well as online. Also, if worship is not taking place in the church to make clear whether the building will still be open for independent visits.

Maintaining your building when it is closed

If you do make the difficult decision to close your church during winter, please ensure the following practical steps are taken:

- That you have consulted your insurer, and are following any requirements they have.
- Check that your plans do not put you in breach of any grant requirements which specify the building must be open a certain amount; you may be able to discuss your plans with the funder and gain their permission.
- Some churches can be left unheated; they were built before a time of central heating and will do fine. This is generally true for electrically heated churches, with no water pipes.
- Most churches will need to be left in 'frost protection mode' when empty. Take care that thermostats have the frost setting turned on and correctly set. (See our guidance on frost protection, *Managing the Frost Protection of your Church During Closure*.)
- That someone will enter the building at least weekly to check for any break-ins, leaks, or other issues. Could this visit be combined with an act of worship?
- Consider if any items normally kept in the building need to be temporarily kept elsewhere.
- If there is an organ to confirm with the organ tuner how regularly it should be played while the church is closed.

This guidance is issued by the Church Buildings Council pursuant to its powers under section 55(1)(d) of the Dioceses, Mission and Pastoral Measure 2007. As it is statutory guidance, it must be considered with great care. The standards of good practice set out in the guidance should not be departed from unless the departure is justified by reasons that are spelled out clearly, logically and convincingly. Issued by the Cathedral and Church Buildings Division, October 2022. © Church Commissioners

