

Coronavirus Risk Assessment for Opening Baptist Christchurch Baptist Church

The Baptist Union of Great Britain has developed this risk assessment template working with health and safety consultants from Ellis Whittam to assist churches as they plan for re-opening their premises. Prior to completing this risk assessment, Christchurch Baptist Church first read the Baptist Union of Great Britain's leaflet [Coronavirus: Guidance For Reopening Church Buildings](#) and reviewed the [government guidance and regulations relating to churches re-opening](#).

This risk assessment enables the Trustees of Christchurch Baptist Church to consider the specific risks relating to Coronavirus in opening it's premises. It is considered as a supplement to a general risk assessment of the premises.

This risk assessment contains some generic risks, and potential control measures plus the addition of some risk or control measures that are specific to Christchurch Baptist Church's building and circumstances.

This document should be a living document and subject to regular review (1) after the first few times of gathering again and (2) after any change in government regulations or guidance, ensuring that the assessment of risks remains appropriate and the control measures are appropriate and are functioning as intended.

Date of issue: 23 July 2020

Risk Assessment Matrix

The following tables give a framework for assessing the risks identified, with some guidance to assist you with what a score might mean. The scoring system deliberately places additional emphasis on risks with the most severe consequences but are not very likely over those that are likely but have limited consequence. This aligns with the most recent best practice in assessment and management of risks. Please note that this framework is a generic one for evaluating risks and not specific to Coronavirus.

During the Coronavirus pandemic it is likely that most risks, before controls are implemented, will be scored as 5 (high probability) and 5 (high severity) as the likelihood of a case being observed within 12 months is significant and the consequences are potentially death of an individual or multiple individuals. This goes to emphasise the importance of taking control measures seriously in order to reduce the likelihood and severity of the risk as far as possible.

It is unlikely that the severity score will reduce until such time as there are effective treatments or a vaccine. The control measures you put in place will mostly impact upon the likelihood of occurrence, but you may conclude their impact is sufficient to reduce it below a rating of 5. This does not mean your control measures are not of value because the scoring bands are fairly broad. For example, reducing the likely rate of occurrence from once a week to once every 50 weeks would be a factor of 50 improvement in likelihood but still have a score of 5.

Likelihood / Probability
5. Likely to occur at least once in any 12-month period
4. Likely to occur at least once in a 3-year period
3. Likely to occur at least once in a 10-year period
2. Likely to occur at least once in a 50-year period
1. Unlikely in a 50-year period

Severity / Significance / Consequence
5. Expected to result in church closure or significant harm to multiple individuals, death of an individual

LIKELIHOOD / PROBABILITY		RISK / PRIORITY INDICATOR MATRIX				
		1	2	3	4	5
5	7	14	21	28	35	
4	6	12	18	24	30	
3	5	10	15	20	25	
2	4	8	12	16	20	
1	3	6	9	12	15	
		SEVERITY / SIGNIFICANCE / CONSEQUENCE				
		1	2	3	4	5

Score = (Severity x Likelihood) + (2 x Severity)
 (this formula places additional emphasis on high severity issues)

4. Material threat to continued existence of church, or significant harm to single individual
3. Substantial adaptation required to ongoing operations
2. Minor adaptation required to ongoing operations
1. Inconvenience to ongoing operations

Summary		Recommended timeframe for implementing any identified control measures
20+	High	Immediate / within days
15-19	Medium	Within weeks
1-15	Low	Whenever viable to do so

Risk: Coronavirus entering the premises and potentially infecting users of the building					
Persons at risk Ministers, leaders, members, attendees, contractors, cleaners					
Risk Rating before control measures	Likelihood	5	Risk Rating after control measures	Likelihood	3
	Severity	5		Severity	5
	Overall Risk	35		Overall Risk	25

Control Measures	Control in place (Y/N)	Person Responsible	Comments
1. Ask everyone symptomatic not to attend	Y	CJB/JD	To be included in all communication on re-opening. See Appendix 4 Privacy Statement – Part of Booking System on ChurchSuite
2. All attendees asked to follow government guidance on self-isolation after symptoms and/or positive test/contact tracing/returning from foreign travel	Y	CJB/JD	To be included in all communication on re-opening & booking system
3. Verbal symptom checks on entry	Y	CJB/KB	Action Plan for Welcomer. laminated symptom/physical distancing poster available and all attendees to be asked on arrival
4. Ask vulnerable not to attend in person	Y	CJB	To be included in all communication on re-opening. Ask clinically vulnerable and those who are shielding not to attend in person without first consulting their doctor.
5. Everyone to use hand sanitiser on entry to the building	Y	Welcomer	Action Plan for Welcomer – Hand sanitiser (2) available on table in foyer in addition to wall mounted dispensers
6. Action Plan in place in case, and communicated to leaders, in the event of Coronavirus case known to enter premises	Y	CJB/Trustees	Appendix 5 Emergency Action Plan to be adopted and put into action in the event that someone entering the church displays symptoms of Coronavirus.

Control Measures	Control in place (Y/N)	Person Responsible	Comments
7. Undertake the Ellis Whittam's 'Pre-Event Checklist' (Appendix 2 of Guidance on Re-opening churches).	Y	Service Facilitator/JD	Checklist to be used in conjunction with the most up-to-date government guidance, prior to the event day/service starting and between services.
8. Display suitable posters to ask people with symptoms not to enter the building (see our Coronavirus poster library)	Y	JD	Posters displayed on front doors and in foyer
9. Social distancing measures to be maintained where possible, including the arrival and departure of the venue.	Y	Welcomer	Management of attendees arriving and exiting the premises. All entrances to be cleared of unnecessary paperwork, furniture etc.
10. All contractors to complete the 'Contractor Checklist' (Appendix 6 of Guidance on Re-opening churches).	Y	JD	Appendix 6 – Contractor Checklist to be available and completed prior to contractor starting work on church premises.
11. Use of technical equipment	Y	Duty Technicians	All surfaces to be cleaned with sanitiser wipe prior to and after an event. Hand sanitiser to be available on sound/multi-media desks. Small, lined foot pedal bin to be available for disposal of used wipes

Risk: Transmission of Coronavirus to an individual direct from infected person					
Persons at risk Ministers, leaders, members, attendees, contractors, cleaners					
Risk Rating before control measures	Likelihood	5	Risk Rating after control measures	Likelihood	3
	Severity	5		Severity	5
	Overall Risk	35		Overall Risk	25

Control Measures	Control in place (Y/N)	Person Responsible	Comments
1. Suitable social distancing policy in place (2m or "1m plus mitigations")	Y	Trustees/Facilitator	Policy agreed on 30 th June 2020 by Trustees – 2m distancing where possible with mandatory (11yrs+) face coverings, unless medically/well-being exempt. Clear social distancing signage on floors. Planned layout corresponding to number booked into service and facilitors putting 'X' on chairs between households. Policy communicated prior to re-opening
2. No physical contact between persons from different households/bubbles	Y	Attendees	Covered in communication and signage
3. All attendees required to wear a face covering	Y	Welcomer/Facilitator Attendee	Policy that face coverings are mandatory unless exempt in accordance with H.M. Government guidelines. Communication on how to use masks safely and disposable face coverings available
4. One-way system of flow through building to avoid pinch points	Y	Caretaker	Clear one way system to be marked with arrows on the floor and signs on doors (Exit/Entrance)
5. Areas marked out of bounds where appropriate	Y	Caretaker	Signage and plastic chains

Control Measures	Control in place (Y/N)	Person Responsible	Comments
6. Seating arrangements adapted for social distancing	Y	Caretaker	
7. Capacity monitored and entry stopped when capacity reached	Y	Booking System & Facilitator	
8. No singing during services	Y	CJB/Service Leader	
9. Signage in place to remind people of safe practices	Y	JD	
10. Any changes to entrances, exits and queues will take into account reasonable adjustments to accommodate those who need them, such as worshippers with physical disabilities.	Y	Facilitator and/or Welcomer	Those with physical disabilities taken in through exit door by service facilitator or welcomer to ensure clear passage into the church
11. Visitors instructed not to gather in groups, except with members of their own household, inside or outside the building.	Y	CJB/JD	Communication and Booking System
12. All individuals who fall into the vulnerable, clinically vulnerable and clinically extremely vulnerable categories will be assessed and provisions made accordingly. Those attending should only do so under the advice of their doctor.	Y	CJB/JD	Communication and Booking System – Advance notice of specific need

Risk: Transmission of Coronavirus to an individual via a contaminated surface/item (excluding toilet facilities)					
Persons at risk Ministers, leaders, members, attendees, contractors, cleaners					
Risk Rating before control measures	Likelihood	5	Risk Rating after control measures	Likelihood	3
	Severity	5		Severity	5
	Overall Risk	35		Overall Risk	25

Control Measures	Control in place (Y/N)	Person Responsible	Comments
1. Doors kept open where possible to reduce contact with door handles (may not be appropriate for fire safety or to maintain suitable temperature)	Y	Facilitator	All doors to remain open when people are arriving or leaving. Shut or opened by service facilitator or welcomer as necessary or appropriate.
2. Windows to be opened where possible to allow a free flow of air. Electric fans should not be used to cool the air.	Y	Caretaker or Service Facilitator	
3. Regular cleaning of surfaces likely to be touched regularly with appropriate sanitiser spray.	Y	Caretaker or Service Facilitator	
4. No passing of collection plate/bag and collection not counted for 72 hours after service unless gloves used.	Y	Finance	All encouraged to give electronically or by Standing Order/Direct Debit. Cash donations discouraged but a single collection box to be available. Gloves to be used when counting any cash donations and disposed of safely.
5. Toilets supplied with disposal hand towels or dryers (not a reusable linen towel), hand sanitiser. Limit to 1 person per toilet unit (even if it has multiple cubicles), posters etc.	Y	Caretaker or Service Facilitator	Use of toilets discouraged – emergency use only. Signage advising the limit to 1 person per toilet unit. Disposable hand towels and anti-bac sanitiser spray available in each toilet. Signs advising sanitising of

Control Measures	Control in place (Y/N)	Person Responsible	Comments
			touched surfaces after toilet use. Toilet lid to be closed prior to flushing.
6. Building not used again for 72 hours or building thoroughly deep cleaned between uses	Y	Mark C	Chairs to be changed between services
7. No serving of food and drink items prior to, during or after the service.	Y	Trustees	Those requiring water or food stuff because of a medical condition should bring their own and take any rubbish home with them. Communion will not be served at present. An on-line Communion Service will take place on the first Sunday evening of each month.
8. No distribution of bibles or other books – attendees asked to bring their own and take them away with them.	Y	JD	Communication – encouraged to bring own Bibles and take them home after the service. Notice Sheets to be collected from a container on entry
9. Microphones and other equipment kept to a single individual	Y	Duty Technician	Sanitised prior to and after use
10. Undertake the 'Pre-Event Checklist' (Appendix 2 of Guidance on Re-opening churches) and Cleaning Checklist (Appendix 3 of Guidance on Re-opening churches)	Y	Service Facilitator/JD	Customised 'Pre-Event' Checklist and Cleaning Checklist to be completed prior to any event/service taking place, and between services
11. Keep Register of attendees	Y	JD/Welcomer	Register produced by Church Suite and checked by welcomer will be retained and disposed of securely after 21 days. (Paper copies and electronic records). Privacy statement to be included in Booking Process via Church Suite or verbally if telephone booking. Privacy Statement (Appendix 4) should be included as an addendum to our Privacy Policy

Risk: Transmission of Coronavirus to an individual via toilet facilities					
Persons at risk Ministers, leaders, members, attendees, contractors, cleaners					
Risk Rating before control measures	Likelihood	5	Risk Rating after control measures	Likelihood	3
	Severity	5		Severity	5
	Overall Risk	35		Overall Risk	25

Control Measures	Control in place (Y/N)	Person Responsible	Comments
1. Regular cleaning of surfaces likely to be touched regularly with appropriate sanitiser spray.	Y	Caretaker or Service Facilitator	To be carried out prior to and between services. Gloves must be worn and disposed of safely
2. Toilets supplied with disposal hand towels or dryers (not a reusable linen towel), hand sanitiser. Limit to 1 person per toilet unit (even if it has multiple cubicles), posters etc.	Y	Caretaker/JD User	Disposable hand towels available and hand sanitiser outside toilet area. Signs advising only 1 person per toilet unit, except for parent/carer accompanying child under 11 years of age.
3. Undertake the 'Pre-Event Checklist' (Appendix 2 of Guidance on Re-opening churches) and Cleaning Checklist (Appendix 3 of Guidance on Re-opening churches)	Y	JD/Service Facilitator	Customised checklists available for pre-event and cleaning checks to take place prior to an event and in between services
4. Setting clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets to ensure they are kept clean and social distancing is achieved as much as possible.	Y	CJB/JD	Communication and signage
5. Introducing enhanced cleaning of toilet facilities, provision of more waste facilities, more frequent rubbish collections.	Y	Caretaker	Foot operated bins installed in toilet facilities
6. Ask people to spray clean toilet after use	Y	User	Communication, signage and individual responsibility

Control Measures	Control in place (Y/N)	Person Responsible	Comments
7. Children under 11 to be accompanied to the toilet	Y	Parent/Carer	Children under 11 should only be accompanied to the toilet by their parent/carers in line with our Safeguarding Policy

Risk:					
Persons at risk					
Transmission of Coronavirus to an individual via contaminated waste					
Cleaners and anyone else handling waste					
Risk Rating before control measures	Likelihood	5	Risk Rating after control measures	Likelihood	3
	Severity	5		Severity	5
	Overall Risk	35		Overall Risk	25

Control Measures	Control in place (Y/N)	Person Responsible	Comments
1. Everyone asked to take waste home with them if possible	Y	CJB/Service Leader	Communication
2. All waste to be assumed contaminated and handled appropriately	Y	Caretaker or Service Facilitator	Communication – Disposable gloves to be worn
3. Anyone handling waste to be trained in suitable working practices	Y	Caretaker	Training to be arranged
4. All waste handled with suitable PPE (see cleaning guidance for details).	Y	Caretaker or Service Facilitator	Suitable PPE to be made available
5. All bins lined with disposable liners and all waste double bagged prior to disposal and kept for 72 hours prior to disposal in general waste.	Y	Caretaker/JD	Disposable liners to be fitted to all bins and liner and contents be placed in further bin liner before disposal
6. Lidded bins operated by foot-pedal to be provided	Y	JD	Lidded bins to replace all existing bins
7. Keep records of who has carried out cleaning and the tasks completed	Y	JD	Cleaning Checklist to be completed and held securely for 21 days

Risk: Transmission of Coronavirus to an individual via working in the church building					
Persons at risk Ministers, leaders, members, attendees, contractors, cleaners					
Risk Rating before control measures	Likelihood	5	Risk Rating after control measures	Likelihood	3
	Severity	5		Severity	5
	Overall Risk	35		Overall Risk	25

Control Measures	Control in place (Y/N)	Person Responsible	Comments
1. Use remote working tools to avoid in-person meetings.	Y	CJB	
2. Restrict attendance of individuals at meetings to those absolutely necessary and maintain social distancing throughout.	Y	CJB	
3. Avoid transmission during meetings, for example, by avoiding sharing pens and other objects.	Y	CJB	
4. Provide hand sanitiser in rooms used for meetings.	Y	CJB/JD	
5. Hold meetings outdoors or in well-ventilated rooms whenever possible.	Y	CJB	
6. For areas where regular meetings take place, use floor signage to help people maintain social distancing.	Y	CJB/JD	Door Signage
7. Implement cleaning procedures for goods and items entering the premises.	Y	JD/MC	

Review/Revision Record

Date of Review	Confirmed by	Comments
9 th August, 2020		
16 th August, 2020		
23 rd August, 2020		
30 th August, 2020		

I have read the risk assessment and understand and accept its contents form part of my job role. I will keep myself informed of any changes

Staff Member Name (Print)	Signature	Date



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Appendix 4: COVID-19 Recovery Phase Privacy Statement

Christchurch Baptist Church Privacy Notice for collecting contact information from church attendees.

This privacy notice is an addendum to Christchurch Baptist Church's main privacy statement and notices. The Charity Trustees of Christchurch Baptist Church (as Data Controller) can be contacted by ringing 01202 4877442 or emailing dataprotection@christchurchbaptist.org.uk

We are collecting your name and contact details in order to fulfil our responsibility to provide a safe environment in which those attending Christchurch Baptist Church can pray and worship during this COVID-19 recovery phase. We will only use this information to contact you in the event that we believe you may have come into contact with a suspected case of COVID-19 at Christchurch Baptist Church and it may be necessary to share your details with NHS Test and Trace if they are requested for contact tracing and the investigation of local outbreaks. Your name and contact details will temporarily be securely stored on our ChurchSuite database. They will be retained for a period of 21 days in line with government guidance and then disposed of within the following 7 days.

Please inform Christchurch Baptist Church as soon as possible if you test positive for coronavirus or develop any of the following COVID-19 symptoms:

- A high temperature
- A new, continuous cough
- A loss or change to your sense of smell or taste

Data Protection legislation allows us to process this information as we regard it as being in the church's legitimate interest. The Information Commissioner's Office has published guidance on data handling during the pandemic. Please see www.ico.org.uk/coronavirus.

Appendix 5: COVID-19 Emergency Action Plan

Christchurch Baptist Church
Coronavirus Emergency Action Plan

Should someone attending the church display symptoms of Coronavirus the following steps will be taken:

1. The person will be asked to leave as soon as possible, return home and seek guidance from NHS111 as to self-isolation and testing.
2. Anyone known to have been in close contact with the case advised to wash their hands as soon as possible
3. Any surfaces likely to have been contaminated cleaned in line with cleaning guidance.
4. Consider whether to bring the service to an early conclusion.
5. Consult Health & Safety Executive website as to whether the event should be reported. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/riddor/>.

Coronavirus: Guidance on re-opening Baptist church buildings

The government has announced that from 4 July 2020, Places of Worship in England will be permitted to open again for services, in addition to being open for private prayer which has been permitted since 13 June 2020. This guidance leaflet is intended to help churches work through the practicalities of re-opening. Please note that whilst much of this leaflet is generally applicable it has been written primarily with a view to re-opening churches for worship services.

Churches in **England** should refer to government guidelines (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july>) and ensure that they operate within these as a minimum. These should be regularly reviewed as they are updated frequently. These should be regularly reviewed as they are updated frequently. Please note that reference to "Venue Managers" in the Government guidance should be interpreted by Baptist churches as being the church charity trustees, who carry the legal responsibility for the general control and management of the administration of the church.

For churches in **Wales** the regulations are different and can be found at <https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus>

This document is based on the general national guidance. Some areas of the country are subject to special regulations to control outbreaks of Coronavirus in a local area, which take precedence. For example, on 4 July parts of Leicester were made subject to special guidance. The relevant guidance for this area can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/closing-certain-businesses-and-venues-in-leicester#businesses-and-venues-that-must-remain-closed-to-members-of-the-public>. You should ensure that you follow any local guidance that applies in your area.

These guidance notes are intended to help Baptist Church trustees/leaders/deacons to work through the issues involved in practicalities of re-opening their buildings and interpreting the guidance in a Baptist context. These notes are not a replacement for the Government guidance and should be read in conjunction with that guidance. If you identify any conflict between this document and the government guidance, the government guidance prevails.

A separate leaflet *[Coronavirus: Guidance on Church Worship](#)* has been written to help churches consider the choice on whether and when to re-open and the conduct of those services.

This guidance has been put together with the support of Ellis Whittam as Health & Safety Consultants. They have a specific Coronavirus Advice Hub available at <https://elliswhittam.com/covid-19/>

Queries or comments about this leaflet should be directed to supportservices@baptist.org.uk.

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Section 6: Other Uses of the Church Building

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Appendix 1: Reoccupation Checklist

Appendix 2: Pre-event checklist

Appendix 3: Cleaning checklist.

Appendix 4: Example privacy statement

Appendix 5: Example Emergency Action Plan

Appendix 6: Contractor Checklist

Issue date: 20 July 2020

Revision Record:

Date	Version	Updates Made
30/06/2020	1.0	Initial Publication
30/06/2020	1.1	Link added to Risk Assessment template
30/06/2020	1.2	Link added to Government Guidance on Multi-Use Community facilities
01/07/2020	1.3	Link added to Risk Assessment templates
02/07/2020	1.4	Added Appendix 6 – Contractor Checklist and paragraph about management of contractors into section 2. Added reference to collection of posters. Made clear that face coverings are not required under government guidance where 2m distancing is possible, but still recommended
09/07/2020	1.5	Clarified wording on waste in Section 2. Added paragraph on transport in section 4 Added comment on queuing systems at entrances in section 4 Added paragraphs on Church Members’ Meetings and Prayer Meetings and Bible Studies in section 5. Updated paragraph on children’s’ activities in section 5 to refer to new government and Baptists Together guidance. Updated paragraph on social interactions in section 5 Added additional detail to section on use of church for other activities Reworded of reoccupation checklist item about pest control.
16/07/2020	1.6	Note on local regulations on first page Added text around interpreting scoring of risks in Introduction section. Added text around how this fits with the mission of the church in the Introduction section. Clarification in section 2 paragraph on building controls and ventilation that guidance is referring to fresh air ventilation. Updated text on PPE in section 3 relating to young children and face coverings and face coverings being mandatory in shops from 24 July. New paragraph on use of outside spaces in section 3. Updated text on recording details of attendees to incorporate ICO guidance in section 4 Updated wording on limiting social interactions in section 5. New paragraphs on use of the premises for filming services for broadcast and streaming of services in section 5. Updated wording on other uses of the premises, including external organisations hiring premises in section 6.
20/07/20	1.7	Updated paragraph on use of outdoor spaces in section 3 to reflect clarified guidance on gatherings off church premises.

Introduction: Critical First Steps

Conducting a risk assessment

It is an essential requirement that prior to re-opening your building you carry out a risk assessment of the risks in relation to transmission of Coronavirus. [A template for this risk assessment](#) is provided alongside this guidance. Once completed this must be reviewed by the Church Trustees collectively to ensure that they believe as a group that appropriate measures have been taken to manage the risk prior to re-opening. It is not sufficient for one or two Trustees to carry out this alone on behalf of the Trustees without it being reviewed by the whole group.

It is likely that your evaluation of risks in your risk assessment will give a high score to many Coronavirus risks, and indeed may come out with the top risk score, even with control measures in place. This is almost certainly appropriate because in this time of pandemic there is a meaningful chance that your church activities could result in the death of one of your attendees through contracting coronavirus. It is unlikely that any risks you will have identified in a more general risk assessment would carry this level of risk. This serves to emphasise the seriousness with which you should take your planning around re-opening. Indeed, having conducted your risk assessment you may conclude that the risk remains too high and should simply be avoided by not re-opening at this time

The remainder of this document goes through a set of practical guidance that you might should consider when dealing with the risks identified in the risk assessment. We suggest you read this document prior to conducting your risk assessment and then again once your risk assessment is complete, to decide on the exact actions that you will take.

Implementing your plans

We strongly recommend that your action plans and procedures are put in writing so that you can use them to demonstrate the action you have taken should this ever be queried by your members, a member of the public or statutory authorities. This is also helpful in sharing your plans, thereby ensuring that everyone is aware of what is to be done.

However, having a documented plan is only a first step. Plans must then be communicated in appropriate detail to all who need to know about them, including ministers, leaders, stewards, members, attendees etc. This may include publishing some elements on your website.

Part of this communication will be putting in place appropriate signage. We have put together a [collection of posters](#) churches may find helpful in doing this.

Plans must then be implemented, by ensuring everyone knows what they are responsible for doing and confirming that they have carried out their tasks. Implementation should be monitored so that tasks are completed.

Fantastically documented plans are no use unless they are put into action!

How does this fit with the mission of the church?

This guidance leaflet is primarily about practical issues, but it is important to remember that dealing with practical issues contributes to our mission as the Church. Coronavirus is a serious risk to the health and wellbeing of our communities and therefore it is part of our care for our neighbours us that we take appropriate precautions to reduce risk of infection. We therefore urge churches to take this issue seriously as not doing so could impact upon the reputation of your church and thereby harm your ability to reach your community with the Gospel.

Section 1: Legal Issues Relating to Re-opening

Legal Duties

The main piece of health and safety legislation is the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 ("the Act"). It sets out the general duties which employers have towards employees (including appointed

ministers for the purposes of the act), volunteers and members of the public. This legislation applies when a church is an 'employer' because it has at least one paid employee. In many churches the only 'employee' will be the Minister. Where a church has no employees, it is still good practice for them to provide volunteers and members of the public with the same level of health and safety protection as they would in an employer/employee relationship. The Act says that you must do what is 'reasonably practicable' to ensure the health and safety of all who come, or are likely to come, onto church land or premises, even if they are trespassing; it is clearly appropriate to try to do all that we can to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of other people and would be reckless to do otherwise.

As well as employers, the Act can also apply to any church which has control of premises used as a workplace; this can include, for example, a landlord who retains control of the common parts of a building.

Churches have a legal duty to assess the risks which exist on their premises and to reduce them as far as reasonably practicable. This is the responsibility of the charity trustees. Any risk which cannot be entirely removed should be mitigated until it can be described as a small risk.

During the pandemic there are additional regulations which govern the purposes for which places of worship are able to open. These are the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020. Our guidance is designed to assist your church in preparing to open for these permitted activities.

More general guidance on health and safety can be found in guideline leaflet [L10 Health and Safety and Fire Precautions](#) and our [L18 Coronavirus Legal Issues](#) leaflet contains more information about churches acting as landlords.

Your Liability as a church

Health and safety law is mostly enforced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or the Local Authority and carries criminal sanctions. If you meet your responsibilities under health and safety law, you will also considerably reduce the risk of being found negligent under civil law. Under civil law, if someone has been harmed, injured or made ill through your negligence, they may be able to bring a claim for damages or compensation against you.

More detailed information about issues of liability can be found in guideline leaflet [L16 Legal Liability of Church Members in a Baptist Church](#)

Insurance for legal liability

It is impossible to eliminate all risk in a church context and health and safety incidents can be reduced by undertaking comprehensive risk assessments and putting appropriate safeguards in place. However, in most cases, insurance will be available to a church to provide cover in the eventuality of a claim arising against the church.

Churches which are employers must have employers' liability insurance. This will enable you to meet the cost of compensation for your employees' injuries or illness. It is a criminal offence if you do not have it. Some specialist insurers will treat volunteers as employees for the purpose of insurance.

It is also very important that churches have adequate public liability insurance, which covers your church if it is held legally liable for injury to a member of the public who is harmed or injured whilst on church premises. Public liability claims may take a number of years to emerge, so it is wise to consider an appropriate level of cover with your insurer and to keep all records of your insurance cover indefinitely. Trustee indemnity insurance is often included as an extension to public liability cover and protects the charity trustees for wrongful acts whilst acting in their capacity as trustees which results in a legal liability to pay damages and costs. This will not cover acts of a reckless, dishonest or criminal nature.

(Please note that the types of insurance cover described above are distinct from buildings insurance).

Section 2: Management of Church Buildings

Preparing for re-opening for the first time

After an extended period of closure, it is important that the building is checked over to ensure it is safe in advance of opening to the church staff, volunteers, members, congregation and/or the general public. The building should be thoroughly checked over for any safety hazards using the 'Reoccupation Checklist' template (Appendix 1). You may also need to bring up to date any routine maintenance that may have been paused during lockdown (e.g. servicing of fire extinguishers).

Checks prior to each service, gathering or event

It is important that prior to each event you have in your premises that you check that your church building is in an appropriate state and that you have the team and procedures in place to be able to manage the event safely. We recommend that you develop a pre-event checklist. A template for such a checklist is provided in Appendix 2 to this document

Building controls and ventilation

In some church buildings careful use of the controls on heating, air conditioning and ventilation, where such controls are available, can help to reduce the risk of disease transmission. We recognise that there are a huge range of different church buildings within the Baptist family, ranging from modern premises with sophisticated controls to historic listed buildings with very limited controls.

Generally, fresh air ventilation is helpful to disperse any particles carrying infection, so any ventilation systems should be used to maximise the fresh air ventilation available. The church should open windows and doors frequently to encourage ventilation where possible, bearing in mind any security concerns that might arise and maintaining a comfortable temperature. Where there are few windows and doors that can be opened, you may wish to consider use of fans to increase the flow of fresh air from the outside.

Where a controlled ventilation system is in place these should be set in line with recommendations from heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) engineers or advisers. You are likely to find that the organisation contracted to maintain such systems will be able to advise you. As an example, it is likely to be appropriate to set ventilation systems so that they do not automatically reduce ventilation levels due to lower than normal occupancy levels.

Cleaning practices

It is well understood that good cleaning practices are very important in reducing the transmission of disease and this is the same for Coronavirus. The infection risk from COVID-19 following contamination of a surface decreases over time, and it is not yet clear at what point there is no risk. However, it has been demonstrated that the virus can survive on some surfaces for up to 72 hours. Cleaning is aiming to ensure that where a surface has been contaminated with Coronavirus that such virus is killed so that nobody can be infected from that surface. Fortunately, Coronavirus can be killed using ordinary cleaning products when used in the appropriate cleaning regime.

The government has produced specific Coronavirus guidance on cleaning and decontamination in non-healthcare settings, which can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>. Churches should follow this guidance. Churches with historic buildings, including but not limited to buildings that are formally listed should also refer to the Historic England guidance on cleaning historic surfaces - <https://historicengland.org.uk/coronavirus/historic-places/cleaning-historic-surfaces/>

Use the 'Cleaning Checklist' template (Appendix 3) to record the cleaning schedule and for additional guidance.

Cleaners should wear suitable PPE, which means disposable or washing up gloves and aprons for general cleaning tasks. Hard surfaces are to be cleaned with warm soapy water using a disposable

cloth, paying attention to frequently touched areas and surfaces (e.g. doors, toilets, stair rails). Avoid creating splashes and spray when cleaning.

For any areas of heavy contamination where there may be bodily fluids, such as toilets, will be cleaned as mentioned but with the PPE for protection for the eyes, mouth and nose (e.g. a face shield) as well as gloves and aprons.

All waste, including waste from bins, any PPE, cleaning waste and disposable cloths should be treated as if contaminated with Coronavirus as it is not possible to prove otherwise. Waste should be double bagged and stored securely for 72 hours before being thrown away in general waste.

Generally, it will be sufficient to clean the premises prior to any event. However, in some cases there may be high-touch surfaces that need to be cleaned during the period of opening, such as handrails on stairs, where this is practical. You will need to ensure that someone is designated to do this and has the appropriate materials and PPE to undertake this cleaning.

Dealing with Contractors

To safely operate a church building, you will almost certainly need to use contractors to maintain systems (e.g. boilers, fire alarms) or to do work on the premises. These contractors are potentially at risk of bringing Coronavirus into the building or contracting Coronavirus on site. We recommend using the *Contractor Checklist* (Appendix 6) to ensure that they are taking appropriate precautions to prevent these.

Section 3: General practices for attendees

Social Distancing

From 4 July, the government social distancing requirement changes from 2 metres to “1 metre plus”, which means one metre plus “mitigations” (which are additional measures put in place to reduce the risk of transmission, such as face coverings). 2m social distancing remains the ideal situation and should be observed wherever possible. We particularly recommend that it is observed in seating arrangements because this is where attendees at the church will spend the majority of their time.

Where 2m social distancing is not practical, one metre or more may be used as the social distancing policy but with suitable measures such as face coverings, installing fixed barriers or asking people to face away from each other must be put in place. Churches must consider whether the measures they are able to put in place are sufficient to allow the distancing within their building to be reduced below 2m, and decide what distance is suitable in your circumstances given the mitigations that you are able to put in place. **This distance must be no less than one metre.**

Please note that in an emergency such as a fire or accident, people do not have to stay socially distanced if it would be unsafe. People involved in the provision of assistance to other should pay attention to sanitation measures immediately afterwards, including washing/sanitisation of hands.

Hygiene practices

Good hygiene practices can prevent transmission from an infected person to a non-infected person, either directly or via a surface. You should ask everyone attending the church premises to demonstrate good hygiene practices including:

- All attendees to wash or sanitise hands on entry. We recommend provision of hand sanitiser at all entrances and exits to enable this.
- Management of coughs and sneezes – cover mouth and nose with tissue or sleeve. Dispose of used tissues immediately.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds or more. Use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available.
- Do not touch eyes, nose or mouth.
- Minimising unnecessary hand contact with surfaces such as doorknobs.

- Avoid multiple people handling the same objects, such as pens, books, service sheets, chairs, etc. Where this cannot be avoided, ensure that hands are cleaned prior to handling such objects.
- Individuals should be requested not to touch or kiss anyone outside their household group.

Use of PPE in services

To minimise transmission risk, we recommend asking all attendees to wear a face covering which covers the nose and mouth while in the church building to reduce transmission risk. This is one factor which can help to reduce risk where you cannot operate with social distancing of 2m (see section on Social Distancing). If you are maintaining 2m Social Distancing then a face covering is not essential under the government guidelines, but we suggest it will give attendees enhanced confidence in their safety in the church. This is particularly the case now that face coverings will be mandatory in shops in England from 24 July and it is more likely that their use will be expected by many members of the community in a church building.

You may wish to make disposable face coverings available at the building entrances, however it is important to provide instructions on how to use these correctly to ensure that they do not become a mechanism for disease transmission themselves. Attendees should be encouraged to:

- Wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on, and after removing it.
- When wearing a face covering, avoid touching their face or face covering, as it could contaminate them with germs from their hands.
- Change their face covering if it becomes damp or if they have touched it.
- Continue to wash their hands regularly.
- Continue to practice social distancing wherever possible.

Bins should be provided to allow for disposable face coverings to be disposed of safely.

Face coverings should not be used by children under 3 owing to the difficulty they may find in using them correctly. You may also exempt other young children who are unable to use them properly.

Face shields that provide an impermeable shield for the eyes, nose and mouth, and other PPE not needed for the general users of the premises, but you may find some attendees wish to use them.

Gloves are generally only needed for cleaners and can be counter-productive if not changed regularly as gloves can transmit diseases similar to the skin. Regular hand washing is likely to be more effective than use of gloves.

Fixed screens may be useful in some circumstances to separate attendees from church volunteers. For example, if you have a church office or a "welcome desk" or stewards in fixed locations. However, this will not be suitable in many circumstances.

Use of toilet facilities

You should try to discourage use of the shared toilet facilities in a church building by asking your attendees to use private facilities at home before and after the service if possible. However, this is unlikely to be completely workable, so it will be necessary to have toilet facilities available in order to open your church.

Toilets are likely to present an elevated transmission risk and so need some careful management. We recommend the following practices

- Toilets should certainly be thoroughly cleaned before and after every service.
- Hand sanitiser should be made available before entering the toilets.
- Shared cloth towels should certainly not be used as these present a high risk of virus transmission.
- Single use paper towels should be provided in dispenser that means person only touches their own paper towel.
- Electric hand dryers can be used as an alternative to paper towels

- Provide foot operated lidded bins for disposal of paper towels
- Even where a toilet facility has multiple cubicles, we recommend that only one person at a time should enter to ensure social distancing around hand-wash areas etc.
- If possible, provide cleaning wipes or suitable cleaning products to allow the toilet seat to be cleaned between users (noting that these should be suitable for non-professional use and suitable instructions on use and disposal should be provided)
- Signage should be provided to explain the rules for toilet use, promote good hygiene practices (such as 20-second hand washing) and promote social distancing.
- Suitable temperature hot water should be provided to allow for hands to be cleaned properly.
- We suggest that children under 11 are accompanied to the toilet by an adult from their household to ensure compliance with good hygiene practice and social distancing. Seating arrangements and seating capacity

Seating arrangements and seating capacity

A group from a single household should sit together but must be separated from all other household groups in line with social distancing requirements (see section on Social Distancing above). One of the challenges is that you are unlikely to know the size of household groups for your service and this can have quite an impact on seating capacity.

The following is a suggestion of how you might manage social distancing with seating using conventional rows of chairs or pews, but you may find something that works better for you. Alternative arrangements of chairs other than in rows may be more suitable for smaller groups such as prayer groups or bible studies.

If your church has moveable chairs, we suggest you measure distance between rows and ensure occupied rows are sufficiently separated to ensure people one behind another are socially distanced. Remember that individuals are likely to move somewhat in their location, so you will need to make allowance for this in separation. You can then measure the seat width and ensure that appropriate number of seats are left empty between household groups. E.g. if seats are 60cm wide, you need to leave gap of 4 seats to achieve 2m distancing.

If you have a choice of chairs to use for your service, we recommend that you select the chairs that are easiest to clean (e.g. hard surface or a plastic surface that can be cleaned with a cloth).

If your church has fixed pews, you may wish to mark sufficient rows out of use between rows in use to ensure distancing. We then suggest you make a temporary mark (e.g. with masking tape) at 50cm spaces and then tell people to leave a certain number of marks between household groups (similar to the chevrons sometimes seen on motorways).

Once you have decided on the appropriate arrangements for your church you should ensure that your stewards are fully briefed, and you provide signage to explain how you wish them to ensure social distancing.

Use of Outside Spaces

Where your church building has outside space, you may consider holding some activities outside. Where an outside space falls is part of the grounds of the church, it falls within the definition of a Place of Worship and so the guidance for Places of Worship still applies, so gatherings can be of any size that can be accommodated with suitable social distancing.

Off church premises, gatherings of up to 30 people are possible in any public, outdoor space for any purpose. However, the gathering would have to be made up of small groups of two households or six individuals from different households, with no social interaction between these groups. Beyond this, gatherings of *more* than 30 people are also possible if the event is formally organised by a business or charitable institution. This includes Baptist churches. In this instance, interaction between those outside of each small group of two households or six individuals is still not permitted and you should consider whether you can realistically ensure this. A risk assessment would have to be completed and the event managed to minimise the risk of COVID-

19 transmission, much as for a service indoors. You would also be expected to liaise with the owner or manager of the outdoors space to discuss how the event can be staged safely and securely. We recommend that you also consider how your community will view a larger public gathering.

Using outside space has advantages as it is generally understood that the coronavirus is less likely to be transmitted outside. It may also be that you can accommodate more people outside if you have sufficient space. You do need to consider how you might deal with inclement weather and also noise disturbance to neighbouring properties.

Special measures for the clinically vulnerable and those who are shielding

Those who are clinically vulnerable (those over 70 or with certain medical conditions) should be encouraged to consider if it is appropriate for them to attend, as they are advised to stay at home as much as possible. Anyone concerned should consult their GP for advice.

Similarly, those who are shielding should be recommended to continue to follow government advice and not attend.

However, the government guidance does make clear that these decisions are for the individual, because the risk is to them and they do not present any higher risk for other attendees.

Section 4: Managing Arrivals at the Building

Travel Arrangements

You need to consider how people attending your service are likely to travel to the building and the risks that this might involve. The government guidance makes specific reference to this topic and avoiding crowding. You should consider this guidance, although it is likely to only be an issue for the largest Baptist churches. However, transport is still an issue that must be considered. For example, providing lifts for those without a car is unlikely to be appropriate currently.

Checks for Symptoms on Entry to the Church

We recommend that churches ask anyone attending the building to confirm that they do not currently have any of the key symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, persistent dry cough and loss of taste or smell) and have not had such symptoms for 14-days, or have been asked to self-isolate by NHS Track and Trace. This may be best managed by a steward at the main entrance.

We do not recommend carrying out temperature checks as the proximity involved (even with a contactless infra-red thermometer) brings transmission risk. Temperature is also not a particularly accurate way to assess risk of COVID-19 as it is possible that some will be contagious but have no fever. By the same token, a raised temperature is not necessarily indicative of COVID-19 (e.g. running can raise skin temperature), meaning you may decide to exclude someone who is perfectly safe to attend.

Recording attendees in the building

You should record the name and contact details of anyone who enters the building, with details of the time of their visit. This will allow NHS Track and Trace to follow up with attendees should a COVID-19 case be identified as having attended the church at a later date.

This needs to be done in compliance with data protection legislation. The ICO has helpfully set out five simple steps on how to ensure that data protection is not a barrier to reopening:

A – Ask for only what’s needed: e.g. name, contact details and time of arrival. You may find a paper attendance register used by a steward on the door is the easiest way to achieve this.

B – Be transparent: be clear, open and honest about what you are doing with their personal information. Tell them why you need it and what you’ll do with it by displaying a notice and using a privacy statement. A sample privacy statement is provided in Appendix 4.

C – Carefully store the data: Keep it secure on a device if collecting records digitally or keep paper records locked away.

D – Don't use it for other purposes: e.g. don't use this contact tracing information for other reasons e.g. for direct marketing, inviting people to church events or profiling.

E – Erase it in line with Government guidance: dispose of the data securely to reduce the risk of someone else accessing the data. Shred paper documents or permanently delete digital files from your recycling bin or cloud storage backup files. Records should be destroyed after 21 days.

You should ask people attending to notify the church if they show symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 so that you can take appropriate action.

A sample privacy statement that could be given to attendees is provided in Appendix 4

Managing arrivals, departures and traffic flow through the building

Management of traffic flow can assist in reducing the risk of people inadvertently breaching social distancing guidelines. One-way systems are often helpful in reducing risk of people coming into close proximity. You should consider how any changes will affect disability access and make arrangements to ensure equal access can still be achieved.

You should consider where the pinch-points might be in your building where people are brought together into close proximity such as entry and exit points and circulation spaces. You should consider how you will reduce this risk. It might involve signage, how your 1-way system is directed, stewarding or staggering arrivals. You may need to implement a queuing system with distance markers if the entrance is likely to be a pinch point.

We recommend that you actively manage people departing too at the end of any event to minimise the risk of social distancing issues. This might involve asking people to leave one row at a time, starting with the rows nearest the exit and working back.

We recommend using floor signage to assist in social distancing. This should include marking pathways through the building with arrows showing the expected direction of flow and markers showing fixed spacing to assist people in judging distance. Please make sure that these markings are securely affixed to the floor and not a trip hazard or they could cause more harm than good.

You should also consider how you might be able to minimise the need for attendees to touch surfaces. That could include leaving doors open. However, please consider how this works particularly in relation to fire doors that should be kept shut in general. If you have a suitable alarm system, systems are available to prop open fire doors that release automatically if the alarm sounds (e.g. Dorguard). If you use these, they should be regularly tested before live use. Alternatively, you may be able to develop operational practices that sufficiently mitigate the risk, such as having stewards briefed on shutting fire doors in emergencies.

Leaving some doors open will clearly not be appropriate (e.g. toilets), so consider what provision may be made for regularly cleaning any high-touch surfaces during any period of opening.

Managing Seating Capacity

How to manage your seating capacity is a complex practical issue that you need to consider in the context of your church congregation, building and circumstances. If you have a large enough building to accommodate all who will attend with social distancing in place it may not be an issue, but churches with capacity constraints will need to think through this issue. This may include streaming the service to another room.

In determining the capacity of the building for services you should not only consider how many people can safely be seated but how they can safely flow through the building.

You may wish to test an approach and assess and develop your approach over time as circumstances evolve and you gain experience of what works or not in your context. Some options to consider:

- Invitation only – this is probably best where potential attendance far exceeds capacity and you can pro-actively manage the best use of the space you do have.
- Pre-booking – similar to invitation only but requires individuals to be pro-active. There is likely to be considerable administration involved in handling bookings and cancellations. This is also some complexity in working out how the bookings fit with your available space.
- Close doors when capacity reached – This is the more reactive approach requires careful stewarding and potentially results in appearing inhospitable when the doors are shut. It may also result in queuing at the door that is hard to manage in line with social distancing.

Section 5: Operating Church Services and Church gatherings

Drinks & catering

Food and drink should not be served or made available on a self-service basis.

We recommend that food generally should not be consumed in the church although for health reasons some persons may need to eat or drink during time on the premises. If this is the case, they should be asked to bring what they need and take away any rubbish, containers or leftovers.

Singing, instrumentalists and music

Congregational or choral singing is not permitted as it is considered that this enhances risk of virus spread. Similarly brass or woodwind or other instruments that are blown into should not be played. Other instruments may be played but instruments must not be shared between instrumentalists. These restrictions apply to rehearsals as well as the service.

If it is essential to an act of worship a soloist may sing but measures should be put in place, such as a plexi-glass screen to protect others from their exhaled breath. This screen should be cleaned after the service.

The volume of any music should not result in people having to raise their voices or shout to be heard. This is particularly important before and after a service.

The government has relaxed some measures in relation to groups of professional musicians and singers, who are able to perform outside or rehearse or record indoors. However, we understand that this is intended to apply to those who earn their living as musicians and singers, and therefore will only apply to a small minority of Baptist church music groups.

Use of hymn books, bibles and other similar materials

The ideal situation is to use a projector to display of any content needed for the service, such as bible verses, order of service etc. If this is not possible single use printed service sheets should be used and households should take their own home to dispose of. We recommend these are put out on chairs in advance of the service by someone who has washed their hands thoroughly prior to putting them out in order to prevent transmission via this mechanism.

Reusable materials, such as bibles or hymn books should not generally be used, but if they are, they should be quarantined for 48 hours before they can be used again. Attendees should be encouraged to bring their own bible if they wish to have one. Ideally these should be removed from public spaces, but if this is not possible, they should be clearly marked as not in use unless a quarantine system is in place.

Speaking from the front

Raised voices are considered a transmission risk so a PA system should be used for amplification if more than a normal speaking voice is required to make voices heard. Handheld microphones and other equipment that is touched should not be shared between participants. This may give rise to some practical challenges that churches need to consider if they have more speakers than microphones available.

A lectern microphone may be shared provided that it is not touched by users. If a lectern or music stand or similar is used by more than one individual, it would be good practice to clean it between uses to ensure that it is not a transmission risk. If this is not possible, users should be strongly discouraged from touching it.

If you have multiple people coming up to the front (e.g. to share a word or lead prayers or give a reading), please consider how they can maintain social distancing moving from their seat to the front. For example, you may need to make sure they are sat on the end of a row, so they don't have to move past other household groups.

Length of Services

As a general rule, services should be concluded in the shortest reasonable time as the longer they are the greater the risk of disease transmission occurring. The lack of singing at this stage is likely to mean that services are naturally shorter in any case. Also, with children likely to be in the service, it would be wise to keep services shorter.

Offerings and collections

We recommend that you encourage giving by direct bank transfer or online giving mechanisms as this removes any risk of virus transmission. However, if this is not appropriate for your circumstances then you can consider have a collection box or plate but ask people to take care not to touch it if possible. There should be no passing of an offering plate or bag in services.

We recommend you leave any cash offerings isolated for 72 hours before handling. Alternatively, use disposable gloves to handle cash and dispose securely after use.

A contactless card terminal may be a suitable way to take payments, although you should supply with antibacterial wipes to clean the terminal after each use.

Social Interaction before, during and after services

The government guidance advises that social interaction in churches beyond household groups should be limited wherever possible, including discouraging engagement in conversation beyond your household. We therefore must advise against holding times of fellowship before or after church services to minimise virus transmission risk. We suggest you encourage attendees to leave promptly after any event.

Similarly, we would advise against encouraging any moving around during a service (e.g. breaking into small groups for prayer). We suggest that it is best for people to remain in their seats or standing by their seats throughout any service, in so far as practical.

We understand that if there is a subsequent positive test that NHS Test and Trace are only likely to ask those who had direct social interaction to self-isolate. Therefore, keeping social interaction limited may reduce the impact of a positive test on your attendees, which may be important to some of your congregation who are concerned about the potential impact of having to self-isolate.

Handling multiple services (including tenant congregations)

Ideally you should leave the building empty for 72 hours between each use, which would significantly reduce the risk of any virus remaining on surfaces. However, this may not be practical if you have multiple services, guest congregations or mid-week activities you wish to run. If this is the case, a thorough cleaning of all surfaces should be completed between uses in line with the guidance provided above.

If you have surfaces that you feel you are unable to clean appropriately (e.g. fabric covered chairs) then we recommend that these surfaces are taken out of use for 72 hours.

Handling Children and children's activities

The government has provided [guidance for "out of school settings" for children](#) and we have published [guidance for children's, youth and families ministry](#), which should be read if you wish to carry out any children's activities.

Depending upon the space you have available, it may be possible to run groups for children 5 years of age or older in line with the guidance, but these are only permitted once the school summer holidays have started.

Parents or guardians should be asked to care for their own children under 5. If you can, you may wish to provide a room where the service is relayed where they can sit with their own children. Social distancing arrangements will need to be observed, so you should ensure the space is large enough to distancing between households.

We recommend that you do not provide toys for children that would be shared between household groups as they may be a transmission risk. It is likely to be easier if parents are asked to bring their own toys. If toys are provided, they should be thoroughly cleaned after use with a suitable disinfectant (e.g. Milton Sterilising Fluid). No soft toys or soft furnishings for children should be provided as these cannot be easily cleaned.

Taking Communion

We realise that Communion is an important, biblical practice that many churches wish to resume. However, this presents particular risks and challenges that need to be considered. You may find it easier not to restart communion at first. Specific guidance is available in our leaflet [Coronavirus: Guidance on church worship](#)

Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms

Separate guidance is available on the conduct of Weddings and Funerals in our leaflet [Coronavirus: Guidance on church worship](#)

At the current time the government advise that full immersion Baptism is avoided. We will seek further clarification on this.

Church Members' Meetings

Church Members' Meetings are a key feature of Baptist practice and important to the functioning of the church, Our view is that a Church Members' Meeting, which should include elements of worship and prayer and collective discernment of the mind of Christ falls within the definition of "religious purpose" described in the government guidance on the re-opening of places of worship. It is therefore subject to the same guidance as described above for church services in general.

One particular issue you need to consider is that the government has said that speaking loudly presents a virus transmission risk, so if your church meeting is large enough that participants need to significantly raise their voice in order to be heard, it may be that this cannot be done safely.

However, churches need to consider the wisdom of holding a church meeting in the current circumstances when some members may not be willing to attend due to the risks involved and your premises may not be able to accommodate everyone who wishes to attend due to social distancing requirements. This could prove divisive if some members feel excluded, particularly if some contentious issues are to be addressed.

It is possible that you might attempt a "hybrid" meeting with some present in person and some joining remotely. However, this is very difficult as it is essential to the functioning of a Church Members' Meeting that all participants can hear each other and participate effectively in the meeting. This requires careful management of microphones so that those present in person can be heard by those joining remotely without creating an infection risk. Further, a hybrid meeting will have additional legal complexity with regard to making decisions and voting in line with our Approved Governing Documents.

If you are considering holding a Church Members Meeting (or indeed a church AGM), you should consult our [Guidance Leaflet L18: Covid-19 Coronavirus Legal Issues](#) which sets out the different legal implications for unincorporated churches and church CIOs.

Prayer Meetings and Bible Studies

Given the restrictions on singing, the challenges in holding larger meetings and the likely numbers willing to attend, some churches may conclude it is best to have their main service(s) online for some time to come. However, the guidance does permit churches to be used for other “religious purposes”, such as bible studies and prayer meetings. These meetings are likely to be smaller and therefore easier to accommodate within social distancing constraints.

Using the church to film a service for broadcast

Some churches are considering whether to open their church building solely to hold a service without a live congregation so that it can be broadcast online. This might be for live broadcast or for recording for later broadcast. The limited number of people involved in such a service clearly significantly reduces the risks involved. However, all the government guidance still applies, including requirements for a risk assessment to be carried out, social distancing to be observed and the limitation of singing to a single soloist.

Streaming of services (including data protection issues)

Many of our churches have been live streaming services throughout lockdown and are continuing to do so until they can safely reopen. The government guidance encourages churches to continue to do this to reduce the size of physical gatherings and continue to reach those who are self-isolating or otherwise unable or unwilling to attend.

There are data protection issues involved in filming services. A church should seek consent from any individuals appearing on screen for their involvement and the processing of their personal data through video footage or podcasts. Records of these consents should be kept. This should be relatively straightforward where a service has been created solely for broadcast due to the limited numbers of people involved and the fact that those involved should be clear on the purpose for which they are contributing to the service.

However, where a church is planning to hold a service in the church with a congregation and broadcast the same the service to a wider audience (either live or later) then this will involve processing images of the persons attending the service who might be filmed and identifiable. It will likely be challenging to obtain consent from all of these individuals for their personal data to be used in this way. The church may need to rely on legitimate interest as the lawful basis for the filming and live streaming. If so, we suggest that information about the filming should be provided to members and attendees in advance, which will enable those attending to decide to opt out if they wish or to sit in a designated area in the church where they will not be filmed. Notices should be placed in a prominent place at the entrances, as well as in the newsletter/notice sheet to explain that the service will be filmed. A reminder can also be given from the front at the start of the service. Particular care should be taken in relation to children or adults at risk, unless prior consent from them or their parents/guardians has been obtained.

In addition to data protection issues, there are also considerable technical and practical issues in trying to produce a service that works well both for those attending live and those joining online. You may wish to consider doing a live service for those attending in person and a separate service for broadcast.

What to do if someone develops symptoms whilst in the Church

You should have a written Emergency Action Plan in place as to what to do in these circumstances. This should be shared with those leading and stewarding any service or gathering. A template for this is provided in Appendix 5.

We recommend that anyone coughing or showing other clear COVID-19 symptoms should be asked to leave the church immediately, along with their household and contact NHS 111 for advice on isolation and testing. We recommend that cleaning carried out of any surfaces that may have been contaminated as soon as possible, in line with the cleaning guidance (see above), and those who have had any contact with the individual should wash their hands. If you feel it is appropriate you may wish to bring the service to an end.

Section 6: Other Uses of the Church Building

Use of the church office

Working from home remains the preferred position and this should be followed where possible.

If you do wish to re-open the church office, then this should be considered in line with the government guidance on use of office premises (see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/offices-and-contact-centres>). You should ensure that you conduct a specific risk assessment for the use of the office.

In general, you should:

- Review layouts and processes to allow people to work further apart from each other.
- Use floor tape or markings to help workers maintain social distancing.
- Only where it is not possible to move workstations further apart, arrange for people to work side-by-side or facing away from each other rather than face-to-face or use screens to separate people from each other.
- Manage occupancy levels to enable social distancing is achievable.
- Avoid the use of hot desks and spaces, where this is not possible cleaning and sanitising workstations between different occupants, including shared equipment (phones, keyboards, mouse).
- Use remote working tools to avoid in-person meetings.
- Restrict attendance at meetings to those who absolutely need to attend and maintaining social distancing throughout.
- Avoid transmission during office activities, such as sharing pens, mugs, kettles, cutlery and other objects.

Use of the church for other activities

We recommend you take the following steps when considering activities that do not fall within the broad definition of church worship.

Step 1: Confirm the activity is permitted

You are permitted to use your building host some non-church activities, but you must first check to ensure that a particular use is permitted. Some activities are explicitly permitted, including registered pre-schools, work with the homeless, blood donation and food banks.

Some activities are specifically prohibited at the current time, including include indoor soft play, indoor fitness and indoor performances in front of a live audience. The full guidance as to what is permitted from 4 July is at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/opening-certain-businesses-and-venues-in-england-from-4-july-2020>. Specific guidance for multi-use community facilities, which will be relevant to many Baptist churches that are normally used for non-worship activities during the week, can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities#permitted-activities-in-multi-use-community-facilities-signposting-to-relevant-guidance>.

Step 2: Ensuring the activity can be conducted safely

Church trustees must satisfy themselves that any activities running on their premises are safe (whether they are part of the church or not). Even if an activity is run by an outside group who are hiring the premises it is unlikely that the church would wish to have their name associated with a disease outbreak, and unsafe use might pose a risk to subsequent users of the building if it introduces coronavirus into the building. You should ensure that the activity is following the relevant government guidance for the activity, as well as any relevant guidance from other regulatory, industry or national governing bodies.

You should ensure that

- a specific Risk Assessment for the activity is in place to evaluate risks and document the risk control measures to be taken to control the spread of COVID-19.
- All volunteers and staff have been briefed so they fully understand the controls that are implemented and their role in them.
- the Risk Assessment is reviewed and updated to incorporate any changes to government guidance.

We recommend adding special terms to your hiring agreement that commit hirers to following government guidance for their activity, conducting a suitable risk assessment, sharing it with you and implementing the control measures identified.

Step 3: Implement appropriate precautions prior to the next activity

It is also important to remember that any activity in the building gives rise to the risk that the virus is introduced into the building. You should therefore consider how subsequent users are protected from this risk. This could be by leaving 72 hours between activities or by carrying out thorough cleaning to reduce the risk of the virus still being present for the next activity. We recommend that you manage the cleaning yourself and do not rely on hirers to clean your premises as you would need to check such cleaning in any case to ensure you were providing a safe environment for subsequent users.

Where you are considering allowing external organisations to use your premises, you should refer to our leaflet L18 on legal issues during the Coronavirus pandemic: www.baptist.org.uk/resources/L18. We recommend that you review the Risk Assessment of any external organisation using your premises to ensure that you are comfortable with the measures they are taking to avoid introducing the virus into your premises.

Section 7: Risk assessment for staff and volunteers returning to work in church offices and buildings

As you re-open your building for worship, you will likely need employed staff, appointed ministers and volunteers to operate the building and services. You have a duty of care to these individuals so you will need to look at planning for their safe return to working in the church building.

Ministers

Please remember that any work that a minister does on behalf of your church, including prayer, teaching, pastoral visiting, Sunday services, is considered to be 'work' for health and safety purposes so needs to be reviewed as part of your risk assessment process. [Specific guidance for ministers for pastoral visiting](#) is available on our website.

Volunteers

Any volunteers returning to work in the church should be risk assessed in the same way as staff as the church has a duty of care to them even if they receive no remuneration.

Thinking about risk

Before you invite anyone to return to work in your church office or building you will need to carry out a specific risk assessment, looking at the issues that affect all staff, and consider any points that are specific to each individual. This risk assessment should be done in writing and will need to consider a wide range of factors. We have produced an [Employer Risk Assessment in relation to the health and safety of staff as they return](#).

You should also read the [Coronavirus: A Guide for Churches as Employers](#) which covers these and other issues.

Who should go to work?

Currently, the government are still encouraging employers to allow workers to work from home wherever possible. If you have been able to manage well during lockdown, think carefully before you start to invite staff to return to work.

Some staff will be unable to return immediately because of shielding requirements or because they or someone in their household, or someone they have recently been in contact with, has had Covid-19. For more information on how to respond to these specific situations, please follow the government guidance at

Government guidance on risk assessment

The government has produced an updated guidance leaflet for employers that works through each section of potential risks in terms of allowing staff to return work in offices or indoor buildings. Risks in each potential area of concern are listed so that those with responsibility for the safe return of staff can work their way through this in a systematic way. If you employ more than 5 people you are required to document the results of your risk assessment. If you have less than 5 staff, documenting your risk assessment is not a legal requirement, but we strongly recommend that you keep a written record to show that you have considered all relevant risks.

The government guidance can be found using the following link and you may choose to read this alongside this BUGB document.

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5eb97e7686650c278d4496ea/working-safely-during-covid-19-offices-contact-centres-240620.pdf>

Section 8: Safeguarding considerations for churches planning to re-open their buildings.

It goes without saying that your church's safeguarding policies and procedures need to stay in place during lockdown and as you start to re-open your church buildings. However, before you re-open, we would encourage church leaders, including the church's Designated Person for Safeguarding, to take time to review your current safeguarding procedures and to consider whether any adaptations or additions are needed to reflect the way in which you plan to provide activities and services in the coming months.

For example, you may want to consider, decide and record your decision on the following questions.

- *If we intend to work in different ways in the coming months, have we carried out a safeguarding risk assessment for any new or altered activities?*
- *Can we provide adequate staffing for each activity or event? Have we checked this against our agreed ratios, particularly for work with children?*
- *Have there been any safeguarding concerns or allegations during the lockdown period that need to be dealt with before staff or volunteers recommence work?*
- *Have we considered whether any of our church members or attendees are now more vulnerable than they were before lockdown? How might we provide support and care?*
- *Many of our elderly church members and attendees will have been shielding since March, increasing their feelings of isolation and loneliness. How might we adapt our pastoral care to reflect this and what extra safeguarding steps might we take to ensure that they are not taken advantage of?*
- *Bearing in mind the increased reporting of domestic abuse, the sharp rise in offences involving viewing or distributing indecent images of children, and the high volume of calls to organisations*

like ChildLine and The Samaritans, are we ready for a higher number of concerns and support needs over the coming months? If not, how might we prepare for this?

- *Suicide rates have continued to rise during lockdown. Have we equipped ourselves to respond to and care for those who are considering or who have attempted suicide?*
- *Have we updated our social media guidelines to reflect the increased use of social media as a key channel to contact and engage with children and young people, as well as adults, in our church?*
- *How might we best support our pastoral carers, including our minister(s), who are likely to be tired and possibly overly stressed after the demands of caring for our church during lockdown?*

You can find guidance on the safeguarding impact of Covid-19, on the main coronavirus pages of our website, including:

- guidance on use of social media with young people
- the need to review existing safeguarding contracts
- resources for young people

If you have questions on how to apply your safeguarding policy and procedures to new activities, or how to adapt to fit in with limitations on staff or volunteer numbers, please contact your Association Safeguarding Lead in the first instance.

Appendix 1: Reoccupation Checklist

Use this template to record important checks of your premises before returning to work after lockdown. Stay alert to government announcements on return to work and complete **before** reoccupation.

	Yes	No	N/A	Action Required
Statutory Checks				
Is the five-yearly fixed wiring (electrical installation condition report) within date and rated as satisfactory?				
Is the gas safety certificate(s) in date for annual review?				
Plant rooms: Has all plant and equipment been suitably serviced?				
Has PAT testing been completed where relevant?				
Have all pressure vessels been examined as per the scheme of examination?				
Fire Safety				
Have you reviewed your Fire Risk Assessment (FRA)?				
Are boiler rooms and electrical cupboards free from combustible storage?				
Are skips and bins a safe distance away from your building(s)?				
Have you informed your Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) of your re-occupation (where necessary)?				
Has the fire alarm system been serviced within the timescale outlined by the contractor?				
Has the fire alarm been tested weekly during the lockdown period?				
Is the fire alarm functioning correctly?				
Have all fire doors, maglocks, acoustic closing mechanisms and other associated equipment been checked for functionality?				
Are all fire extinguishers in place and free from defects?				
Have all fire suppression / sprinkler systems been suitably maintained and checked for sufficient pressure (where appropriate)?				
Have fire dampers been maintained (within the last 12 months)?				

Have the automatic smoke vents been maintained (within the last 12 months)?				
Has the lightning protection been tested and maintained (within the last twelve months)?				
Emergency Lighting				
Has the emergency lighting system been serviced (within the last 12 months)?				
Has the emergency lighting been tested monthly during the lockdown period?				
Is the emergency lighting system fully functional?				
Building Security				
Is there any damage to the structure, roof, windows or fixtures?				
Is the CCTV system functioning correctly?				
Is the intruder alarm functioning correctly?				
Contractors				
Have contractors been re-engaged (where possible)?				
Can contractors be controlled on site?				
Have measures been put in place to ensure contractors (and other visitors) with identified symptoms are not permitted entry to your premises?				
Water Safety				
Has your Legionella Risk Assessment been reviewed?				
Is there a re-commissioning plan (where necessary)?				
Has weekly flushing of all unused/little-used outlets (including external taps) been completed during lockdown?				
Have temperatures been checked against acceptable ranges?				
	Recorded temperature			
Cold water storage tank (maximum 20°C)				
Hot water storage tank (minimum 60°C)				
Sentinel tap (furthest tap from the boiler – minimum 50°C)				
Have all spray fittings been removed, descaled and replaced?				

Is Thermostatic Mixing Valve (TMV) maintenance up to date?				
Has the system been disinfected/chlorinated (including water tanks) where necessary?				
Utilities				
If any utilities have been temporarily shut off, have these been turned back on?				
Equipment				
Are all first aid kits in place, in date and fully stocked?				
Has the defibrillator(s) been checked for safe operation?				
Has all equipment been switched on and checked for correct function?				
Are all necessary guards in place / undamaged?				
Has equipment been serviced or maintained as necessary by a competent person?				
Have the annual services been completed on all oil / electric boilers?				
Have all six-monthly LOLER checks been completed by a competent person?				
Have all window restrictors been checked to ensure they are in place and safe?				
Staffing				
Have risk assessments and plans been reviewed and agreed with vulnerable persons?				
Has your Lone Working Risk Assessment been reviewed?				
Are there sufficient staff on site to undertake safety-critical roles e.g. first aiders, maintenance, fire wardens?				
Is there sufficient supervision and support of staff?				
Does re-occupation need to be staged to maintain social distancing?				
General				
Has the building been checked for signs of pest infestation? Where appropriate, has a pest control contractor visited the premises recently and are suitable controls in place?				
Is any asbestos likely to have been disturbed during lockdown?				

Appendix 2: Pre-event checklist

This checklist is to be used in conjunction with the most up-to-date government guidance during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It should be completed prior to the event day starting and should be fully communicated to all team members. It is the responsibility of the Church Trustee to ensure that the site is safe to open and that controls are put in place.

Leader name: Date:/...../.....

Item	Y or N	Comments	Reported to
Has the latest government guidance been checked and followed?			
Have any members of team reported any symptoms of COVID-19?			
Has the Cleaning Checklist been completed and cleaning materials put in place?			
Is there adequate hand soap, paper towels and running water in place?			
Has hand washing facility or sanitiser been provided in all locations needed			
Are bins available for disposal of any rubbish?			
Is the plan for managing traffic flow for social distancing in place and floor/wall signage in place			
Are stewards briefed on agreed procedures for arrivals, departures and emergencies?			
Have chairs/pews been laid out and marked in line with social distancing requirements?			
Procedures in place to record names and contact details of attendees			
Building ventilation set in line with recommendations to maximise air flow			
Is there any other information to consider?			
After carrying out the above checks, please sign below.			
I have carried out the above checks and found the site to be following the current government guidelines in line with COVID-19.			
Leader signature:		Date:	

Appendix 3: Cleaning checklist.

Premises:	Date:	Completed by:
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The infection risk from coronavirus (COVID-19) following contamination of the environment decreases over time. It is not yet clear at what point there is no risk. However, studies of other viruses in the same family suggest that, in most circumstances, the risk is likely to be reduced significantly after 72 hours.

Action	Guidance	Completed (tick)	Comments
Confirm PPE worn before cleaning commences	Where possible, wear disposable or washing up gloves and aprons.		
Hard surfaces have been cleaned prior to disinfecting?	Clean hard surfaces with warm soapy water using a disposable cloth.		
Disinfect all surfaces with usual disinfectant	Pay attention to any frequently touched areas and surfaces, e.g. doors, toilets, stair rails and phones.		
Clean any areas of heavy contamination (bodily fluids, or sleeping areas) as above using additional PPE where possible	Additional PPE would include protection for the eyes, mouth and nose, as well as gloves and apron.		
Any PPE used is double bagged and to be stored securely for 72 hours before being thrown away in general waste	Use plastic bin bags where possible.		
Hands washed with soap and water for 20 seconds, after removing PPE	Hand wash using warm water after cleaning and regularly throughout the day.		

Additional guidance, information and instruction when cleaning:

- Use disposable cloths or paper roll and disposable mop heads to clean all hard surfaces, floors, chairs, door handles and sanitary fittings, with one of the following options below:
- A combined detergent disinfectant solution at a dilution of 1,000 parts per million available chlorine (ppm av.cl.); or
- A household detergent followed by disinfection (1,000 ppm av.cl.). Follow the manufacturer's instructions for dilution, application and contact times for all detergents and disinfectants.
- NB: If an alternative disinfectant is used within the organisation, this should be checked and ensure that it is effective against enveloped viruses.
- Avoid creating splashes and spray when cleaning.
- Any cloths and mop heads used must be disposed of and should be put into waste bags as outlined below.
- When items cannot be cleaned using detergents or laundered (for example, upholstered furniture and mattresses), steam cleaning should be used.
- Any items that are heavily contaminated with body fluids and cannot be cleaned by washing should be disposed of.
- If possible, keep an area closed off and secure for 72 hours. After this time, the amount of virus contamination will have decreased substantially, and you can clean as normal with your usual products.

Laundry

- Wash items in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Use the warmest water setting and dry items completely. Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an unwell person can be washed with other people's items.
- Do not shake dirty laundry – this minimises the possibility of dispersing virus through the air.
- Clean and disinfect anything used for transporting laundry with your usual products, in line with the cleaning guidance above.

Waste

- Waste from cleaning areas should be put in a plastic rubbish bag and tied when full.
- The plastic bag should then be placed in a second bin bag and tied.
- It should be put in a suitable and secure place away from children. You should not put your waste in communal waste areas until the waste has been stored for at least 72 hours.

Appendix 4: Example privacy statement

.....Baptist Church Privacy Notice for collecting contact information from church attendees.

This privacy notice is an addendum toBaptist Church’s main privacy statement and notices. The Charity Trustees ofBaptist Church (as Data Controller)* can be contacted by ringingor emailing

We are collecting your name and contact details in order to fulfil our responsibility to provide a safe environment in which those attendingBaptist Church can pray and worship during this COVID-19 recovery phase. We will only use this information to contact you in the event that we believe you may have come into contact with a suspected case of COVID-19 at Anytown Baptist Church and it may be necessary to share your details with NHS Test and Trace if they are requested for contact tracing and the investigation of local outbreaks. Your name and contact details will temporarily be securely stored [please provide detail of how details will be stored and kept secure]. They will be retained for a period of 21 days in line with government guidance and then disposed of within the following 7 days.

Please inform Baptist Church as soon as possible if you test positive for coronavirus or develop any of the following COVID-19 symptoms:

- A high temperature
- A new, continuous cough
- A loss or change to your sense of smell or taste

Data Protection legislation allows us to process this information as we regard it as being in the church’s legitimate interest. The Information Commissioner’s Office has published guidance on data handling during the pandemic. Please see www.ico.org.uk/coronavirus.

*please note – if your church is a CIO or CLG, the data controller will be the church, acting through its Trustees.

Appendix 5: Example Emergency Action Plan

Church Building:

Coronavirus Emergency Action Plan

Should someone attending the church display symptoms of Coronavirus the following steps will be taken:

- 1) The person will be asked to leave as soon as possible, return home and seek guidance from NHS111 as to self-isolation and testing.
- 2) Anyone known to have been in close contact with the case advised to wash their hands as soon as possible
- 3) Any surfaces likely to have been contaminated cleaned in line with cleaning guidance.
- 4) Consider whether to bring the service to an early conclusion.
- 5) Consult Health & Safety Executive website as to whether the event should be reported.
[https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/riddor/.](https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/riddor/)

Appendix 6: Contractor Checklist

COVID-19 Contractor Checklist – Site Safety			
Church Site Name		Name of Church representative	
Contractor Name		Date	

A – Specific Hazards
Hazards specific to the task:
Hazards specific to the premises:
Who may be harmed?

Assessment Checklist	Yes	No	N/A
Information			
Have employees been advised on the latest government guidance on COVID-19, including what to do if they become ill?			
Have employees received appropriate training in minimising the transfer of COVID-19 at work?			
Has a call to site been undertaken to establish their COVID-19 policy?			
Personal protective equipment (PPE)			
Has a risk assessment been undertaken to determine what level of PPE is required for the task to protect from COVID-19? (e.g. single-use gloves, disposable overalls, face masks, eye protection, etc.)			
Is the PPE identified in the risk assessment available?			
Have employees received training in the appropriate use of the PPE?			
Welfare			
Are there suitable handwashing facilities on site?			
Are employees provided with hand sanitiser where handwashing facilities are unavailable?			
Is there a suitable area to take rest breaks?			

Have employees been instructed not to eat/drink/smoke/touch face without first washing their hands?			
Site arrangements			
Can any of the work be done off site to minimise exposure?			
Can the work be moved outside or to a location where there are minimal persons?			
Can barriers be used around the work area to maintain a safe distance between employees and others in the vicinity?			
Do any tools/equipment used on site need to be decontaminated due to potential COVID-19 exposure?			

B Assessment Rating		
The current risk assessment rating is considered to be:		Tick
High risk	Fatal or major injuries or irreversible health effects to one or more people are highly probable.	
Medium risk	Serious injury or ill-health effects are possible.	
Low risk	Minor injury or reversible minor health effects may occur.	
Insignificant	The activity presents no greater risk than those associated with life in general.	

Action required	By	Priority	Timescale	Completed

Church representative signature		Print name		Date	
Contractor representative signature		Print name		Date	

This is one of a series of Guidelines that are offered as a resource for Baptist ministers and churches. They have been prepared by the Baptist Union of Great Britain and are, of necessity, intended only to give very general advice in relation to the topics covered. These guidelines should not be relied upon as a substitute for obtaining specific and more detailed advice in relation to a particular matter.

The staff at the Baptist Union of Great Britain at Baptist House will be very pleased to answer your queries and help in any way possible.

Contact Address and Registered Office:

Baptist Union of Great Britain, Baptist House, PO Box 44, 129 Broadway, Didcot, OX11 8RT
Telephone 01235 517700 email supportservices@baptist.org.uk website
www.baptist.org.uk

Registered Charity Number: 1181392, operating as a CIO.

Date of Issue: 20 July 2020

Coronavirus: Guidance on church worship

Updated 20 July 2020. Changes are highlighted in red – clarification on worship outdoors; and wedding reception numbers.

Introduction

The UK Government's [Guidance for the safe use of places of worship](#) published 29 June 2020 indicates that from 4 July, church buildings in England may be used for the following purposes, but only if measures for the safe use of the building are in place:

- Worship services and events with attendance determined by social distancing requirements.
- Weddings with up to 30 attendees.
- Funerals with up to 30 attendees.
- Private prayer.

If the capacity of a building prepared for social distancing is less than thirty, then the maximum number of attendees at a wedding and funeral is reduced accordingly.

Please note that in Wales, the devolved Government's [Guidance on Re-Opening Places of Worship](https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus-html) (<https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus-html>) published 23 June does **not** allow church buildings to be used for general worship services. The guidance restricts the use of church buildings to:

- Weddings where all attendees, except those from the same household and the couple themselves, maintain 2m social distancing. However, register offices may not yet be open and anyone planning a wedding should check.
- Funerals where attendees are invited and where all attendees, except those from the same household, maintain 2m social distancing.
- Private prayer.

In Wales, for both weddings and funerals, the maximum number of attendees is determined by those responsible for the building, namely the trustees. They will have to ensure social distancing and other safety requirements can be met.

Some things are explicitly prohibited in worship for all cases as follows:

- Congregational and choral singing. The exception to this is when the congregation gathers outside and singing is limited to professional singers. This scenario is permitted under the Government's [guidance on performing arts](#), as is rehearsing and broadcasting when a congregation is not present and when the singers are professionals.

- Sharing food or drink, though see on communion below.
- Anything that brings those from different households closer together than 1m, except for during an emergency and when brief closer contact is necessary to facilitate an essential act of worship. This might include communion, but please see below. **Please note that the ideal distance remains at least 2m** between those from different households. Between 1m and 2m is acceptable only when 'mitigations' (extra measures) are in place, such as face coverings. Though not demanded by Government guidance, we recommend that face coverings are used by all those attending church regardless of the distancing, as this will give attendees enhanced confidence in their safety in church. Young children and those with respiratory conditions are excluded from this as in all cases where face coverings are otherwise expected.
- Any contact between people such as handshakes, hugs or the laying on of hands.

The requirements for the safe opening of church buildings are extensive. Our own summary of these requirements can be found in our leaflet [Coronavirus: Guidance on re-opening Baptist church buildings](#). You **must** consider these requirements before opening your building.

This guidance below aims to help you think through the wider issues of gathering for worship. We recommend these issues are discussed carefully among church trustees alongside the Guidance on Re-Opening Baptist Churches. **Above all, we encourage you not to rush to re-establish gathered corporate worship but only to do so prayerfully and after the widest possible consultation.**

If you usually meet in a school or alternative community facility, there is some Government [guidance for the safe use of multi-purpose community facilities](#) How this advice applies to churches meeting in community facilities is not entirely clear. We recommend that if you wish to meet again for worship, you should follow the guidance in this document and in our guidance on Re-Opening Baptist Church Buildings, where it is relevant. As hirers of the community facility, issues around building maintenance are for the facility's management, not the church. You will need to speak to the facility's management so that you may work within their requirements also.

If you are thinking of worshipping outside, but still within the boundary of the church grounds, you should seek to apply all relevant sections of both this guidance and the guidance on Re-Opening Baptist Churches Buildings.

If you wish to meet outside but off church premises, say in a park, then gatherings of up to 30 people are possible in any public, outdoor space for any purpose. However, the gathering would have to be made up of small groups of two households or six individuals from different households, with no social interaction between these groups. Beyond this, gatherings of more than 30 people are also possible if the event is formally organised by a business or charitable institution. This includes Baptist churches. In this instance, interaction between those outside of each small group of two households or six individuals is still not permitted and you should consider whether you can realistically ensure this. A risk assessment would have to be completed and the event managed to minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission, much as for a service indoors. You would also be expected to liaise with the owner or manager of the outdoors space to discuss how the event can be staged safely and securely. We recommend that you also consider how your community will view a larger public gathering and whether this will enhance or hinder your witness.

Some guiding principles

1. **Give priority to the safety of both church membership and the community.** Any gathering carries a risk of spreading COVID-19. Proceeding with caution and diligence is an

act of ongoing care towards those who are vulnerable to the disease. This approach also protects the reputation of the church within the community.

2. **Be sensitive to the needs of all those who will be affected by your decisions.** While some will feel both ready and keen to return to church for worship, many will not. Some continue to live with the fear of the disease. Others have suffered the trauma of being bereaved, witnessing multiple deaths, losing jobs, or living in lockdown in very difficult family circumstances. Others are exhausted from the demands placed upon them. For more information on what to expect as a community emerges out of a crisis, you might find it helpful to watch our webinar on [The Life Cycle of an Emergency](#). Be aware that if worship services start again in church, some might feel under pressure to attend, or to return to their volunteer position even when they wish not to. Do not assume that the readiness felt by a few is shared by all. You may of course have to actively discourage a few who are keen to return, for example where they share a house with a clinically vulnerable person. You are not responsible for the decisions of others, but you should enable wise choices wherever possible.
3. **Be Baptist in your decision-making.** Consult as widely and as prayerfully as possible. Ask your congregation what they feel, as well as other building users and even those who live near the church. Listen well to their hopes, fears and practical concerns. A church-wide survey may be a good starting point.
4. **Do not be afraid of NOT returning to using the building.** We have seen a remarkable explosion of creativity that has enabled churches to maintain worship, fellowship and witness. We have discovered that we can still express the reality of being Christ's body through online meeting platforms, phone, letters, and small, socially distanced gatherings. It is not the same as everyone gathering physically – it is just different. Do not hesitate to continue with these alternative ways of being church if you feel unprepared or unwilling to meet once again in a building. If you would like to think more about what the church is when it gathers digitally rather than physically, please see our recent webinar called [The Church Gathered and Scattered](#). In it, Prof Paul Fiddes makes a case for what he calls a 'Zoom Ecclesiology.'
5. **Accept this is a marathon not a sprint.** You have time. Resist the sense of urgency to re-open, or the need to keep up with other churches who take a different course of action. Work to ensure that whatever you decide as the best way forward is sustainable. Try to avoid anyone having to carry an unrealistic burden, whether that be the minister, the deacons responsible for fabric, cleaners, technical teams and so on. Many Baptist churches have for example already decided not to open until at least September, giving them time to plan.
6. **Accept uncertainty.** None of us know what the future looks like. You may have to experiment and then change your approach. We are all learning to trust God more and accept that our understanding is limited.
7. **Communicate clearly with your church.** Tell them what is now permitted, what is still disallowed, what is planned, and what is expected of worshippers. Be clear that worship in church buildings will for some time look different to what we are used to. There will be fewer worshippers, no singing, different ways of celebrating communion and baptism, and everyone might be wearing face coverings. You should spell out this reality to your church as you consult with them. Good communication will save later disappointment or the embarrassment of having to correct people when they are at church.

Whole church worship

Our [Coronavirus: Guidance on re-opening Baptist church buildings](#) covers the safe use of buildings in all circumstances. In addition to reading this, here are some questions to consider before re-establishing gathered corporate worship:

Have you:

Asked the church if they want to be together in the building?	YES/NO
Asked the church when they would like this to happen?	YES/NO
Asked the church to express their concerns about re-opening?	YES/NO
Compared a list of advantages and disadvantages of re-opening?	YES/NO
Worked out whether all those who wish to attend can, and if so, how?	YES/NO
Considered who might be excluded?	YES/NO
Spoken to those who are shielding about how they will be included?	YES/NO
Ensured you have the people to enable safe re-opening of the building?	YES/NO
Made the whole church aware what is not permitted?	YES/NO
Told the church what they will need to bring, for example their own Bible?	YES/NO

In all the above, be aware that there is likely to be a wide range of expectations within the church. People will pull in different directions, towards and away from risk. Again, careful consultation and comprehensive communication will be important.

If after all these questions, you do decide to re-open for worship, care should be taken not to create a division between those who can attend and those who can't.

Those who must not attend include:

- Anyone showing symptoms of COVID-19.
- Anyone who is self-isolating because of possible or actual COVID-19 in their household or because they have been told to do so by NHS Test and Trace. There is an exception for funerals – see below.

Those who might not attend include:

- Those who are shielding, whom the Government have advised but not demanded stay away from places of worship.
- Those who remain fearful of catching or passing on the disease, for example if they work on the frontline in the NHS, or who have a vulnerable person in their household.
- Those for whom a different format of service creates difficulties, for example those with children whose groups are not yet meeting.

To address this potential division, some churches are considering combining live and streamed services. Though possible, combining both in one event can be technically demanding and the format for one does not easily fit with the other. You will also need the permission of anyone in the live service if they are going to appear on the streamed service online. However, if you do follow this route, you might consider how those still at home can be included. Can you, for example, use a chat box for them to join in prayers? Can they take part in readings or testimonies on the screen?

Other churches are considering holding separate live and streamed services. Here, the issue is the workload involved in the additional service.

Another option is to repeat a live service at a different time for those who are at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, which includes those over 70. It may be a relief to them to know they will be worshipping only with others who are taking extra measures to avoid the disease.

The Government asks that lives services do not include any choral or congregational singing. Solos are permitted, but only when this is "essential to an act of worship", and when the singer is screened or sufficiently distanced from other worshippers. Instruments may be used, including an organ but not including any wind or brass 'blown' instruments. The guidance also recommends services are short. Given the stripped-back service that will result, you should consider how to make the best of the format. A reflective style of service may be helpful. Pre-recorded video interviews, testimonies or readings could be used. Or you can project a live preacher from anywhere in (or outside) the country.

Perhaps the most difficult time to manage will be before and after the service. The welcome greeting will have to be re-thought. We strongly encourage you to avoid general mingling before and after a service. Not only will this guard against transmission of COVID-19, but it protects the entire congregation from being told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace if a worshipper later develops symptoms. If proper social distancing has been practised at all times by worshippers, the chance of any worshipper being asked to self-isolate is reduced. Please consider how this avoidance of contact will work in your building and make sure everyone attending is clear about the expectations.

Communion

It feels particularly important right now to express our unity, remember Jesus' suffering on our behalf, and recall the hope of death defeated, through sharing bread and wine.

However, communion poses a particular problem and Government guidance is strict. Bread and wine cannot be passed from person to person. And we do not recommend worshippers collect bread and wine from stewards. Nevertheless, brief proximity with a person distributing communion is permitted. We suggest for Baptist churches the guidance means:

- Any bread and wine the minister lifts symbolically or speaks over should be separate from the bread and wine that is distributed.
- Those distributing bread and wine should wash their hands immediately prior to distribution or wear gloves.
- Pre-prepared pieces of bread can be dropped into the hands of those receiving.
- Small wine cups can be lifted from trays and placed in the hands of those receiving.
- At all times, there should be no contact between those distributing and those receiving, and no contact between those receiving and any plate, basket or tray.

As an alternative, pre-packaged individual cups of juice with a sealed pocket on top for a wafer are available. These could be placed on chairs before the service, though we note the environmental cost of single-use plastic.

Though it is possible to ask worshippers to bring their own bread and wine to a service, care should be taken. It risks a painful breach of the symbolism of unity if some forget to bring any. A service in which only a percentage can take the bread and wine would be in conflict with the very meaning of communion.

Given all this, you may wish to continue celebrating communion by sharing bread and wine in your own homes whilst being led online, if this has been your recent pattern. Or, those who are not digitally connected could agree to follow a set liturgy, posted to each member, at a certain time. It can be a comfort to know that the words in the liturgy are being led concurrently by a minister or other church leader. If small groups of up to six church members are gathering outside for fellowship and prayer, communion might be shared here too.

Children in worship services

In live services, young children should remain with their parents or carers. Though it is possible to hold separate children's programmes, the Government are asking that such groups comply with their [guidance on education and childcare](#). This is not easily translated into the church setting. It is the principles rather than the detail that you will have to apply. You might consider it easier to ask children to remain with parents and carers. Services should then take into account their presence throughout.

Shared toys and books have to be put away and indoor play areas closed, though outside play areas may remain open, as outlined in our [Guidance on Re-opening Baptist Churches](#).

Weddings

All the above comments on whole church worship will apply. Additionally, the following ought to be considered.

- In England the number attending a wedding service has been capped at 30. This includes the couple and all those facilitating the service.
- Services are to be shortened to cover the basics of the ceremony. We suggest this minimum to be the legal requirements plus the additional vows, Bible readings and prayers that affirm that this is a marriage before God.
- The social distancing guidelines of 2m distance between households or 1m where extra protective measures are taken still applies to everyone except the couple. This includes the minister from the couple. It includes any bridal party procession in or out of the service.
- Rings should be brought to the ceremony by the couple themselves.
- It will not be possible for hands to be laid on the couple during prayers.
- For signing registers, all signatories must wear disposable gloves or wash/sanitise their hands immediately before using the pen. This is because the pen and ink are of a particular type and so the same pen has to be used by all signatories. Signatories apart from the couple should remain sufficiently distanced from each other.
- Mingling of guests on the church premises must be discouraged.
- Receptions on church grounds are not feasible as neither social interaction nor food and drink are allowed. The only exception would be where a church has a hospitality space such as a café that operates in line with Government [guidance for restaurants, pubs and bars](#). **In this instance, as for other hospitality venues that have been made COVID-19 secure, receptions may be held for up to 30 people, from 1 August.** Any reception in a private or public space would be limited to two households or, if outdoors, six people from different households, as outlined in the Government's general [advice on social distancing](#).

Given these constraints, we again encourage you to be creative in thinking how best to celebrate weddings. Can others be included by digital means? Should you plan a later service of thanksgiving, perhaps including the reaffirmation of vows?

Please see the separate wedding attendee allowance for churches in Wales noted towards the top of this guidance.

Funerals

All the above comments on whole church worship will apply. Additionally, the following ought to be considered.

- In England, the number attending funerals in churches is capped at 30. This includes all those facilitating the service except for funeral director staff.
- The coffin cannot be carried by mourners.
- We believe open coffins are not permitted, though you should check this with the funeral director.
- We recommend there are no ceremonies around the coffin or body, such as filing past the coffin to pay respects.

Funerals should still be brief and focus on the committal. Given this, it may be easier to use crematoria chapels or go direct to the graveside rather than use a church building. This keeps to a minimum the risks to mourners and funeral staff that are inherent with social interaction and movement between locations. The maximum number of mourners permitted at crematoria is determined by each crematorium and you should check with the funeral director.

The guidance for funerals around those who are self-isolating or shielding are different to that for general worship. A person who is self-isolating may attend a funeral, but not at the same time as a person who is shielding because they are 'extremely clinically vulnerable'. The same is true vice versa. Anyone in either category who wishes to attend should therefore tell the service organiser. If people from both groups wish to attend, it will be a matter of discussion between the service organiser and the family as to which is given priority.

Live streaming, if possible, will enable more people to participate. Alternatively, you can record a reading, prayers, eulogy and message beforehand and make this available to those not present, so they 'share' in the service as it takes place. It can also be offered to anyone wishing to listen in later. You can also produce a leaflet that contains all the above written within it. A service sheet to commemorate the person who has died may still be printed. You can then print the text of the service inside or add it later and send the leaflets round to all those not present.

Please see the separate funeral attendee allowance for churches in Wales noted towards the top of this guidance.

Baptisms

Baptisms by full immersion are not permitted. Government guidance says that only "small volumes [of water] can be splashed onto the body."

Such a reduced use of water strips away much of the symbolism of baptism that we are familiar with. We will be questioning the Government on this matter as we wish to suggest that baptisms should be permitted when the person being baptised and the person baptising is from the same

household or household 'bubble'. This would not stop the minister or another church leader from leading the baptism liturgy and praying for the candidate from the appropriate distance.

In the meantime, we ask you to refrain from using full immersion in a church. There may be other ways of baptising a person outside of church. For example, among a small gathering of up to six people outside. Again, the person baptising and the person being baptised should be from the same household or household 'bubble.' Others could 'join' the event online. Even the service leader could be involved remotely. This could be in a suitable outside body of water or, if in a garden, by effusion (water poured over the candidate.) Though full immersion has always been considered by Baptists to carry the fullest symbolism of participation in the burial and resurrection of Jesus, effusion has often been employed when immersion is not possible. In effusion, the cleansing by much water and the kneeling and standing of the candidate can echo the symbolism of full immersion.

Private prayer

Churches buildings may open for private prayer, as has been the case for a while. Individuals or a group from the same household may use the building for prayer but are discouraged from social interaction with others. All the advice on use of the building, social distancing and hygiene in our guidance on opening churches must be adhered to. Aids to prayer such as books or prayer sheets must be either brought and taken away by the worshipper or be single-use and disposed of by the worshipper.

Care for yourself

We are not unaware of how demanding and perhaps demoralising some of these restrictions are. We also understand that the earlier total ban on meeting was easier to manage than the situation we now face. Leaders may well be in the firing line for criticism from those who disagree with decisions being taken, or who are angry at the toll the pandemic is taking on life and society in general. If you are a minister or other church leader reading this, do make sure that you proceed at a pace that you are comfortable with and which will not demand of you more than you can give. And please pray for, listen to and be vocally supportive of each other within your leadership teams through what continues to be an exceptionally challenging season.

Ministries Team

20 July 2020

This is one of a series of Guidelines that are offered as a resource for Baptist ministers and churches. They have been prepared by the Baptist Union of Great Britain and are, of necessity, intended only to give very general advice in relation to the topics covered. These guidelines should not be relied upon as a substitute for obtaining specific and more detailed advice in relation to a particular matter.

The staff at the Baptist Union of Great Britain at Baptist House will be very pleased to answer your queries and help in any way possible.

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