

NEWCASTLE DIOCESE

LONE WORKING GUIDANCE

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Introduction

The Diocese of Newcastle recognises that during the course of their work, church officers, including clergy and volunteers may find themselves working alone. This may be in church premises, visiting individuals in their homes, or working and receiving people in their own home. This may occur regularly or occasionally but will be a necessary part of the role. Where the work involves home visits, the safety of both the visitor and the person being visited is paramount.

The work of clergy may carry additional risks. It is important that these are fully understood and that a risk assessment and adequate arrangements are made to ensure they are as safe as possible.

Potential Hazards of Lone Working

There are a number of areas where risks may be greater when working alone:

- Accidents or sudden illness when there is no-one to summon help or first aid.
- Violence or the threat of violence.
- Allegations of inappropriate and/or abusive behaviour.
- Fire or other threat.
- Attempting tasks which cannot safely be done by one person alone, e.g. heavy lifting, or use of certain equipment.
- Lack of safe way in or out of a building (e.g. danger of being accidentally locked in).
- Travelling, particularly in bad weather.

Assessing the Risks of Lone Working

The perception of what is a risk and the actual risk itself may be seen differently by individuals. For example, an inexperienced worker may underestimate the risks of an activity; some church officers, especially those in urban parishes may feel particularly vulnerable to violence after dark; or a medical condition may make it unsafe for an individual to work alone.

Clergy, through the PCC, should consider these factors and assess the particular risks in their parish environment. Appropriate steps, using a risk management tool, should be taken to reduce the risk, particularly where the environment around the vicarage or church or area of the visit is lonely, poorly lit and / or in an area where criminal activity is more likely.

Measures to Minimise the Risks of Lone Working

There are a number of things which can be done to minimise risks when working alone. Reducing the risks is the best form of protection. Consider the following:

- Know as much about as possible about any potentially risky situation.
- Avoid, as far as possible, situations with significant risk of vulnerability.
- Consider beforehand a strategy for a swift exit if a situation changes.
- Consider who else might be available to be working in church (also applies at one's home) if a one to one meeting is requested.
- Be familiar with strategies for dealing with difficult situations.
- Be aware of effective communication skills.
- Ensure you have a mobile phone with you.
- Let someone else know where you are going and when you will be back.
- Explore a simple system for reporting safe return e.g. short text or phone call.
- Ensure that someone else has a record of car and mobile phone details.
- Park safely and as close to the destination as possible.

Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Clergy

These guidelines on Lone Working and Personal Safety should be read in conjunction with the good practice advice given in the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy, which are on the Church of England website. Each Office Holder should have a copy provided to them but a copy is available in Appendix 2 for reference. They comment:

“At the heart of ministry is risk. Faced by a pastoral situation the minister has to take immediate decisions about what to say and do”.

Clergy will often find themselves in the powerful position of meeting people at the limits of their vulnerability. The Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy seek to help you to safeguard and reassure such people, so engendering trust, without which ministry cannot take place. They set out how to maintain appropriate boundaries, which in themselves are helpful in preventing misunderstandings and reducing risks. Clergy/Church Officers should also consider whether it would be better for pastoral care to be undertaken by a professionally qualified person ie therapist, financial advisor.

Reporting Incidents

Please report to your incumbent [or other if no incumbent] any incidents or near misses that happen to you as soon as possible so that you can be supported. This allows for lessons to be learned and practice to be improved.

Further details on personal safety can be obtained from:

- Suzy Lamplugh Trust <http://www.suzylamplugh.org>
- National Churchwatch <http://www.nationalchurcheistrust.org/>
- Home Office <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office>
- Local police force websites

Thanks is expressed to the Diocese of St Albans whose lone working guidelines were used to inform this guidance.

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