

## Webinar for Churchwardens on 11 June 2020 – Questions with Answers

### **1. Are we nearer to a situation where several people at a time (by arrangement) are able to access church for prayer, maintaining social distancing.**

The government advice is that from 13 June 2020 it is permissible for churches to be open for private/individual prayer. This is defined as:

"Individual prayer within a place of worship is defined as a person or household entering the venue to pray on their own and not as part of a group, led prayer or communal act.

Public worship remains not to be permitted at the present time. The government have indicated that the soonest this might be permitted is 4 July 2020 – but this is subject to confirmation.

### **2. NHS advice is still that anyone aged 70 or over, or with certain medical conditions, even though not at very high risk, 'should try to stay at home as much as possible'. Should clergy, church officers or members of congregations who are in those categories take any part in preparing churches for individual private prayer, and/or making churches available for i.p.p., and/or participate in i.p.p. themselves?**

The very latest government guidance about shielded groups and clinically vulnerable groups (which includes over 70s) issued on 11 June 2020 states:

*We know that people 70 and over, those with certain underlying conditions and pregnant women may be more clinically vulnerable, so we have advised them to take particular care to avoid contact with others.*

*That means such individuals can meet people outdoors but should be especially careful. Similarly, clinically vulnerable people can form a support bubble with another household, if one of the households is an adult living alone or with children, but extra care should be taken. For example all members of the support bubble should be especially careful to socially distance from people outside of the household or bubble.*

*the advice for those aged 70 and over continues to be that they should take particular care to minimise contact with others outside their household. If they do go out more frequently, they should be careful to maintain distance from others. They and everyone should continue to comply with any general social distancing restrictions.*

*We know that those aged 70 and over can be absolutely fit and healthy and it's not the case that everybody over 70 has a chronic health condition or an underlying disease.*

*But unfortunately, we also know that as you get older, there is a higher risk of coronavirus having a more serious impact with infection. Complications and deaths are more common in the elderly, even those without pre-existing conditions."*

With this in mind the diocese advises against those who fall into this category who might be considering participating in preparations for building (cleaning) and supervising at times

when the church is open doing so. This is consistent with the guidance of the national church too.

It is recognised that these conversations will be need to be very carefully managed in order to avoid offence and upset.

The diocese currently continues to say that those who are in the clinically vulnerable category are not permitted to conduct funeral services at the present time because of the government guidance: this is applied to avoid transmission of the virus and ***to lovingly protect, rather than to prohibit and frustrate.***

- 3. If a minister were to make it known that (s)he intended to open the church at the normal time of Sunday worship for i.p.p., and that anyone who happened to come along at that time would be able to hear him/her pray and/or worship aloud, and would be free to echo that, either silently or audibly, what would your view be?**

This is not permissible.

Private prayer has been clearly defined: Individual prayer within a place of worship is defined as a person or household entering the venue to pray on their own and not as part of a group, led prayer or communal act.

No public worship, streamed or otherwise, should take place whilst the building is open to visitors.

- 4. By private prayer, does that mean casual individual visitors?**

Yes.

"Individual prayer within a place of worship is defined as a person or household entering the venue to pray on their own and not as part of a group, led prayer or communal act."

- 5. Can we be open any day of the week or just Sundays.**

This will be a local decision based on the local situation. There is no requirement to open all churches, or to open any church all the time or on any particular day.

The church cannot be open for individual prayer at the same time as worship, streamed or otherwise, is taking place.

- 6. We used to have small morning prayer group meetings in church of up to 10 people. Is this acceptable to restart these or is this going too far yet?**

This is not permissible at the present time.

**7. Will we need to have the buildings cleaned and provide hand sanitiser before we can open?**

The Church of England have provided specific advice about cleaning prior to churches being open for private prayer and a parish risk assessment template. This advice should be read and a risk assessment completed prior to the church being open.

Supplies of hand sanitizer should be available in the porch/inside the main door (or water, soap and paper towels).

**8. Do we need to get approval of specific openings from the Diocese first?**

No. The specific openings need to be agreed at the parish level – not by the diocese.

**9. Then there are of course many questions on how we open for services later, in regards to access, spacing, singing (or not), use of toilets, cleaning etc.?**

This is accepted.

At the present time the government have not confirmed when and how public worship will recommence.

There will be more advice and guidance provided from the Church of England and shared across the diocese.

**10. Then finally looking even further forward, how we allow outside hire groups to return in our buildings. Eg. Our adjacent school used to use our church 3 days a week as overflow classrooms. Eg We had a private dance class using our rooms on Saturdays.**

With the explicit exception of nursery provision, blood donation provision and food banks it is currently *not permitted* for church buildings and church owned property to be used for any other purposes.

As the lockdown eases and these community based activities become permissible advice and guidance will be made available.

**11. Christ Church & St Saviour's (Chadderton), hold a parish prayer meeting on the third Thursday of each month. During lockdown this has been covered by the mailing of a sheet with Bible passage and prayer topics/requests outlined, so that all who wish can use the same format during the set prayer hour. I am considering opening the church on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> for the scheduled prayer hour so that if people wish they can come and pray in the church, rather than at home. I will complete a risk assessment beforehand, chairs will be set out at appropriate distances, those arriving will be asked to use hand gel as they**

**come in and to minimise touching of surfaces. I will clean all surfaces which may have been touched with bleach solution once the last person has left. The maximum number of attenders to 'normal' meetings is about 25; I expect far fewer to attend for private prayer during the hour and this number is easily accommodated within the space of Christ Church. I just wanted to check that this will be acceptable under the definition of 'open for private prayer'?**

"Individual prayer within a place of worship is defined as a person or household entering the venue to pray on their own and not as part of a group, led prayer or communal act.

What is being described is a group prayer/communal act – and is not currently permitted.

**12. Are we obliged to keep a register of attendees once we return to church?**

Members of the public attending for private prayer or for funerals do not have to give their names and contact details. It is good practice for the church to provide a named contact at the church, so that if a member of the public who has been in the church exhibits Coronavirus symptoms within a week, they can let the contact know.

The government guidance advises on the availability of NHS Test and Trace but places no requirements on places of worship to keep records of those entering.

**13. Are church chairs with upholstery on their seats and backrests in a different category from other kinds of seating in regard to the cleaning necessary if and when people enter for i.p.p.?**

Parishes should refer to the guidance regarding cleaning provided by the Church of England.

**14. When a parish is in vacancy and a licensed minister states his/her intention of opening the church for i.p.p. at a time of his/her choosing, to what extent should the PCC (through its vice-chairman) insist on making the decision? Would a standing committee majority view, obtained by reply-all emails, be appropriate?**

Whether to open the church for private prayer and funerals is a decision for the minister (i.e. the incumbent or priest in charge). The minister is advised to consult the PCC before taking a decision to re-open, given the responsibilities the PCC has in relation to maintaining and insuring the building. If there is no incumbent or Priest in Charge, the decision is for the churchwardens and rural/area dean, who should consult the PCC.

This decision should be reached together having examined the Church of England guidance and having completed the risk assessment.

**15. Will church wardens of Parishes in interregnums be supported with the risk assessments?**

Risk assessments should ideally be completed by the PCC as a collective. If there is specific advice needed, in the first instance it is advised that parishes in this situation reach out to the Archdeacon.

**16. Will parish risk assessments be checked / approved by the Diocese and advice / recommendations given? (similar to what Local Authorities have done with schools)**

No. There is no requirement for the risk assessment to be submitted to Church House.

**17. If we choose not to open will we have the support of the Diocese? I can envisage a situation whereby undertakers / funeral directors assume that churches can be used simply because the government has said so and will then have families who want to use church however some churches may not be able to open - to what extent will the Diocese support us or can undertakers 'force' us to open for funerals just because the government say we can?**

While it will be permissible for churches to open for private prayer it is not compulsory. Individual parishes can decide when and if they open for private prayer depending on local circumstances.

The diocese will support all parishes in the decisions that they make and offer practical advice as required.

This applies to funerals too. The House of Bishops have also been very clear: There will be places where, for a number of reasons, it might not still be advised to conduct funerals inside church buildings and the decision will be taken locally.

**18. What cleaning requirement is needed between church use (e.g. say it was open for private prayer and there was a funeral the day after) and / or what type of cleaning constitutes a deep clean?**

There is no definition of a deep clean – this needs to be determined locally. The advice and guidance provided by the Church of England should be referred to.

The frequency and format of cleaning needs to be determined locally – and this should be discussed, agreed and documented in the risk assessment.

**19. What if churches can't get hold of products to ensure safe opening - namely hand sanitiser and hand wash, which are both in short supply - can the Diocese assist with this? (similar to what Local Authorities have done / are doing with schools)?**

If churches cannot get products (hand sanitiser and hand wash) to enable opening of the church safely then it is prudent not to open.

Parishes are encouraged to register with [Parish Buying](#) for procurement options.

**20. Could we have advice please about churchwardens and volunteers over the age of 70 opening up church for private prayer time and then cleaning down afterwards?**

The very latest government guidance about shielded groups and clinically vulnerable groups (which includes over 70s) issued on 11 June 2020 states:

*We know that people 70 and over, those with certain underlying conditions and pregnant women may be more clinically vulnerable, so we have advised them to take particular care to avoid contact with others.*

*That means such individuals can meet people outdoors but should be especially careful. Similarly, clinically vulnerable people can form a support bubble with another household, if one of the households is an adult living alone or with children, but extra care should be taken. For example all members of the support bubble should be especially careful to socially distance from people outside of the household or bubble.*

*the advice for those aged 70 and over continues to be that they should take particular care to minimise contact with others outside their household. If they do go out more frequently, they should be careful to maintain distance from others. They and everyone should continue to comply with any general social distancing restrictions.*

*We know that those aged 70 and over can be absolutely fit and healthy and it's not the case that everybody over 70 has a chronic health condition or an underlying disease.*

*But unfortunately, we also know that as you get older, there is a higher risk of coronavirus having a more serious impact with infection. Complications and deaths are more common in the elderly, even those without pre-existing conditions."*

With this in mind the diocese advises against those who fall into this category who might be considering participating in preparations for building (cleaning) and supervising at times when the church is open doing so. This is consistent with the guidance of the national church too.

It is recognised that these conversations will be need to be very carefully managed in order to avoid offence and upset.

The diocese currently continues to say that those who are in the clinically vulnerable category are not permitted to conduct funeral services at the present time because of the government guidance: this is applied to avoid transmission of the virus and to lovingly protect, rather than to prohibit and frustrate.

**21. The current C of E advice says that anyone with underlying health conditions should not assist in cleaning but does not mention age whereas there is guidance for clergy and churchwardens over 70 not to be attending church as part of their duties.**

See response to question 20.

**22. Also - wall mounted dispensers**

**It was suggested at the last Zoom that these would be permitted for 6 months but the website now indicates they are not permitted. Can we have clarification please?**

[1] Free-standing hand sanitisers may be placed on a table or other object in the porch or near the entrance to a Church without the need for a Faculty.

[2] Requests for interim Faculties for wall-mounted hand sanitisers are discouraged and are unlikely to be granted save in exceptional circumstances. Applications will be determined by the Chancellor on their individual merits. If he is persuaded that it is necessary for such to be installed, an interim Faculty will be granted for a limited period of no more than 12 months on condition that any fixings are drilled through mortar joints in any wall, if appropriate, and after such hand sanitisers are removed, the wall shall be made good within 28 days.

A new FAQ was published on 12 June 2020 on the diocesan website regarding faculty applications – and should be referred to for full advice.

**23. Is there any limit on how many can be in church at any one time for private prayer?**

For private prayer by individuals or members of the same household, multiple members of the public can be admitted provided that no more are present that allows social distancing to be maintained. Depending on how busy the building is likely to be some reminders of the 2 metre spacing may well be helpful

The limit will need to be based on each church individually – depending on what will be practical to ensure social distancing.

**24. As our chairs are upholstered these cannot be cleaned after use so what do we do?**

There is no specific, detailed advice about the cleaning of upholstered chairs. If the church is able to accommodate private prayer using seating that is not upholstered these chairs might be roped off for now.

The risk assessment should take account of church seating etc. and help each parish decide if opening is appropriate.

***My addition – it has since been said that the only sure way to clean upholstered chairs is to leave them for 72 hours before allowing anyone else to sit on them***

**25. We have a prayer that meets on a Tuesday morning, but that still cannot go ahead at the moment.**

It is not permissible for this prayer meeting to take place at the present time

**26. Do we have clean after someone has been in church? I.e. where they have been sat etc.**

The Church of England document, which can be accessed via the diocesan coronavirus webpage gives advice about the extent and frequency of cleaning. This document should be referred to when completing the risk assessment. The risk assessment includes specific questions about cleaning.

**27. The URL to the risk assessment would be useful**

<https://www.manchester.anglican.org/documents/parish-risk-assessment-template/>

A further updated risk assessment template was published by the Church of England on 12 June 2020. It can be accessed via this link:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/20510>

**28. Can we put a washing bowl i.e. washing up bowl, at the door to wash hands without a faculty?**

The government have stated that on entering and leaving a place of worship everyone, including staff, should be asked to wash their hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds using soap and water or to use hand sanitiser if hand washing facilities are not available.

If there is a facility for people to access a sink, running water, soap and paper towels it would be preferable to enable them to use this.

If a washing bowl is provided it would need to be replenished after every use – rather than being left for multiple uses.

**29. Could funerals be streamed online so that the clinically extremely vulnerable can participate from home?**

This is technically feasible.

**30. Has there been any announcement on Weddings?**

Currently there can be no weddings in church buildings until further notice.

**31. Advise please if people begin to hug each other?**

Social distancing is advised by the government at the current time. With the exception of those from the same household.

There is no expectation that clergy or lay people should seek to intervene if people choose not to adhere to the government advice and hug.

**32. Do you need to keep a register of attendees for tracing purposes?**

Members of the public attending for private prayer or for funerals do not have to give their names and contact details. It is good practice for the church to provide a named contact at the church, so that if a member of the public who has been in the church exhibits Coronavirus symptoms within a week, they can let the contact know.

The government guidance advises on the availability of NHS Test and Trace but places no requirements on places of worship to keep records of those entering.

### **33. Would a vergger be permitted at funerals?**

Minimising the number of people in attendance is the priority consideration.

The guidelines say that additional people including verggers are 'not encouraged' to attend the service so it's not an absolute ban.

At the current time minimising the numbers of people who gather in enclosed buildings is a key part of the efforts to reduce virus transmission. This is what is behind the discouragement of verggers attending.

If a clergy person takes the judgment that they need an additional person to undertake "management/supervision" duties for a funeral service they should agree that on a case by case basis.

If the vergger is there they must be there for a reason (and that reason must be understood)

The vergger should not be in the shielded or clinically vulnerable categories or be self-isolating

The vergger should follow all the hand hygiene, social distancing measures etc.

The parish risk assessment should take account of who needs to be in the building to support a funeral.

### **34. Will people looking after the church during private prayer have to wear face coverings?**

The latest government advice regarding face coverings in places of worship states:

Evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does not protect you. However, if you are infected but have not yet developed symptoms, it may provide some protection for others you come into close contact with. Wearing a face covering is only a requirement in hospital and on public transport where wearing a face covering is mandatory from the 15th June.

However, worshippers, and staff at the venue, may wear face coverings to offer protection to others and it is important to use them properly and thoroughly wash hands before putting them on and taking them off.

Face coverings are not a replacement for the other ways of managing risk, including social distancing, minimising time spent in contact, and increasing hand and surface washing. If you have symptoms of COVID-19 (cough, and/or high temperature, and/or loss of, or change

in, your normal sense of smell or taste - anosmia), you and your household must isolate at home: wearing a face covering does not change this. You should arrange to have a test to see if you have COVID-19. These measures remain the best ways of managing risk in a place of worship.

A face covering is not the same as the surgical masks or respirators used by healthcare and other workers as part of personal protective equipment. These should continue to be reserved for those who need them to protect against risks in their workplace, such as health and care workers, and those in industrial settings, like those exposed to dust hazards who already use these in their daily work.

Face coverings should not be used by children under the age of 2 or those who may find it difficult to manage them correctly. For example, primary age children unassisted, or those with respiratory conditions.

See guidance on making face coverings at home. The key thing is they should cover the mouth and nose and fit well around the face.

**35. If Summer Holiday Clubs wish to hire church buildings is there any advice?**

At the present time this is not permissible.

**36. Can we recommence building work which had been put on hold?**

There is specific advice and guidance about this within an FAQ on the diocesan website.

**37. it's going to be very difficult turning away people if more than social distance numbers allow in our church**

There may be a need to introduce a queuing system for times when your church has reached capacity.

The government advises the following:

- Queue management is important so the flow of groups in and out of the premises can be carefully controlled, reducing the risk of congestion or contact. Considerations should be made for how to manage those waiting outside a place of worship, including the introduction of socially distanced queuing systems.

For example:

- Introduce a one-way flow in and out of the premises with appropriate floor markings or signage, with restrictions on accessing non-essential areas.
- Multiple entry points could be opened and clear signposting or assistance could be offered to guide worshippers and avoid congestion.
- Staggering arrival and departure times can also reduce the flow at exits and entrances as well as reduce any impacts on public transport. Venues could also consider introducing a booking system to help facilitate this.

**38. How long does the virus last on soft materials like paper, card, books?**

The scientists suggest it is 72 hours.

**39. looking forward. could we offer our church facilities to our church school to assist them to open in September?**

Sadly, what the government say is permissive is restricted to early years' childcare provision - so offering space for use by the school is not viable at the present time.

**40. If we have to see a contactors risk assessment before they can work in church should we also ask the funeral directors for a risk assessment**

It would be perfectly reasonable for a parish to ask this of a funeral director.

**41. If we agree to funerals taking place, can we ask that attendees wear face masks?**

See response to question 34.

**42. Do Insurers need to sign Risk Assessments off?**

There is nothing to suggest that they do. However, they will need to know that a risk assessment has been conducted.

**43. Do we need to take everyone's name and contact detail so all who enter the building?**

This is not a defined requirement of the government. Each parish can decide this for itself.

**44. Re using church buildings, our parish hall has an old air raid shelter which we use to receive newspaper from people & store it until we can fill a skip for which we receive money. This was suspended in lockdown. When will be able to resume?**

This is currently not permissible. There is no clarity at the present time when this will be able to recommence.

**45. You were saying that live musicians cannot be in the church to limit numbers. Is the playing of pre-recorded music permissible?**

It would be permissible to play pre-recorded music. However, this might not be something that every permission attending for private prayer would find conducive.

**46. One member of our PCC is a retired insurance expert, and he is asking whether we can claim from Ecclesiastical for loss of income under our policy as the policy wording seems to allow this. Has the Diocese explored this option at all?**

The diocese has not made a direct approach regarding this matter at this point.

**47. How do we handle envelopes? could the envelopes into plastic bags then into a safe?**

***If anybody brings their regular giving envelopes to the church when attending for private prayer they should only do so if there is a means of securely leaving the envelopes (eg: a locked box) in order to reduce the risk of theft.***

***If envelopes are received it would be prudent to allow time to elapse before they are handled and opened. Consideration needs also to be given to being able to secure the envelopes during this time.***