

Preparing to return to our church buildings

Checklist for clergy and PCCs

Diocese of Blackburn
COVID Task Group

Version 2 - 28th May 2020

Version	Date	Changes since last version
1	13 th May	None – first publication
2	28 th May	Updated advice re: use of candles and cleaning in line with guidance from the national Church of England

Introduction

The latest information from the UK government (covering England) released on 11th May provided some details on how relaxation of lockdown measures that have been in place since mid-March would occur in steps. It is likely that some, or all, of the following social distancing restrictions may be in place for many months:

- i) Older and more vulnerable people may need to continue to self-isolate
- ii) People may be asked to wear face masks when out of the house
- iii) People from different households may need to maintain a distance of 2 metres from each other
- iv) Good handwashing/cleansing practices will need to continue
- v) Limits on the number of people who can meet socially may be set; between 5-50 people

This document provides a checklist for parish clergy/PCC for three scenarios:

- a) A priest, or nominated lay-person, may choose to enter their church(es) for private prayer and record/livestream services alone or with members of their household – **From 7th May 2020** (shared via Coronavirus briefing on 7th May)

Currently, from 4th July (at the earliest):

- b) The church may be opened to the public for private prayer; assuming social distancing can be maintained
- c) The church may be opened for public worship; with limited numbers and assuming social distancing can be maintained

The checklists below are offered as a guide only. Each church/parish setting and building is different so decisions will need to be taken locally **including whether to enter and/or open church(es) at all. NB No priest is required to enter their church(es).** Decisions should be based on an objective assessment of risk to individuals (clergy, volunteers, congregation and members of the public) balanced with the desire to re-engage with prayer and worship. Area Deans, the Archdeacons and members of the DAC continue to be available to provide advice.

The checklists will be added to and updated as and when government/national Church of England guidance becomes clearer, including the return to holding funerals, weddings, baptisms and memorial services in church buildings, holding public worship outside, as well as other 'non-public worship' activities in church premises (including halls).

As Test and Trace becomes more prominent, there may be questions about 'what to do if someone with the virus has been in my church building?' If someone symptomatic of, or confirmed to have Covid-19, has used the building, in ideal circumstances the building should be closed for 72 hours. After this period the building should be cleaned. Where closure is not possible, cleaning of the building should follow the specific guidance found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>"

Scenario A) A Priest may enter their church(es) for private prayer and record/livestream services alone or with members of their household – From 7th May 2020

As the priest is entering the building alone or with members of their household, there are relatively few actions to be considered.

Action	Activities to consider	Completed Y/N
Entering/leaving the building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The priest (and any members of their household) should go directly to the church, wash their hands, ideally with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds on entering the building, drying hands with paper towels and complete the time of private prayer / recording/ live streaming • The priest (and any members of their household) should return directly to their household and wash their hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds on returning home • Wiping down/cleansing of all hard surfaces before and after touching with suitable cleaning materials (please see appendix if historic surfaces are to be cleaned), especially those which are frequently touched such as door handles, microphone stands, taps etc. All wipes used to wipe down surfaces should be disposed in the appropriate bin. • Personal safety if entering the building alone eg take a mobile and inform someone you are going to the church and when you expect to return home • If you are using candles then take care not to light them immediately after using hand sanitiser gel, especially if this has alcohol in it. Wait a full minute after applying gel, then wipe your hands with a disposable tissue. Candles and matches/lighters should be either removed from the building when you leave, or securely locked away 	
Livestreaming/ recording services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check strength of wi-fi/4G signal before livestreaming 	

Scenario B) The church may be open to the public for private prayer – PLANNING ONLY

As the church building may not have been used for at least seven weeks, significant thought will be needed before the ‘public’ – including congregation members – can safely enter the building.

Those self-isolating due to age and underlying health conditions should be dissuaded from entering the building – and would therefore not be available to be on any ‘steward/caretaker’ rota.

Opening for at least 4 hours per day minimises the number of people who may be in the building at any one time.

Action	Activities to consider	Completed Y/N?
Preparing the building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run all the taps (to minimise the risk of legionella) and flush and clean toilets. Run the water from all taps and other hot and cold water-outlets for at least five minutes to ensure the water system has been thoroughly flush through. If you have any concerns seek appropriate professional help/advice. • Thoroughly clean floors/hard surfaces that are likely to be touched using a cleaning agent – ideally a cleaning product that contains bleach (NB check suitability if to be used on historic surfaces) See Appendix for Q & A • Air/de-humidify the church (ideally keep an ‘active airflow’) • Check legal compliance with statutory inspections eg fire extinguishers • Look around buildings for any damage and/or animal droppings • Ensure that the holy water stoups/font are/is empty • Deal with urgent maintenance eg clear paths/cut grass (if not done) • Consider the flow of people through the building. Where possible, establish a one-way system to minimise the probability of close contact at doors or other ‘bottlenecks’. Where possible, leave doors open so fewer people touch door handles as well as helping to air the space. • Consider how to mark out 2 metre spacing in pews/remove chairs to maintain social distancing (avoid damage to wooden pews by using chalk?) 	

<p>Steward/ caretaker/ vergger (clergy and/or volunteer)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide whether 'steward(s)/caretaker(s) are required. If alone they should ideally have a mobile phone, another person should know they are there, and they should have an escape route available other than the main door. • Decide how to ensure that there are facilities to wash/ cleanse hands on entering the church and every hour whilst in the building and on leaving the church. NB The recommended minimum process is the use of alcohol gel with a prominently displayed poster guiding people how to apply to both hands and wrists on entering and leaving the church building. • Ideally have a rota, so that no one steward stays in the building for the whole time that it is open – minimising their 'exposure time' risk 	
<p>Communications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide how to inform the congregation and others in the community that the church is open for prayer and the opening times 	
<p>Members of the congregation/ public entering/leaving the building</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide how to ensure the wipe down/ cleansing of all surfaces after opening – especially metallic surfaces eg door handles (see appendix for more guidance). The person undertaking the cleaning should wear disposable gloves. All wipes should be disposed of into a bin bag. • Decide how to provide alcohol based sanitiser gel/wipes or facilities for handwashing with disposable paper towels available to all as they enter the building. Provide bins and seal then safely dispose of the bin liner at the end of the period of opening. • Decide how to abide by any government guidelines on wearing of 'face masks' – consider the provision of masks. • Decide how to provide prayer resources eg single use pieces of paper • Decide how to record the details of those who have entered the building for any future contact tracing requirements – ideally each person should bring their own pen 	

Scenario C) The church may be open for public worship – PLANNING ONLY

Those self-isolating due to age or underlying health conditions would be dissuaded from entering the building – and therefore unlikely to be attending the service, nor available for volunteering eg as sidespeople. It is currently assumed that teas/coffees cannot be served.

It is not yet clear whether a) live singing will be allowed (eg it is not permitted in Germany) and b) contact details of those who have attended will need to be kept eg for contact tracing (Eg as in Germany/USA)

Action	Activities to consider	Completed Y/N?
Preparing the building (if not previously opened for private prayer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refill/flush liquid (water/oil)/gas systems – safety check with engineer? • Thoroughly clean floors/hard surfaces that are likely to be touched (materials to be used should be checked for suitability - especially if historic surfaces are to be cleaned. See Appendix for Q & A) • Air/de-humidify the church (ideally keep an 'active airflow') • Check legal compliance with statutory inspections eg fire extinguishers • Look around buildings for any damage and/or animal droppings • Ensure that the holy water stoups/font are/is empty • Deal with urgent maintenance eg clear paths/cut grass (if not done) • Consider the flow of people through the building. Where possible, establish a one-way system to minimise the probability of close contact at doors or other 'bottlenecks'. Where possible, leave doors open so fewer people touch door handles as well as helping to air the space. • Consider how to mark out 2 metre spacing in pews/remove chairs to maintain social distancing (take care not to damage wood with masking tape, use chalk?) 	
Volunteers eg sidespeople/verger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the minimum number of volunteers needed to ensure a safe and welcoming church • Decide how those providing a welcome be protected from airborne particles eg wear a face mask and possibly wear disposable gloves if opening doors 	

How to ensure number limits aren't exceeded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess how many people might like to attend public worship in person • Decide whether to develop a rota or use on-line ticket system eg Eventbrite • Consider what to do if people who haven't booked, just 'drop in' 	
Liturgy/music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide how to conduct the peace whilst remaining socially distanced • If allowed, decide how to distribute the sacraments whilst remaining socially distanced • Decide how liturgy, readings and prayer resources should be provided eg 'on screen' where possible and/or single use paper – not the usual Bibles and service books (that should be stored away) – Ask people to bring their own? • Decide whether instrumental/recorded music/worship videos be played (without singing)? • Consider the length of the service, NB the shorter the service, the lower the 'exposure time' risk to airborne virus particles to those attending 	
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide how to inform the congregation and others in the community that the church is open for public worship (potentially at different times to the usual pattern' and/or access the service on-line 	
Provision for those unable to attend in person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide how congregation members and 'the new digital fringe' be kept involved? Perhaps livestream or record services and upload/produce DVDs? 	
Member of the congregation/ public entering/ leaving the building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide how to wipe down/cleansing of all surfaces regularly – especially metallic surfaces eg door handles. • Decide how to provide alcohol-based sanitizer gel/wipes or facilities for handwashing with disposable paper towels available to all as they enter the building. Provide bins and seal then safely dispose of the bin liner at the end of the service • Decide how any government guidelines on wearing of 'face masks' including the provision of masks can be met • Decide how to record the details of those who have entered the building for any future contact tracing requirements – ideally each person should bring their own pen 	

Appendix

Keeping church buildings clean

Version Control Issue Date Version
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Issued by
The Archbishops' Council, Cathedral and Church Buildings Division

General Questions

- **What do we need to do to keep the church buildings clean?**

For routine cleaning, frequently clean those areas that are used, using your usual cleaning products. Pay particular attention to objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, and to busy areas. For advice on cleaning historic parts of churches please see below.

- **What if someone with symptoms has attended the church building?**

If you are cleaning after a known or suspected case of COVID-19 then refer to the specific guidance.

- **Is there any way we can reduce the amount of cleaning we need to do?**

You may want to consider restricting access to certain parts of the church to reduce the area of cleaning required.

To reduce the amount of cleaning of door handles you may want to consider propping open doors if this is appropriate.

- **How often should we clean?**

This will depend on the local situation and your local risk assessment. You will want to consider things like footfall, the nature of your building, whether you have restricted access to some parts, the need to clean those parts that are more frequently used more often eg door handles, toilets. If a church is closed for more than 72 hours, this will reduce the need for cleaning.

- **Who can clean?**

Anyone who is considered vulnerable and with an underlying health condition should be encouraged to stay at home and not assist in cleaning at this time.

Whilst churches are only open to ministers for private prayer and live streaming, only the minister or a household member should be regularly entering the church, other than for maintenance or building work. At this time, cleaning should be proportionate and depend on the use of the building.

Once others are allowed to enter individual prayer, then cleaning will become essential. Numbers going in to clean should be kept to a minimum, and social distancing complied with at all times.

- **What about cleaning the historic elements of church buildings?**

If historic fixtures and fittings have been restricted from access, they should not need to be cleaned. If they form part of the accessible areas that will be touched by the general public, such as pews, the following advice should be followed.

Historic England advises the following when cleaning historic parts of buildings:

Metal/wood/stone/glass/ceramic/modern painted surfaces can be cleaned with a dilute solution of non-ionic conservation-grade detergent or sensitive washing up liquid and distilled water, rinsed with distilled water and dried immediately with white paper towel or soft cotton cloth. Follow manufacturer's instructions for dilution, application and contact times (a minimum contact time of 20 seconds is currently advised by PHE) for all detergents.

Examples of conservation grade non-ionic cleaners include:

- ORBUS WA Paste
- DeHyponLS45
- Synperonic 91/6

Getting hold of conservation grade materials may be difficult. If you can't get hold of conservation grade materials, try to use products with as few additives as possible but that will still clean a surface, such as detergents with no added perfumes and no harsh chemicals. The Ecover range, for example, has few harsh chemicals but will be effective if used correctly. Other examples include Boots Sensitive, and Surecare.

Distilled water is preferable. This is water that contains no salts, so that there are no residues or corrosives to interact with delicate surfaces. However, distilled water may be difficult to obtain, so in these circumstances tap water or filtered tap can be used instead.

If there is no water source in the church, bringing in spray bottles filled up at home may be useful. If this is not possible then cleaning wipes can be used instead but be aware this is not a good solution for delicate surfaces, and wipes with alcohol in them should be avoided. Use of wipes is not recommended for long-term use on historic or varnished surfaces but will work as a temporary measure to keep frequently-touched areas such as doors clean.

Metal surfaces can also be cleaned with industrial denatured alcohol (IDA), such as methylated spirits or isopropanol.

Do NOT use any household detergents or disinfectants containing **chlorine** (1000 ppm dilution) on any historic surface since these could cause permanent damage.

Cleaning materials should be disposed of appropriately.

Seek advice from a Conservator before undertaking any cleaning to more fragile historic surfaces.

- **What should we do about general hand hygiene: hand washing, sanitation facilities and toilets?**

Signs and posters can help build awareness of good hand washing technique, the need to increase hand washing frequency, avoid touching your face and to cough or sneeze into a tissue which is binned safely. Try not to stick posters and signs to historic fabric - use free standing signs or noticeboards.

- **What about toilets?**

Ensure toilets are kept clean, use liquid rather than a bar of soap, and where possible, provide paper towels as an alternative to hand dryers in hand washing facilities. If regular cleaning of toilets is challenging you may need to think about shutting them or limiting access.

- **What about upholstery and soft furnishings?**

Available information suggests that unless they have been soiled soft furnishings do not need to be cleaned other than as part of your usual cleaning processes, which may include vacuuming with a soft brush attachment

- **Should we wear personal protection equipment (PPE)?**

The Government advises that additional PPE is not generally beneficial. This is because COVID-19 is a different type of risk to the risks you normally face in a workplace, and needs to be managed through social distancing, hygiene and not through the use of PPE. Unless you are in a situation where the risk of COVID-19 transmission is very high or there is a problem with mould or bat droppings (which would have required the use of PPE in any case), the role of PPE in providing additional protection is extremely limited.

- **What about face coverings?**

The evidence of the benefit of using a face covering to protect others is weak and the effect is likely to be small, therefore face coverings are not a replacement for the other ways of managing risk, including minimising time spent in any form of contact with anyone outside your household, maintaining social distancing, and increasing hand and surface washing.

Further advice can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://historicengland.org.uk/coronavirus/historic-places/cleaning-historic-surfaces/>

If someone symptomatic of, or confirmed to have Covid-19, has used the building, in ideal circumstances the building should be closed for 72 hours. After this period the building should be cleaned. Where closure is not possible, cleaning of the building should follow the specific guidance found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>

Other people who have been in the building should be contacted to advise them of the risk – they may also be contacted via the new ‘Test and Trace’ process.

Preparing water systems

See [Government Guidance for organisations on supplying safe water supplies](#)