

COVID-19: opening cathedral and church buildings to the public

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17 th December 2020	5.1	The House of Bishops Covid-19 Recovery Group
Updates from version 5: A strengthening of Government guidance on performances and tourism in tier 3 areas means we have updated the relevant sections below.		

The Recovery Group has been set up to support the Church of England as government guidance changes through the COVID-19 pandemic. This document has been prepared with information available by the issue date. It will be kept under review and updated as the situation develops, with each update issued as a new version. The current version will always be available to download from the Church of England website via the [Coronavirus FAQs page](#).

This document should be read in conjunction with the Church of England’s guidance on conducting public worship and relevant government guidance as detailed below.

The Government announced that from 2 December 2020, measures to limit the transmission of COVID-19 in England would be subject to a regionally-differentiated approach, where different tiers of restrictions apply in different parts of the country. Public worship is allowed in church buildings, though with some important restrictions depending on which tier the church is in. Other activities are also allowed, also with certain restrictions. Some special local restrictions apply, so it is important for parishes to check their local situation. This note provides general guidance on matters related to buildings management which will help PCCs ensure that buildings are ready to be opened safely and in line with government guidance.

In using all this advice, Government guidance on social distancing and other relevant public health measures must be taken into account. Each church building is different, and a proportionate response will be necessary according to local circumstances.

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The three-tier system and church buildings

1. How many people can churches allow into their buildings?

- The number of people able to attend a place of worship is determined by the number of people the space can safely contain while all attendees adhere to social distancing of 2m between households, or 1m with additional safeguards.
- You can find more information on what is allowable in different tiers [in this document](#). In terms of numbers the rules broadly are:
 - In tier 1 areas, people may attend with or socialise within groups of up to six people while there;
 - In tier 2 areas, people may attend with or socialise within groups of up to six people while outside the building but not when inside;
 - In tier 3 areas, people must not attend with or socialise with anyone from outside their household or support bubble, either inside or outside the building, unless a legal exemption applies.

These limits are the law and the police have the power to enforce them. There are a few exemptions which may be relevant to churches; these are [listed here](#). There are also specific exemptions for weddings and funerals (see section 2 below).

- It is essential that PCCs and managers of church buildings carry out a [risk assessment](#), or update their existing risk assessment, and put in place measures to ensure they are Covid-19 secure. It should not be assumed that any activity is permitted in a church – activities where close physical contact will be hard to avoid, such as coffee after a service, are unlikely to be safe to hold and may easily lead to illegal behaviour where groups mingle with one another.
- The intention of the current rules is to limit the spread of the virus by minimising close physical contact as much as possible. When deciding whether to proceed with an activity, depending on local circumstances, please bear this principle in mind.
- In tier 1 areas, multiple groups of up to six can gather in a church building for certain purposes, but individual groups must remain at no more than six people (larger if all are members of an individual household, support bubble or exempt grouping) and household groups of any size must be able to distance from one another.
- Where group members are from different households, they should maintain social distancing of 2m, or 1m with additional safeguards even within their group of six.
- Whatever the purpose of their visit (worship, tourism, community activity or anything else), the total number of people attending worship is limited by how many people can socially distance within the venue. Seating, visitor routes and entrance/exit arrangements should enable everyone to practise physical distancing from those they don't live with (or share a bubble or exempt grouping with).
- People should only enter and leave the venue together, and socially interact, within a household group (or support bubble or exempt grouping) or, in a tier 1 area, a group of up to six from different households.
- Between 23 and 27 December, the restrictions set out above will be relaxed to allow people to attend a place of worship with members of their Christmas bubble. This applies in all tiers. A Christmas bubble is a group composed of people from up to three households and you can find [guidance on managing this here](#)

2. What activities are permitted in churches?

- Communal worship is allowed in any church, as long as it can safely be held within the restrictions set out above.

- Weddings, funerals and commemoration services for a specific individual are subject to specific limits of 15, 30 and 15 people respectively, whether in tier 1, 2 or 3. Specific guidance applies, including to any associated reception or social event.
- Prayer and study groups, and other religious activities, including preparatory activities, are subject to the same limits as worship itself.
- Between 23 and 27 December, but only then, people may attend a place of worship with members of their Christmas bubble. This applies in all tiers.
- Other activities run by the church may take place if they have been assessed as safe and the venue is Covid-19 secure.
- Support groups such as bereavement groups or support for victims of crime, will still be able to take place subject to a limit of 15 people, provided that they can socially distance. The list of support groups identified by the government is [here](#).
- Supervised activities for children, such as mother and baby groups, are subject to a limit of 15 people, provided that they can socially distance. Children under five are not counted towards this limit.
- Churches hired out or lent for other purposes, such as hospitality, community activities or performing arts, are subject to the specific guidance in place for those sectors or activities.

3. Do I need to arrange my seating in a particular way?

- Yes. The total number of people attending worship is limited by how many people can socially distance within the venue. Seating should enable everyone to practise social distancing from those they don't live with (or share a bubble or exempt grouping with). If you have unfixed seating, you can arrange it with 2m gaps between seats to demonstrate the required distancing, even though household groups may place their seats together. If you have fixed seating, you can mark off rows or places to demonstrate the required distancing.
- In tier 1 areas, the maximum number of people that you should socially interact with outside your household in a place of worship is six, including when leaving or arriving. It is still necessary for people to socially distance, including when seated.

4. Can groups socialise with one another after worship or as part of a visit or activity in a church building?

- No. People should be encouraged to move on promptly afterwards, to minimise the risk of contact and spread of infection.
- Everyone, at all times, needs to limit close physical contact with people not in their household or support bubble as much as possible.

5. Does the exemption for Places of Worship cover faith groups hiring other venues (or outside spaces) for communal worship?

- Yes, it is the activity of communal worship that is exempt from the law against groups of more than six people from gathering.
- A faith group can host a prayer service or communal worship at a hired venue that is Covid-19 secure, with the same restrictions as a place of worship.

6. Does the exemption cover faith groups gathering in outdoor public spaces for communal worship?

- Yes, it is the activity of communal worship that is exempt from the law against groups of more than 6 people from gathering, rather than the place of worship.
- This means that a faith group can host a prayer service or conduct communal worship in an outdoor public space, with the same restrictions as an indoor place of worship.

- In order to do so, they must undertake a rigorous risk assessment for the event alongside the private owner or relevant local authority, and ensure that safeguards are in place to allow for strict social distancing between attendees.
- All attendees should provide contact details for the purposes of NHS Test and Trace.
- This exemption applies to the grounds of a place of worship or any other outdoor venue authorised for gatherings where the landowner allows it. It does not apply to private spaces such as gardens.
- You can find a template risk assessment for outdoor worship [here](#).

7. Does the exemption cover faith groups gathering in outdoor private spaces, such as gardens, for communal worship?

No. The rules of gathering in private spaces are laid down in the tier system and faith groups are not exempt from these.

8. Are prayer groups/study groups for adults meeting in church buildings subject to a specific cap?

- No. They are subject to the same limits as acts of worship.
- You can organise prayer and study groups, either in a church building or and at a hired venue (not a private dwelling) that is Covid-19 secure.
- If your group is hiring a venue, they must undertake a rigorous risk assessment for the event alongside the private owner or relevant local authority, and ensure that safeguards are in place to allow for strict social distancing between attendees.
- All attendees should be enabled to provide contact details for the purposes of NHS Test and Trace.

9. Are activities for children and young people, such as youth groups, allowed?

- Yes. Activities for children organised by a business, charity or other public organisation, taking place in a church are able to continue as long as the premises can be made COVID-19 secure. Specific [guidance is in place](#).

10. What are the rules around numbers present for weddings, funerals and life-cycle events?

- Marriage ceremonies are subject to a limit of 15 attendees, apart from those who are working to facilitate the service.
- Funerals are subject to a limit of 30 and commemorative events to celebrate the life of a person who has died are subject to a limit of 15, again excluding those people working to facilitate the service.
- Other life cycle events are covered by the limitations that apply to normal worship.
- In all cases, guests or attendees should continue to practise social distancing when mixing with those they don't live with or outside of their support bubble. People and venues must strictly follow the guidance on conducting these gatherings safely.
- Please see our detailed guidance on different life-cycle events.

11. Can all life cycle events have receptions after?

- It is strongly advised that only essential aspects of these ceremonies take place at this time. No food or drink should be consumed as a part of the event unless required for the purposes of solemnisation.
- There is specific [guidance for wedding receptions](#).
- Receptions and wakes for other life-cycle events such as funerals and baptisms will be subject to the guidance in place for hospitality events.

12. Are choirs and musicians permitted to lead and take part in worship or performances in churches?

- Yes. See *Music and performance* (paras 23-26) below.

Face coverings

13. Do we need to wear face coverings in church?

Yes. Face coverings are currently mandatory on public transport and in a range of indoor venues including Places of Worship and church halls. While there are exemptions (please see our [guidance document on face coverings](#)) this is a legal requirement.

Those who are leading services or events in a place of worship, and those who assist them (for instance by reading, preaching, or leading prayer) do not always need to wear a face covering, although one should be worn especially if physical distancing cannot be maintained.

These exemptions are made to enable communication, particularly with those who rely on lip-reading, facial expressions or clear sound; they do not exempt clergy and other leaders from wearing face coverings in other situations or during other activities.

Opening church buildings: issues to consider

14. What does the law say about churches re-opening?

The government advised that our church buildings can be opened for public worship as long as this can be done safely. Some activities in churches are limited to 15 or 30 people (weddings, funerals and commemoration serves for deceased individuals), for others the capacity is determined by the capacity of the building while maintaining social distancing. Some general activities and businesses are still not allowed under the Coronavirus Regulations (see the list [here](#)) and there are others for which special guidance applies, such as singing and playing musical instruments (see section 8 below).

There is no requirement to open and you should only do so if you are comfortable that you can do so safely. Churches should take into account their local circumstances, including the vulnerability of their clergy, staff team and volunteers before making a decision to return to church buildings. Churches are encouraged to consider continuing to stream worship or other events, both to avoid large gatherings and to continue to reach those individuals who are self-isolating or particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, as well as those who have joined worship for the first time online during the lockdown period.

15. What government advice is there?

The government has issued three guidance notes of special relevance to churches and cathedrals, which should be read in addition to Church of England guidance:

- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has issued [guidance for the safe use of places of worship](#) (updated 2 December).
- For churches and cathedrals which welcome visitors or tourists in addition to worshippers, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has issued [guidance on working safely at heritage locations](#) (updated 7th December).

- For churches who run community facilities, whether these are in church buildings or in halls or other buildings, MHCLG has issued [guidance for the safe use of multi-purpose community facilities](#) (updated 30th November).

In addition the following government guidance notes may be useful for some churches and cathedrals, or contractors who work with them:

- [Guidance for people who work in or run restaurants, pubs, bars, cafes or takeaways.](#)
- [Guidance for food businesses](#)
- [Guidance for managing playgrounds and outdoor gyms](#)
- [Guidance on accessing green spaces safely](#)
- [Safer public places - urban centres and green spaces](#)

16. How can we decide if it's right to open?

You should carry out a risk assessment. This will help you decide whether it is right to open and how the building can be safely used. A [template designed for church use is available](#).

The risk assessment template can be adapted to help you make a decision on whether it is safe for you to re-open your church building. Consideration of the availability and vulnerability of clergy, volunteers and staff teams will be a big consideration in making this decision. You know your local context best, and what is appropriate in a heavily used or busy church will not be the same as in one where worshippers and visitors are few, but we hope the guidance and tools provided will help you to make this decision.

Many different businesses are now open again. If your church building is in a location shared with other public buildings or businesses it is worth reviewing the impact of re-openings and the risks of the area becoming busy. Whilst churches and most businesses serve very different purposes, if you are in an area where there are several churches, could community relations be strengthened by conversations between churches and faith leaders over proposed re-opening plans to avoid crowding where this is a possibility?

17. What are the implications under Canon Law if we cannot provide services or open the building?

You should not feel under pressure to open a church for public worship if it would, in the light of government guidance and your own risk assessment, be unsafe to do so. There are several options for managing the Canon Law requirements which you can find in the advice note on legal issues around resuming public worship on the main CofE Coronavirus pages.

18. What are the wider security issues of re-opening?

Although our attention is taken up with the response to Coronavirus, other security risks associated with a building being open to the public remain. If, prior to the lockdown, you had identified any security risks (including those related to terrorism) relevant to your building, the measures that you put in place to manage them should still be in place. If you introduce new ways of working to manage public health during Coronavirus, consider how they relate to your existing security measures. For example, if you introduce a queue outside your building to manage the number of people present, does this present a new risk to the public from road traffic, in particular hostile vehicles?

This is addressed in the [Protective Security](#) section of the government guidance.

Specific advice is available from the [Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure](#).

19. What is the general advice on hygiene in buildings?

The government has published [five steps to working safely](#). These are:

1. Carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment (a template for churches is available on the CofE Coronavirus pages)
2. Develop cleaning, handwashing and hygiene procedures
3. Encourage people to work from home where possible
4. Maintain 2m social distancing, where possible
5. Where people cannot be 2m apart, manage transmission risk

The more detailed [advice on cleanliness in the workplace](#) can usefully be applied to church and cathedral buildings. This advice is relevant whether the people are paid to be there or are volunteers. Key points of this include:

- Tell people what you are doing to reduce risk of exposure to the virus
- Provide hand sanitiser at every entrance and encourage people to use it
- If you have them, provide places within the building to wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water
- Provide disposable tissues and encourage people to use them
- Use signage to encourage social distancing
- Regulate places of access to the building
- Frequently clean surfaces that are touched regularly, with your standard cleaning products

For advice on cleaning church and cathedral buildings please see this [dedicated advice note](#). Historic England has also issued [updated guidance on cleaning and disinfecting historic surfaces](#).

We do not recommend use of fogging as a cleaning technique – not only can it damage historic surfaces, its efficacy at controlling the virus is unproven, whilst direct cleaning of surfaces is known to work.

If you know that someone with Coronavirus symptoms has been in the building in the past seven days, then [advice for cleaning a contaminated building](#) should be followed or the building closed for 48 hours.

Each building is different and presents different ways of managing risks. It may be helpful to consider how the building may lend itself to supporting social distancing. For example, even if you normally only use one door, could additional doors be used temporarily? Could a door that is normally left closed be propped open to save having to use the door handle, provided this does not compromise security or fire safety?

20. We've been advised to improve ventilation to reduce Covid-19 spread. As it gets colder, is it safe to turn on the heating?

Yes. It is safe to operate nearly all forms of church heating. You can find [detailed guidance here](#).

Types of heating that present a Covid-19 risk are those that take air from one occupied space in a building and move it into another occupied space. If your heating or ventilation system has this feature it must be turned off so that air is not moved from one space to another. The system can be used with the feature turned off. It is extremely unlikely that a traditional church building will have such a system, but if in doubt ask the company that services your heating. If you worship in a building that has little or no natural ventilation, the [guidance from the HSE](#) will assist you in assessing an appropriate heating and ventilation strategy.

No Covid-related concerns have been identified with the use of traditional hot water radiator systems, electric heating (including under pew), underfloor heating, or, in a ventilated space, fan convactor heaters. In a ventilated space fan convectors can assist with reducing pockets of stagnant air. They are not recommended in a space that does not have natural ventilation.

The cooler autumn and winter weather will promote some forms of natural ventilation, meaning that adequate ventilation will be achieved with a reduction in the number of windows open, and the amount they need to be open. If there is high level ventilation it will not usually be necessary to leave lower-level windows open.

If your current Covid-safe practice relies on leaving doors fixed open to promote good ventilation now would be a good time to consider how you would operate with fewer (or no) doors fixed open. For detailed guidance consult the [CIBSE website](#).

Music and performances

21. Can we have live music?

- Yes. Following [government advice on performing arts](#) musical performances can be given in church as part of an act of worship. Concerts or other cultural activities are permitted in tiers 1 and 2 but not in tier 3. Professional choirs, orchestras and musical groups are considered to be in a work environment and should ensure they abide by the official guidance.
- In a COVID-19 Secure venue or public outdoor place, non-professional performing arts activity, including choirs and orchestras or can continue to rehearse or perform together where this is planned activity in line with the performing arts guidance and if they can do so in a way that maintains social distancing, minimises the number of performers and the duration of the performance and takes account of the increased risks, especially those related to singing and the playing of wind instruments.
- You can find a template risk assessment for outdoor worship [here](#).

There is [general guidance](#) issued by Government. There is detailed guidance with FAQs on the [website of the Royal School of Church Music](#). This guidance includes template risk assessments for music in church and a risk assessment is essential before a musical activity is commenced. The risk assessment will determine the number of people who can safely perform – as instrumentalists or singers. The risk assessment will determine the physical arrangements for the singers and other performers to ensure appropriate social distancing.

22. Can choirs and orchestras rehearse and perform?

Musical rehearsals for professional church choirs, orchestras and music groups that take place in a Covid-secure setting are subject to the relevant restrictions for performing arts. A church building which has had a Covid risk assessment can be considered a Covid-secure setting.

Amateur choirs and orchestras can meet to rehearse and perform in church provided that a risk assessment has been carried out and the restrictions relevant to the tier are observed. Individual members (not in the same household or support bubble) must remain physically distanced from one another throughout. The MHCLG guidance states that amateur choir rehearsals represent an activity where there is a sizeable risk of breaking the law by people from different households or support bubbles being unable to keep distanced from one another. You should carefully assess the space you have in your church building and the ways in which distancing can be assured before allowing choirs to rehearse or perform.

23. Can the congregation sing as part of a service?

At present the congregation is not allowed to sing except where the act of worship takes place outside.

24. Can I play the organ?

Yes. The organ can be played, including during public worship and for life-cycle events.

25. Can the organ humidifier and blower be serviced?

Yes. If your organ has a humidifier that has been turned off for an extended period of time please seek advice from the company that maintains it about bringing it back into use.

Opening for visitors, tourists, and other purposes

26. Can I now open to visitors and tourists?

In tiers one and two, yes, if you have read the relevant guidance, carried out a risk assessment, and put appropriate measures in place to ensure it is safe to do so. Specific government advice on [opening heritage sites](#) applies if your church is listed, and you should ensure you are familiar with it. Please note that for the purposes of health and safety, volunteers are considered as employees and so all references in the guidance to 'employers' or 'employees' should also be read as applying to anyone in a voluntary role.

You will need to assess how the restrictions relevant to the tier in which the church is located affect your opening arrangements. Travel to any tier 3 area is discouraged other than where necessary, such as for work, education, youth services, to receive medical treatment, or because of caring responsibilities. You can travel through a tier 3 area as a part of a longer journey. If your church is in a tier 3 area, tourism visits are not permitted.

Churches who have visitors for leisure and tourism are required to collect data for [NHS Test & Trace](#). Visitors should be encouraged to give details, but not forced to.

The government guidance recognises that all heritage sites are different in how they are run. Nevertheless the following paragraph should be carefully considered:

“The key to successful site opening and managing is to ensure that there are sufficient staff and volunteers on site, working in appropriate conditions, to ensure*

the visitors and workers have a positive and safe experience. This may mean different staffing levels than normal, and will certainly mean different working practices for everyone on site. It could also be worth amending your usual booking procedures, for example by introducing a pre-booking system.”

*For churches, ‘sufficient staff’ may mean no staff in some contexts, especially in areas with very low footfall. The advice is about ensuring you have carefully considered what is sufficient for your church.

27. How should we assess the number of people who can visit the church at any one time?

You should undertake a risk assessment to gauge the capacity of the building, allowing for safe entry and exit points and communal areas. The number of people permitted to enter at any one time should be limited to ensure at least 2 metres (or 1 metre with risk mitigation where 2 metres is not possible) between households. The sorts of things to consider include:

- Size and layout of the building, including ventilation
- Total floor space, pinch points, busy areas, entrances and exits, and where possible alternative or one-way systems should be used.
- Travel to and from the church building – whilst it may be possible to safely seat a number of people in the building, it may not be safe for them all to travel to and from, or enter and exit, and so numbers may need to be reduced to allow for this.
- What other venues are open locally and whether to stagger entry times with other venues to avoid queues or congestion in surrounding areas.
- Travel routes and whether it may be necessary to consider one-way travel routes, including between transport hubs and churches.

28. How can we maintain physical (social) distancing?

This needs to be addressed as part of the risk assessment. Things to consider include:

- For frequently used places, mark areas using floor tape to help people to maintain social distancing. If your floor surfaces are historic or delicate even so-called ‘temporary’ adhesive products can cause damage if they are left in place for an extended period. Advice is normally available from the manufacturer’s website.
- Consider additional mitigations such as: avoiding face to face seating, reducing the number of people in any one area, improving ventilation (perhaps by opening windows or propping open doors if they are not fire doors), closing non-essential social spaces, one way flow, staggering arrival and departure times to avoid congestion at entrances and exits.
- Queue management to reduce congestion and contact.
- Clear signposting or assistance with sufficient “stewards” to help maintain compliance. Example posters to help with this can be found [here](#).

29. Do we have to keep a register of who attends our church buildings?

Churches are strongly encouraged to provide NHS Test & Trace posters to enable visitors to check in, and to provide an alternative system for those who cannot use the QR code system.

Where churches are open as tourist destinations or running events in community halls they are required by law to display a poster. Where churches are providing food or drink for consumption on the premises it is required to take details for Test & Trace and take all reasonable steps to refuse

serve to someone who has not given their details. This more stringent requirement only applies to areas used for food service.

Please see detailed [guidance on test and trace](#).

30. Should we ask people to book in advance or buy tickets?

It may be necessary for some parishes or cathedrals to introduce a booking system to help with managing numbers, particularly where demand will be high. Systems such as Eventbrite can be set up very easily and cheaply. However a booking system is not required if you can manage entry and numbers in other ways such as a clear queuing system.

31. What about hygiene for visitors?

On entering and leaving the church building everyone, including staff and volunteers, 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. There should be signs and posters on safe hygiene practices. You should provide hand sanitiser in multiple locations around the building.

[Parish Buying](#) can help with procurement of supplies of hand sanitiser and other useful materials to help with hygiene measures.

32. Can we open our toilets and Changing Places facilities?

Toilets, baby changes and accessible Changing Places facilities should be kept open if at all possible, carefully managed to reduce the risk of transmission. Steps that will usually be needed to make the use of toilets as safe as possible:

- signs and posters about safe hygiene which can be downloaded for example [here](#).
- social distancing marking in areas where queues normally form, and the adoption of a limited entry approach, with one in, one out (whilst avoiding the creation of additional bottlenecks).
- If possible, make hand sanitisers available on entry to toilets where safe and practical, and ensure suitable handwashing facilities including running water and liquid soap and suitable options for drying (either paper towels or hand dryers) are available. Communal towels should be removed and replaced with single use paper towels.
- Agree clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets, with increased frequency of cleaning in line with usage. Use normal cleaning products, paying attention to frequently hand touched surfaces, and consider the use of disposable cloths or paper roll to clean all hard surfaces. Special care should be taken for cleaning of portable toilets and larger toilet blocks.
- Keep the facilities well ventilated, for example by fixing doors open where appropriate and safe to do so.
- Putting up a cleaning schedule that is kept up to date and visible.
- Providing more waste facilities and more frequent refuse collection.

33. How can I encourage tourist visitors to return in a safe way?

It is essential that visitors can find out as much information as possible before they set off. For this we recommend updating your website and/or A Church Near You entry, as well as posting on social media, so it is easy for people to understand the hours you are open, what sort of measures they will be expected to take to stay safe, what facilities such as toilets, accessible changing places, cafés etc. are open. If your church is in a tier 3 area, tourism visits should be politely discouraged.

The Church of England has signed up to the Visit Britain [Good to Go](#) standard for the tourism industry. The 'Good To Go' standard and supporting mark means businesses across the tourism sector can demonstrate that they are adhering to the respective Government and public health guidance, have carried out a COVID-19 risk assessment and checked they have the required processes in place. If you welcome a lot of tourist visitors we recommend completing the simple online questionnaire, selecting 'Church of England' as your industry body, and getting the accredited mark, meaning you can use the Good to Go logo on social media, your website and in other marketing. This is a free service being used across the UK by organisations both big and small.

34. Can we charge for entry or ask for donations, and open our shop?

Yes. Where possible the use of contactless card payments is being encouraged to reduce the need for handling cash. The [Parish Buying website](#) has advice on the set up and use of [contactless card payments](#) for donations or use in a parish shop or café.

35. Can we open our café or serve food and drinks to visitors?

Hospitality venues in churches in tier 3 should close other than for takeaway or delivery. Hospitality spaces within a place of worship in tiers 1 and 2, such as cafes, are permitted to open but should be limited to table-service, social distancing should be observed, and with minimal staff and customer contact in line with government [hospitality guidance](#). Other mitigations should also be considered, for example, foodstuffs should be prewrapped, and a system should be in place to prevent individuals from coming into contact with consumables and any dishes and/ or cutlery other than their own. Shared bowls or platters are unlikely to be appropriate.

If you are running a service providing facilities for consuming food or drink on the premises (including food given out for free that is intended to be eaten on site, but excluding the consecrated bread and wine consumed as part of a Communion service) then you are subject to stronger regulations. You must take details for NHS Test & Trace and take all reasonable steps to prevent access to an individual who refuses to provide the requisite details in a hospitality venue such as a café or restaurant. You should make this clear to visitors, perhaps with a sign indicating this at the entrance to hospitality areas.

Please see separate [guidance on Test & Trace](#)

36. What should we do about managing waste?

All bins should have liners so that emptying them is simpler and safer. If possible encourage recycling by providing separate bins.

37. What precautions should I take when using the building to ensure my own safety and the safety of anyone else accessing the building?

Ensure you have carried out a risk assessment, using the Church of England template if that is helpful but adapting it to your circumstances.

Other matters to consider include:

- Making it clear that parents or other responsible adults from their household are responsible for ensuring that children follow social distancing guidance.
- 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 or lighters should be either removed from the building when you leave, or securely locked away – this is to reduce the risk of someone finding materials to start a fire if they were to break in.
- Remove holy water from stoups and do not make use of these at present.
- If you have any devotional objects that worshippers tend to touch, touching them must not take place. Signage and a cordon, or some similar access restriction, should be used to enforce this.
- Surfaces and door fixtures, light switches etc, that are frequently touched should be regularly cleaned. Detail is available in our guidance on [cleaning church buildings](#).

Opening for multiple community uses

38. Can multiple users now return to our church and/or church hall?

Yes, this is permitted for some purposes so long as it can be done safely. The government has [issued guidance on this](#) which all users should read.

If you are responsible for a community or church hall, guidance from [Action for Communities in Rural England](#) may also be of assistance.

Bells and clocks

39. Can church bells be rung?

Yes, provided that guidance agreed between the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers and the Church of England is followed. The number of participants and whether people from different households can participate is restricted according to the tier the church is in. The advice is [here](#). Please ensure your ringers have read the guidance and undertaken the [ringing risk assessment](#).

40. Can I access the church for winding the clock and/or changing the time?

Yes, if a safe working practice can be established with clock winders.

If the clock is hand wound and has been left to run down completely, the weight lines should be checked before the clock is wound. When the weights reach the floor or other resting location, especially for the strike and chime trains, it is possible for the clock to run on a little and for the lines to then jump off the pulleys. Winding the clock without first checking the location of the line can end up with the weight hanging directly on the line rather than with the weight line running over the pulley. With very heavy weights it might not feel wrong to the winder. Caution is needed.

Bats

41. What should we do if our church has bats in it?

Ideally a church building with bats that affect worship areas will not be open to anyone until it has had a thorough clean, which will have to wait until multiple people are able to safely enter, and appropriate PPE has been sourced. Advice on cleaning up bat droppings is published by [the Bats in Churches project](#).

However, if you do wish to offer prayer from a building affected by bats then avoid spending prolonged amounts of time in areas with high concentrations of droppings. If you find a dead or grounded bat, please do not pick it up. The [National Bat Helpline](#) can provide advice on 0345 1300 228.

If you are involved in the Bats in Churches project or are planning bat mitigation surveys or works, you can find out how this has been affected [here](#).

END