

COVID-19 Advice on Individual Prayer by Members of the public in Church Buildings

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3 rd June 2020	2	The House of Bishops Recovery Group

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 and is for planning purposes only until present restrictions are lifted. 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 advice seeks to help clergy and church councils to reopen churches when circumstances allow. It recognises that for all kinds of specific reasons to do with both people and buildings a particular local church may or may not be able to open at the same time as others and collaborative working between local churches is encouraged. You may want to refer to the simple risk assessment template available on the national website to help with your planning.

General questions

What can we offer when the churches open for individual prayer by members of the public??

It is anticipated that only individual prayer will be allowed when the church is open to the public. No public worship, streamed or otherwise, should take place whilst the building is open to visitors.

What should we do in terms of reminding people about hygiene and social distancing?

Please put notices on the door reminding people about hygiene and physical distancing measures, including stressing the critical importance of using the hand sanitizer both going in and going out of the church building. Supplies of hand sanitizer should be available in the porch/inside the main door (or water, soap and paper towels).

You should consider whether there is anything you can do in terms of seating to enable physical distancing. For instance by marking places where people can sit or removing some chairs for churches with movable seating.

What about cleaning the church?

- The church should be cleaned regularly in line with the [guidance note](#) on keeping your church building clean.
- Each PCC should assess how regularly this is done, given the likely numbers of people using the church.

- You may want to rope off parts of the church to limit the area to clean.
- It is best to shut away items such as toys, books, etc. which may be difficult to clean or to know if they have been used.

Advice about cleaning including sensitive historic interiors is available on the [national website](#) and from [Historic England](#).

Should someone be present all the time to monitor the church?

There is no public health need to do this, though the decision will need to be based on your own local situation and risk assessment.

What about rough sleepers and other vulnerable people?

Some churches have rough sleepers and those who are vulnerable who use the church as a 'base' during the day when it is open. In the end, managing this has to be a local decision based on pastoral responses. For some, explaining clear 'rules' as to where in the church and when a person may come in might be enough. Others will not respond to this and it may be that for that reason the church cannot be open unless it is possible to have someone on duty. Discussing these issues with your Archdeacon or Area Dean might help to think through how to approach them.

Does the church have to be open all the time and do all churches have to open?

No, 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. Such decisions should be taken in consultation between the incumbent and the PCC. A [Risk Assessment](#) has been produced for churches to use prior allowing access. Disagreements or concerns should be carefully discussed and you might seek the advice of the Archdeacon or Area Dean.

Whatever you decide to do, think about how best to communicate this to your local community. Remember to agree arrangements to open and close the church.

Can we leave out prayer leaflets and books?

It is best not to leave out things that can be touched repeatedly by different individuals, and which may be difficult to clean. This includes pen and paper for prayer requests. Instead you may want to invite people to email or phone in prayer requests.

What about lighting candles?

The lighting of candles with reusable lighters or similar should not be encouraged, but if they can be lit safely in another way this can be an aid to prayer. Issues of safety must be considered and leaving candles available is only recommended if the church is being supervised.

Should we leave our toilets open?

This will be a local decision based on the situation, but you will need to consider cleaning arrangements. The simple risk assessment template available on the national website may help you decide.