

Coronavirus Guidance Update - 13 July 2021

Changes to Government Guidance

- One of the aims of the latest government communiqué is to **enable the public to make informed decisions**. We are keen ministers and leadership teams do likewise. We offer these guidelines to help you, and your leadership teams, make decisions linked to your local context.
- The Property Team will be reviewing more detailed Connexional guidance following the Prime Minister's update on the 12 July, and posting this from 19 July, when the Government will lift most restrictions.
- Although there are no specific updates to the government guidance document concerning places of worship yet, the Health Secretary announced to the House of Commons that from the 19 July there will be '...no restrictions on communal worship and singing'. This includes singing at weddings, funerals and baptisms.

What will the lifting of restrictions mean for churches and communal worship?

When government restrictions are removed, the emphasis will be on 'personal responsibility.' Currently, the Government is indicating that this will mean:

- No maximum numbers for meeting in any indoor or outdoor environments, including removing restrictions on group sizes attending communal worship.
- Communal singing can resume.
- All venues currently closed will be allowed to open.
- No restrictions on weddings, funerals or baptisms.
- No requirement for Covid-19 vaccination status certification to enter a venue.
- No legal requirement to wear a face covering, although it will be 'advised' for enclosed and crowded spaces.
- No social distancing rules, although the risks to those deemed vulnerable need to be considered.
- No need for 'Covid-secure' environments.
- Encouragement to continue good cleaning and hygiene procedures.
- Good fresh air supplies into a property will still be encouraged, and steps should be taken to improve it if ventilation is poor.
- There may be temporary local restrictions or additional advice offered by health officials in areas of high infection rates, so this will need monitoring locally.
- No further work-from-home directive.
- An encouragement to continue to use the NHS Test and Trace system.

What does the Methodist Church advise?

The Methodist Church, whilst always adhering to government advice, is urging some caution for the sake of others in the church, community and for self-care.

- Firstly, from a missional perspective, reflect on and continue with the positive changes that have been made during the pandemic. Perhaps this has been live-streaming services or more outward-looking mission into the community through outdoor services, prayer or house groups or other events. Look to improve on these as a means of giving people within and outside the church continued access to worship, teaching and support during this period of transition and change.

- This will help in considering whether it is appropriate to return to a building or whether the mission of God and the work of the church is better done in another way. In some places, the decision might even be not to resume physical worship in the building. This should not be seen as a failure, but as a response to the movement of the Spirit of God as we seek to create new places for new people.

What should we consider before reopening our church buildings?

- If you have not yet reopened the building, we would recommend a cautious, phased return. We encourage dialogue with congregations to ensure they feel safe to return to in-person worship. The aim is to build up the community of believers who feel safe, rather than see them staying away for fear of the virus.
- Likewise, we encourage early discussions with individuals or groups from the wider community who will be returning to use your building to ensure that any concerns and expectations are shared through a transparent process. Work together to risk assess all those using the building and any new bookings with Covid-19 safety measures in mind.

How can we make our buildings as safe as possible?

In returning to buildings, consideration should be given to:

- Appropriate use of face coverings. Would it be sensible as a congregation to wear them for a little longer?
- Good ventilation to properties or considering meeting outdoors.
- Encouraging frequent hand washing and keeping sanitiser out for people to use.
- Encouraging people to stay at home if they are unwell.
- Considering individual risks: such as clinical vulnerabilities, illness and vaccination status.
- Retaining retiring offering or online giving rather than 'passing the offering plate'.
- Deter handshaking and hugging and find other ways to share 'the Peace'.
- Encourage the continued use of personal, not shared items, such as books.

Further guidance for ministers and leaders of worship

- Those who lead worship should bear in mind that the virus is still highly prevalent. Care should be taken to reduce the risk of spreading the virus, including reviewing the length of service and the number of hymns sung (when permitted), avoiding various people handling the same piece of equipment etc.
- For the time being, we suggest ministers should refrain from using the common cup for Holy Communion.
- We recommend keeping the elements to be distributed covered during the thanksgiving prayer if it is deemed inappropriate for the presiding minister to wear a mask. It may be wise for those distributing to wear face coverings.
- Similarly, for the time being, consider retaining the reasonable safe practices for cafes when providing or distributing food and drink, such as after a service or other events.
- Although not required by law, it is probably wise to retain the NHS Test and Trace system for the time being in case of an outbreak in the church community. We would want to be able to inform our neighbours to proceed with caution if someone they had come into contact with had tested positive.
- We do not recommend requesting proof of vaccination before a person is admitted to church.

Careful risk assessment of a building should be carried out before congregations return. See the **Guide to Managing Your Church Building** tab towards the bottom of this page.

What does the North Yorkshire Coast Circuit advise?

At our staff meeting held on 13th July, we offer the following guidelines for implementation on Monday 19th July

We suggest that, for the time being, people sanitise their hands on arrival at church and face coverings continue to be worn when entering and moving around the church. They can then be removed once seated.

For the time being we also suggest that face coverings are worn during the singing of hymns.

Whilst social distancing is no longer a legal requirement, we ask that people respect one another's space.

Each church must make its own decision as to when to resume serving refreshments following services.

If any church wishes to implement stricter rules the Church Council as the governing body of the church should meet to agree these rules.

Risk Assessments should be updated accordingly (Peter Evans is available to offer guidance if needed).

Rev Graham Morgan – Superintendent Minister