



Getting Ready for the Future

**A guide for churches and circuits in YNE District
as we respond to living with a pandemic**

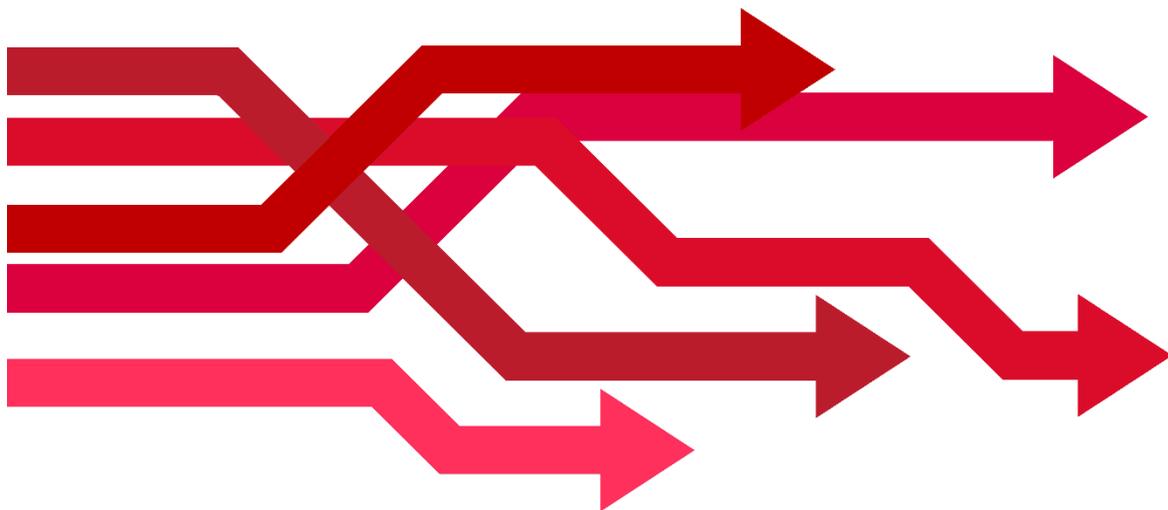


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Introduction

The impact on us all in responding to the global pandemic has been unprecedented and life-transforming. Of course, this includes the life of our churches. As we move to a gradual emerging from a comprehensive lockdown, we face considerable challenges. We look ahead, recognising that we cannot simply go back. I'm reminded of words in Isaiah 43:16-21. To a people in exile in Babylon we read words both reminding them of God's faithfulness in the past, but also God's promise of 'the new.'

Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters,¹⁷ who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: ¹⁸Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. ¹⁹I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. ²⁰The wild animals will honour me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, ²¹the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise. (NRSV)

On their own, those words, "I am about to do a new thing" can raise different responses from within us. We can be excited by them or made nervous by them – or a mixture of both at the same time. However, in the context of all we know of God's faithfulness and promises, I trust that they can above all else give us hope and courage.

As we travel from the old to the new, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

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(accurate as of 21 October 2020)

Changes or additions to guidance are in bold

Connexional or government updates

Connexional guidance can be found by following links from [this page](#).

Government and Methodist guidance changes regularly: updates will be noted in this space:

Digest of government information for places of worship updated 21 October (attached separately)

Using your worship space updated 21 October

Managing church buildings updated 21 October

Weddings updated 29 September

Open air worship updated 29 September

[Church meetings, small gatherings and house groups](#) updated 29 September

[Pastoral visits](#) updated 29 September

[Face coverings](#) updated 29 September

[Harvest celebrations](#) updated 17 September

[Test and Trace advice](#) updated 24 September

[Guidance for other users](#) updated 23 September

[Guidance for children's and young people's activities](#) updated 23 September

[Guidance for food and drink](#) updated 23 September

[Guide for funerals](#) updated 18 August

[Cleaning churches guidance](#) updated 18 August

[Updated guidance on Holy Communion](#) updated 10 August

[Guidance on conducting church meetings online](#) updated 3 August

Good, detailed information can be found at the above link. Listed below are some of the most relevant points:

- No church should open without first completing a risk assessment. Failure to prepare an adequate risk assessment, and to enforce it, will be considered a breach of health and safety legislation
- The risk assessment should include a consideration of how many people can be safely accommodated at activities held in the building
- The 2 meter social distancing rule still applies. Where this is not possible, a 1m rule can be employed alongside other mitigation strategies, such as compulsory mask wearing (see guidance link above)
- Members of a household are not required to socially distance from each other
- Avoid café-style worship as individuals should not face each other
- Do not encourage gathering before or after services
- Use disposable resources (worship sheets, notices) or suggest people bring their own bibles, hymn books etc. If books are used, they must be quarantined for 48 hours before and after each use.
- There are specific guidelines for administering communion, including no verbal blessing over the elements unless they are covered, see [Guidance for Holy Communion](#)
- No singing or loud music that would encourage people to converse with raised voices
- Previous advice on cleaning, individual hygiene, and managing movement around the building and queuing on entry should be observed; see new guidance in the link above
- No passing of a collection plate
- Children should remain with their parents
- Attenders' contact details should be recorded. [Test and Trace](#) guidelines are available from TMCP.

- Over 70s and those with certain medical conditions are still advised to avoid group situations such as church services
- When planning for reopening, consideration should be given to fair and equal access
- Specific advice for weddings, funerals and baptisms is included in the document (see wedding and funeral guidance links above)

[Methodist guidance on opening churches](#) reissued 18 August

This is a very detailed document which you are encouraged to read; some of the main points have been added to our more general advice below.

[Methodist property guidance](#) updated 6 July

Looking Forward

We live in uncertain times. To many people, it would appear that the work of the church has largely stopped. We know that this is far from the truth – buildings are closed but the work goes on. For many, this is proving to be a very distressing and disorientating time. Individuals' experiences will be so variable, depending on whether they live alone, they are healthy, they have work to do, they have lost a loved one and not been able to mark that event publicly, they are under financial pressure, or they have access to the online world. Most Methodists will be missing their opportunities to worship and socialise in physical community, for some this will be a devastating loss of connection. Church life just got very much more complicated. Many of our people have risen to this challenge with a wealth of resources being provided both physically and electronically, and in many communities, pastoral support has stepped up a gear.

After more than three months, everyone is looking forward to things 'getting back to normal'. But questions are being asked about whether 'normal' was actually the best we can do, and are there not some really important things to be learned from being catapulted into the unknown and forced into change without the time to ponder and discuss? Things may never be the same, and although that will undoubtedly mean loss and grief and struggle for many, perhaps this crisis will help us to identify what we really value from our 'normal', and how good we can be, when push comes to shove, at rising to new challenges and adapting to a new world.

Communal, physical spaces are important and as we look forward, communities will be thinking about how and when they might resume meetings in church buildings. The absolute priority in this must be the safety of those who come into those spaces, and those they come into contact with when they leave. Obviously, this is a moral imperative, but there are other considerations to be taken on board. Trustees have a statutory duty of care, and at a time when churches across the world are being identified as sources of infection due to their reluctance to adhere to rules drawn up to protect the common good, we need to be conscious of the message we are giving to the wider community. Connexional guidelines on safely reopening churches are being prepared, but some information is already available.

What should be happening now

Practical and pastoral support

Pastoral support by phone is recommended. This can be provided by existing pastoral visitors and networks. With permission, they may also be able to provide the pastoral coordinator with useful information on individuals' current circumstances, including family contact details where appropriate.

Practical support for those who are self-isolating and may need help with collecting shopping or other errands can be provided by existing pastoral visitors with a current DBS check and who are exempt from the self-isolating list. Those who are seeking to provide support, but have not done so before, must be recruited safely following the church safeguarding guidance.

Home visits should not be taking place except in exceptional circumstances, such as dealing with a minor emergency (replacing light bulb etc). The advice above regarding who might undertake these tasks should be applied. In addition, any visitor should take appropriate distancing and hygiene precautions and should not have been in contact with anyone showing symptoms of coronavirus.

Be aware of the mental health toll of the virus. Good advice is available from the [Mental Health Foundation](#).

[Guidance on pastoral visits](#)

Safeguarding

- The Methodist Church has published Covid-specific safeguarding guidelines at this [link](#).
- Arrangements for those who may pose a risk to others, or have restrictions placed on them by virtue of a Safeguarding Contract, might need to be altered. Contact your District Safeguarding Officer for further advice.
- Refer any concerns about inappropriate online behaviour and be aware of signs that children and adults may be at risk.
- Be alert to indications of domestic violence or abuse and seek support from your DSO. Other information on this issue can be found [here](#).
- Try to spot physical signs of abuse or neglect, including self-neglect. Notice what has changed about your congregation
- Be prepared for individual or family stories of trauma, whether it be having been unwell, bereaved, furloughed, made redundant, going out of business or facing financial difficulty
- Be alert to poor emotional wellbeing linked to the effects of isolation, separation and fractured relationships
- Church safeguarding officers should collate information about local services offering more specialist support and guidance, and access the websites of their local Children's and Adult Safeguarding Partnerships in order to provide an online resource for listeners and church leaders who may need to signpost individuals to them. This information can also be posted in church buildings.
- See the [Guide for Children's Worship](#)

Finance

Many churches will have had their income impacted significantly by loss of lettings and potential reduction in giving. Have the conversations now about how this might be dealt with. Giving can be encouraged but bear in mind that some people's financial position will be, at best, uncertain and pressure/expectations from church will only add to their stress. GDPR regulations do not permit direct appeals for financial support through general newsletters and emails as this comes under the definition of 'direct marketing' and would therefore require consent. You can use these means to alert people to a financial need and direct them to sources of further information.

Meetings/Small groups

Are your arrangements for meetings, now and in the future, inclusive? If you meet in person in the future, have you considered those who might still be shielding? Do online meetings exclude some of your decision makers and contributors? How can you ensure that governance and accountability are taking place as they should? See the [Guidance for house groups, meetings and small gatherings](#)

Church and Circuit employees

Use the expertise of Rob Cooper, our Lay Employment Secretary, to ensure that you are meeting your obligations to your staff. Remember to include them in your pastoral support.

Working/worshipping online

There are a variety of resources and suggestions for worship while churches are closed on the [Methodist website](#)

Detailed information can be found [here](#), but note the following advice:

- Use encrypted software for meetings (Zoom, Skype, Teams) and check the privacy settings
- YouTube is not the best medium for interactive events; think about turning off comments prior to use.
- If you are hosting a meeting, be the first online and the last to leave
- Make notes of group calls
- Do not record video meetings unless absolutely necessary – the GDPR implications are complex. Further information on GDPR/copyright relating to digital media, as well as some 'how to' guidance, is available on our District [website](#)
- Do not hold one-to-one online meetings/chats with children, young people or vulnerable adults. Use the same principles you would with an in-person meeting.
- There is specific guidance on working with young people in an online environment [here](#)
- Do not to give or ask for personal information
- Do not post photographs of anyone without their written consent
- Treat online business meetings as you would face-to-face meetings; take and circulate minutes
- When posting on social media or message boards, be aware of your reputation and that of the church. The Methodist Church social media policy can be found [here](#)
- Watch what you 'like' or retweet as it suggests support for the views expressed
- Emails sent to multiple people should use the BCC (blind copy) function unless all the addresses are in the public domain (eg active ministers)
- Do not send personal information to family or joint email addresses

What could be happening now

Projects, maintenance, safety inspections and repairs

Construction work can now take place, providing the safety of workers and the public can be maintained, including social distancing and hygiene requirements. More detailed information can be found [here](#).

Cleaning

Deep cleaning of churches can now take place, providing safety measures are in place for cleaners. More detailed information can be found in the risk assessment referenced above, the [government cleaning advice](#), and [cleaning historic surfaces](#). Precautions against [legionella](#) from unused water systems should be considered. **The Methodist Church has produced its own cleaning advice which can be found [here](#).**

Gardening

This can take place providing social distancing measures are observed.

Outdoor worship

Consider the guidelines [here](#), which draw a significant distinction between public and private spaces.

Using church buildings

Questions to consider before opening

- What is the advice of the Connexion, District and Circuit? We know that inconsistency and confusion will only increase frustration, fear and mistrust.
- Remember the responsibilities of trusteeship. Trustees are liable for the health and safety of those invited onto your premises. Can you be sure that you can manage the social distancing requirements and the rigorous cleaning, re-cleaning and sanitising that would be involved?
- What is the age profile of your church community? Remember that those over 70, and others with long term illnesses, are still being advised to remain at home even when some activities resume.
- How will you ensure that those who cannot attend church, or do not feel safe to do so, are included as fully as possible?
- How will you limit numbers at services if space is likely to be an issue?
- How will you ensure that service books, notice sheets, money collections, communion rails etc do not become a source of infection? Consider removing items from chair backs.
- Singing is discouraged – what will replace it?
- Toys and books will need to be thoroughly cleaned before and after use. Don't assume that anti-bacterial cleaners will kill a virus – soap and hot water might be better.
- Consider removing all non-essential items from rooms in use – fewer surfaces to clean, fewer sources of infection.
- How will communion be managed?

- Be clear with welcomers about distancing, ensure that the peace is shared without physical contact.
- Can refreshments be managed safely? (No communal biscuit plates, regular glove changes of servers, dishes washed thoroughly...)
- A risk assessment would need to be undertaken before opening as part of trustees' responsibilities.
- Consider how you will communicate your plans – including restrictions and expectations – to your congregation and the wider community
- Instructions for those using the building must be clear, readily available and ideally, issued in advance

Risk assessment checklist

A risk assessment template can be downloaded [here](#). Some of the requirements are listed below, to give you an idea of what might be involved in resuming services:

- Physically arrange communal areas to keep people 2m apart
- Mark areas using tape or floor paint to help people keep a 2m distance
- Provide signage to remind people to keep a 2m distance
- Use screens to create a physical barrier between people
- Use more than one exit or entry to reduce numbers of people coming together.
- Set up a register to track who enters the building (contact details would need to be recorded for track and trace in the event of an attendee becoming infected)
- Provide easily accessible hand sanitiser and ask people to bring their own pen.
- Permit only essential trips within the building to maintain social distancing as much as possible.
- Leave doors open that can be left open (taking fire safety and security issues into consideration) to reduce the need for people to touch door handles.
- Monitor use of areas such as toilets or kitchens where it might not be possible to keep 2m distance, with a '1 in 1 out' system with distanced queuing
- Decide if the current cleaning arrangements are enough to ensure adequate hygiene, for example, deep cleaning once a day and then supplementary cleaning, e.g. wiping high contact surfaces throughout the day.
- Ensure that you have handwashing facilities that provide running water, soap and paper towels.
- Ensure that bins for paper towels are emptied regularly and safely.
- People should wear face coverings in enclosed public spaces; consider providing masks [Guidance on face coverings](#)
- Agree a policy for what will happen if someone falls ill in the building and how you will protect others.

Superintendent minister Nic Bentley has prepared a user-friendly checklist on opening churches which can be found on our [district website](#) under the Getting Ready for the Future heading.

Other recommendations

- Produce an action plan based on the findings of the risk assessment and make arrangements for this plan to be reviewed and revised at regular and frequent intervals.

- Appoint a dedicated responsible person for Covid-19 related health, safety and safeguarding matters. Also have a delegated Committee, which can meet virtually, to support this individual in decision making or actions.
- Consult with TMCP over any lease, licence or other legal obligations
- Contact your insurers to discuss your plans
- Ensure that any decisions regarding opening buildings during the pandemic are minuted.

Non-church activities in church buildings

Some pre-schools and other childcare facilities that use Methodist premises might wish to open. They must adhere to the government advice found [here](#). There is a checklist of tasks to be undertaken by churches before this happens on [this page](#). Some of the considerations are listed below:

1. There should be a risk assessment before re-opening, particularly where church maintenance programmes and safety inspections have not taken place during closure.
2. If the facility is provided by the church, then it will have the responsibility of ensuring that all activity meets the safety requirements as listed above
3. If the facility is offered by a third party, then some responsibility will still accrue to the church, particularly in making the premises fit for purpose and enabling social distancing and hygiene standards to be applied.

See the [Guidance for Food and Drink](#)

See the [Guidance for Community Users of Church Buildings](#)

See the [Guide to weddings](#)

See the [Guide to funerals](#)

Thinking about the future

Despite the huge strain and costliness of these days, they also provide a key opportunity for local churches and circuits to be thinking and praying together about the future.

Here are some questions that we hope will help. They can be explored individually or in small groups – over the phone, or in Zoom. They can help discussions at stewards' meetings and staff meetings.

Some general questions:

- What do we want the new normal to look like?
- What have we learned during this time? What have we done better (eg. Zoom meetings saving time, money and carbon footprint; worship and prayer reaching a wider demographic through social media)
- Which of our alternative worship options have worked really well and might be retained? Are we fully aware of the GDPR and copyright implications of live streaming or video recording of worship with congregations?
- How do we ensure that some new things *replace* some old things and are not just added to the workload?

- What are the things that were badly missed and might be core elements of our mission and ministry?
- What shortcomings has this crisis highlighted (eg. irregular employment arrangements, insufficient delegation, lack of a reliable photocopier/internet connection)?
- What expertise are we lacking? Can this deficit be made up by training or do we need new people with new skills?
- Has our care for each other improved during this crisis? If so, how do we maintain that?
- How do we keep recognising and supporting the struggles of the many while welcoming the opportunity to make positive changes?
- As we celebrate the return, in time, to our buildings, how can we also make sure that we give space for appropriate grieving?

Other denominations and organisations are also looking at these types of questions. Here are some of their suggestions.

URC document ‘Ready for the New Normal’ ([here](#))

Buildings: ‘do you still need a church building? Would there be a freedom from letting go of the current buildings and meeting in community space (or even, for smaller churches, in somebody’s home)? Would being freed of the expense and complication of managing a building give new energy to engage in mission in the community? Would it just make the church a happier place? Would it mean that you could relocate to somewhere that would make it easier to reach the people you want to reach? Is this the moment to ask the questions that seemed impossible before lockdown?’

Services: ‘a number of people that would normally be present and taking an active role may not be there. In response we can encourage, or press, others to take on those “jobs,” or we can seek to be more creative... Anecdotally, a number of Ministers have reported many people joining online worship services that would not or could not attend physically in the past. Might streaming our worship online be part of the “new normal”?... Many churches, pre-pandemic, had stopped their evening service – might an online or recorded service come to take its place? Or should it be vice versa – if you are getting a larger congregation online, should your morning act of worship be that, and then physically gather in the afternoon or evening?’

Bereavement: ‘be aware that Ministers and worship leaders will be expecting a significant number of memorial and thanksgiving services post-pandemic, as the restrictions placed on funerals meant that many were unable to grieve well or fully. They will need a good deal of time to prepare these well and lead them for an extended period, especially if restrictions on numbers, distancing and singing remain in place. Do not immediately re-fill diaries with the “same old” – keep plenty of time available for this vital aspect of ministry... How will you corporately acknowledge and remember the dead, lamenting their loss?’

Community: ‘What have you learned about the needs of those around your buildings or where you live? What can you do differently to express more fully God’s love in word and action?’

Sustainable change: ‘What matters now is how to re-shape our churches, to re-set expectations, and to live in the way that we intend to live, all in a sustainable manner. What we don’t need (with very few exceptions) is Ministers working harder: most do too much and more than they ought. We need a balance in our ministries that will last beyond a few weeks or months of post-pandemic recovery.’

‘We would be most unwise to look to get back to “how we always do things.” This is, we pray, a once-in-a-lifetime chance to do things better.’

Anglican blog by the Bishop of Leeds, Nick Baines ([here](#))

'Christian faith does not assume a life (or world) of continuous security and familiarity. It is fed by scriptures that speak of transience, mortality, provisionally, interruption and leavings. But, they also whisper that the endings are always beginnings – the leavings open a door to arrivals that could not have been experienced otherwise. In other words, the loss can be seen as a gift – what Walter Brueggemann calls 'newness after loss'. So, as I have suggested to clergy in the Diocese of Leeds, we might be helped in articulating this by asking four questions:

- (a) what have I/we lost that we need to regain in the weeks and months ahead?
- (b) what have we lost that needs to remain lost – left behind in another country?
- (c) what have I/we gained that we need to retain in the future?
- (d) what have we gained recently that was useful for this season but needs to be lost if we are to move forward?

Tearfund – The World Rebooted ([here](#))

Start a Conversation:

Talk about these issues over dinner and over Zoom, with your children and your church, with your colleagues and your networks. We want to discern together what God is doing now:

- What part will you and your church play in this great reshaping of society – locally, nationally and internationally?
- Based on what we've learnt and are learning, how can we ensure that the church, and society as a whole, enables everybody to flourish? In particular, what can be done to help those in greatest need (locally and globally)?
- Finally, considering how we have mobilised as a church and as nations in recent months, how could we respond to the climate crisis – a far greater threat to life on earth – with the same urgency as this pandemic?

And finally...

Public health emergencies like the COVID-19 can cause fear and anxiety. Prepare, but don't panic. This passage reminds us that, in every situation, our prayers ground us in God's peace. We step forward with faith: God is with us as we seek protection and discern how best to love our neighbours.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)