

## REOPENING OUR CHURCH BUILDINGS FOR WORSHIP

Version 1	26 June 2020	First published
Version 2	30 June 2020	Updated link to government guidance Risk Assessment now a legal requirement Updated number of Building Users Updated considerations when using a worship space Added sections for Communion, Baptism, Funerals, Weddings, Children in Services, House Groups,
Version 3	6 July 2020	Guidance for Baptism and Communion updated to be more reflective of issues in practice

### 1. Introduction

The Government has outlined in its roadmap to lift lockdown restrictions, that certain measures will be relaxed in Steps. Under Step 3, the current proposal is to reopen church buildings for group prayer and worship from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020. It is important to note that the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales are reducing restrictions at different times to England. Please refer to the Connexional Property website section on Timetable for lifting restrictions in devolved administrations, together with the relevant regional guidance.

Government Press Release 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2020 - Places of Worship to Reopen:

*‘From Saturday 4th July, the Prime Minister has announced that...In order to begin restoring the arts and cultural sector, some leisure facilities and tourist attractions may also reopen, if they can do so safely – this includes...libraries, social clubs, **places of worship** and community centres.’*

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-announces-easing-of-lockdown-restrictions-23-june-2020>).

#### **IMPORTANT NOTE:**

**The Government has now published its COVID-19: Guidance for the safe use of places of worship from 4 July. It can be found here –**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july>

Managing Trustees will also be aware that under current and previous Government policy decisions, some parts of Methodist Church property may already be open, and others will now be allowed to open. This may include, for example, facilities for community-focused activities and social action projects, offices spaces, community cafes, pre-schools or charity shops. Separate guidance will be provided for these non-worship related activities. This guidance note is produced to assist Managing Trustees who are now considering reopening church buildings for worship and church activities or services not permitted in church buildings under previous Government policies.

### 2. Reflection

Before we consider the practical aspects of reopening our church buildings, it is very important that we take time to reflect:

“Church” can be wherever we gather or scatter, conscious of our calling as disciples of Jesus. We already knew this, but the lockdown has brought it into sharp focus. We are now permitted to open our buildings once more. A desire to “return to normal” is natural, but may not be practically possible

or missionally necessary at this time. Our task in this moment is to consider what use of our buildings and what pattern of worship will best serve the discipleship of our people and the needs of our local community.

### **3. Mission, Planning & Monitoring**

As we emerge from lockdown, these questions can help us discern what God has been doing in us and in our communities. In this context, we can consider what God would have us do with our buildings and how God would have us worship:

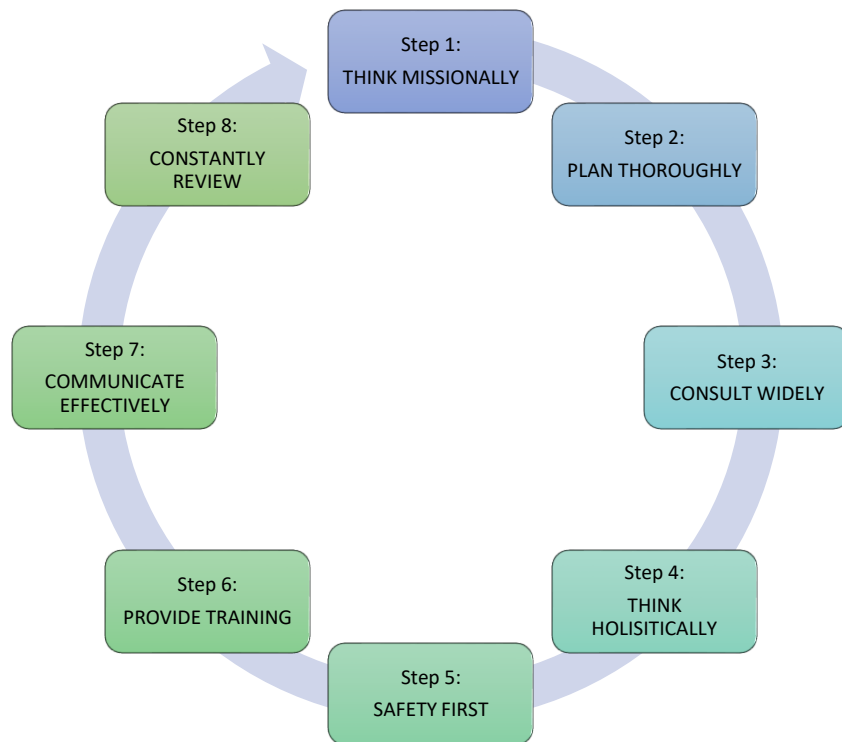
- What have you learned during lockdown as a church that excites you about worship? What have you learned about evangelism and building relationships with new people?
- What have you not grieved for or missed as a church during lockdown? What might you decide not to pick up again?
- How have you perceived God's presence and hiddenness?
- What has lockdown taught you about the foundations of your mission as a local church?

Use these questions alongside your mission plan to work out God's way forward for you. For help with writing or reviewing your mission plan, download the new 'Mission Planning Workbook', available from 1st August on [www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk).

Reopening our church buildings is a significant decision by Managing Trustees, and should not be taken lightly. It needs to be well planned – both before opening and then kept under review once the building is in use – and should be undertaken in the light of the church mission plan. To encourage positive discussion, Managing Trustees could consider the following suggestions:

- Allow time to fully consider matters, risks, approaches and options.
- Do not assume you can immediately do things 'as you used to do'.
- Be creative, and remain open-minded to new ideas and approaches.
- Manage expectations, listen and learn from mistakes.
- Accept that saying 'no', 'not yet' or 'not like this' can be positive decisions.
- Work together and share ideas, within your Circuit or District or with other denominations.

This planning process is essential, as it checks and ensures that the church building accommodates the requirements for opening; or alternatively highlights what other considerations need to be discussed and agreed to make the building safe to open. This is a shared responsibility that should be 'circular' in process, not linear, i.e., each risk and action needs to be reviewed over time, so that processes can be monitored and changes made, if needed. This is summarised in the diagram below, with each heading forming an important step towards reopening your church building and using it safely:



#### 4. **STEP 1: Think Missionally**

A decision to reopen for worship should be taken in the context of the church’s mission plan, which will need to be reviewed following the upheaval of lockdown. If you do not have a mission plan in place yet, you are strongly advised to take some time to write one, in consultation with church members, before making a decision to reopen for worship. Download the Mission Planning Workbook and contact your District Mission Enabler and/or Regional Learning Network Co-ordinator for help and advice.

The following review questions are suggested:

- i. What changes in your community have you noticed during lockdown? What new strengths have you observed? What new needs have arisen?
- ii. What has been the impact of lockdown on your church? What strengths have emerged? In what ways have you been weakened – e.g. members who have died, members shielding at home, furloughed staff, lost income?
- iii. Have any new dreams or visions come to light?
- iv. What priorities did you discern when writing your mission plan? Are these still the things on which you believe God would have you focus?
- v. What actions had you planned? Can they still take place - perhaps in a different way – or must they be set aside for now? What new actions might be possible?
- vi. What fruit do you long to see in your community as a result of your actions?

#### 5. **STEP 2: Plan Thoroughly**

It should be borne in mind that reopening our churches is not mandatory, but remains the responsibility of Managing Trustees to decide; working with their circuits or districts to develop

phased approaches if necessary, to suit their local situations and priorities. Any decision to reopen a church building should be based upon assessing the risks and putting plans in place to ensure that it is safe to do so, to fully meet the relevant COVID-19 UK Government guidance. It is acceptable to decide that it is not safe to reopen at this particular time, or that reopening should be carried out in a phased way.

The initial planning phase considers all areas of risk associated with opening and using the property, and should be undertaken before the building is reopened. The following actions are suggested:

- i. It will help to appoint a dedicated **responsible person** for COVID-19 related health, safety and safeguarding matters. This gives a single point of contact for everyone, so that decisions can be made quickly and actions implemented efficiently in response to issues going forward.
- ii. This does not have to be seen as a new role, as it might be undertaken by an existing office holder as a set of additional, temporary responsibilities. Alternatively, Managing Trustees working together within circuits could consider this as a shared role covering a number of chapels. If practical, this is encouraged, as it will be a good way of sharing resources, information, knowledge and ideas. This may help those areas who have smaller chapels or limited experience in this particular responsibility.
- iii. It is practical to have a delegated Committee to support this individual in decision making. This can be convened 'virtually', and will help with consistency of approach. Again, it may be appropriate, to help support individual churches if this were considered at a circuit level. It will help make better use of resources and ensure consistency of approach across an area.
- iv. It is **essential** that you undertake a [Risk Assessment](#) for the whole building. This is a legal direction within the Government's guidance, and more details can be found under existing Health and Safety legislation.<sup>1</sup>
- v. Follow the outcomes of the Risk Assessment to produce a live<sup>2</sup> [Action Plan](#). This will outline what physical changes or provisions Managing Trustees need to instigate to manage risks throughout the property. This should be a practical document with achievable actions.
- vi. It is advisable to review the Action Plan weekly, or perhaps daily in the first few weeks, depending upon how the property is used and occupied, and make changes where needed.
- vii. It may be necessary for the **responsible person** to respond on an *ad hoc* basis if a particular issue arises during the course of a day; this is why the Risk Assessment and Action Plan should be seen as 'live' documents which evolve, to help improve processes by learning through implementation.
- viii. Meetings and discussions are important to ensure planning and ongoing monitoring processes are completed successfully. This communication should be easy and practical and take into consideration the need for social distancing. The medium used should therefore be proportionate to the discussion and actions required:
  - Use telephone, email or online meeting platform communications wherever possible;
  - Use digital images or recordings of an issue with emailed communication if needed;
  - If a property visit is required, then operate a timed system, so that only essential people are in the building and social distancing rules can be accommodated safely;

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<sup>1</sup> *Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974:* <https://www.hse.gov.uk/legislation/hswa.htm>

<sup>2</sup> *Where mentioned in this guidance, 'live' means a document which is reviewed and updated as part of a continuous process of reflection by those who have responsibility for it, on how well it is working in reality, and making changes to it if needed; it is not intended to be a one solution, static document. It forms part of Step 7 in this process.*

- If attending in person and social distancing is not achievable, ensure suitable PPE is worn to avoid potential transfer of infection, e.g., masks and gloves.
- ix. Once a decision has been reached to reopen the property for the first time please refer to the Connexional Property Team's [Re-opening a Building Checklist](#), which covers the following:
- Airing the Building
  - Outside the Building Checks
  - Checking Cleanliness of the Building
  - Electrics
  - Heating
  - Water Systems and Legionella
  - Organ Maintenance
  - Cleaning
  - COVID-19 Risk Assessment

## 6. **STEP 3: Consult Widely**

### i. Generally

It is essential that Managing Trustees consult and engage with all those who use or access the building. This will ensure that every stakeholder's requirements are considered in the [Risk Assessment](#) and [Action Plans](#). These may include the following (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Church membership;
- Ministers;
- Property Secretary or Property Stewards;
- Church group leaders such as youth workers or mission enablers;
- Those who care for the building, particularly those who clean it;
- The local community and groups who use the building and its facilities.

It is also worth consulting other relevant Connexional Property guidance at this point if other building users are already using the premises. Currently this may include pre-schools, charity shops, some work activities and essential community activities. There are also considerations if you are undertaking repairs or construction work, which is also covered by separate Connexional Property guidance. All can be found under –

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/coronavirus-guidance-for-property/>

### ii. Lease and Other Legal Obligations to Consider

It is essential that TMCP are consulted in relation to any impact on leases or legal obligations. Please contact TMCP if you have any queries relating to the lease or licence under which a Third Party uses the church premises. Specific information relating to COVID-19 and its impact on leases and licences can be found on the TMCP website in their [Lease COVID-19 FAQs](#) (FAQ 4 to FAQ 8 inclusive) and their [Licence COVID-19 FAQs](#) (FAQ 1 to FAQ 3 inclusive).

Please note:

- If Managing Trustees want to allow a Third Party to use more of the church building than is under the current lease or licence (to allow for social distancing), then this would need to be documented very carefully. Please contact TMCP so that full guidance can be provided depending on the circumstances.

- Any requests from tenants for rent concessions in view of COVID-19 must be considered and documented very carefully. Please refer to the guidance in the [Non Residential Leases – requests from Tenants to a Rent Concession](#) article on the TMCP website.
  - Please bear in mind that the ability to limit rights that a Third Party exercises over communal areas will depend upon whether they are using Methodist premises under a lease or a licence. In relation to leases, please refer to [TMCP’s Lease COVID-19 FAQs](#) (FAQ 7.1). Managing Trustees have more flexibility with licences but will need to consider whether the terms of the licence require formal change. Please contact TMCP for guidance.
  - Please consider any services provided to a Third Party under a lease, e.g., cleaning, very carefully, bearing in mind not only the Government’s guidance and guidance issued by the Methodist Church relating to COVID-19, but also their legal rights under the lease. Please refer to [TMCP’s Lease COVID-19 FAQs](#) (FAQ 7.1).
- iii. Insurance Matters  
Please consult your insurer on any matters relating to property insurance. Methodist Insurance has provided a comprehensive set of COVID-19 guidance on their [website](#).
- iv. Physical Building Alterations  
In this guidance, it is not intended to suggest that physical changes to a property, either temporary or permanent are required or indeed encouraged. Managing Trustees might consider this though as a means of achieving a temporary, safe environment for building users which will enable activities to resume in their church buildings. It could also be considered as part of a wider project or expansion of the church building for mission purposes in this regard.
- If such considerations are undertaken, then it is important that Managing Trustees follow the correct process for obtaining advice and consent. This should include their District Property Secretary, the Connexional Property Team and Conservation Officer (if the building is listed or in a Conservation Area) for specific property advice and TMCP in the case of more major property changes and matters which will have an impact on lease or licence arrangements (see note 5ii above) .

## **7. STEP 4: Think Holistically**

Although this guidance focusses on Re-opening for Worship, Managing Trustees should consider the building as a whole, particularly where church buildings provide a mixture of spaces for other church or non-church activities. This should consider how different activities or users interact, rather than looking at each situation or user group in isolation. This will ensure that a ‘joined up’ plan is developed, and that risks and plans associated with all users of the building are considered and action plans are effective.

- i. Numbers of Building Users  
As part of initial planning and consultation, it is essential that Managing Trustees and other building users collectively assess how many people may be using the building at any one time during a typical week. This information forms an important basis of the Risk Assessment and may lead Managing Trustees to make changes to rotas and how the building is used by worshippers and other users. This will allow clear forward planning and ensure that all users are safe, whilst managing expectations for everyone and making changes where necessary.
- ii. Common Areas between Different Building User Groups

Managing Trustees should be aware that controls within other users' 'separate environments' will be developed by those users, but it is important for Managing Trustees to share their overall guidelines and controls to ensure that there is compatibility and co-operation in approach between everybody. This is important, as consideration should be given to the **points of contact or interaction** between different occupiers, rooms or properties, such as within communal or shared areas, for example. It is essential that these potentially high-risk areas of contact between building user-groups are risk assessed, Action Plans are clear and practical, and processes are managed and controlled very carefully. It is particularly important that there are clear agreements between users as to the allocation of specific areas of responsibility; be it a particular room, a cleaning rota, or a cleaning standard. As a guide, such areas might include:

- Entrance doorways
- Corridors
- Washroom and WC facilities
- Kitchens
- Halls/Larger Rooms
- Outside spaces

This agreement is especially relevant if temporary accommodation changes are being made, beyond the arrangements set out under an existing lease or licence agreement, for example. It is important that if any changes are made, even temporary, to existing agreements then this is checked with TMCP – refer to their guidance set out in **Step 3** above.

iii. Property Access, Limitations, Means of Escape & Security Matters

Safe means of access and egress for every building user is essential, and is considered in the Risk Assessments and Action Plans, including the following general points:

- Limit the number of key holders to the building to ensure controlled access.
- Ensure that any church member unlocking does not fall into an 'at risk' category.
- Limit access to other parts of the building not in use at the time; this will help limit potential virus transfer and help manage the responsibilities on cleaning regimes.
- The Government has requested that churches in England assist the NHS Test and Trace service by keeping an accurate temporary record of visitors to church premises for 21 days. Please refer to TMCP's [Guidance on Test and Trace](#) for further information and templates.
- Ensure that any access or areas in use do not have compromised fire-escape routes or means of escape to external areas.
- Ensure that any access or building limitations do not compromise security for the open parts of the buildings or other parts of the building.
- Ensure that if alternative access and egress points are used that they still allow fair and equal access to everybody in accordance with the requirements under the Equality Act 2010.

iv. Moving around the Building

- Limit movement between different user group areas within the building(s) to maintain social distancing as much as possible and reduce potential virus transfer.
- Limit the number of people who use lifts or stairs if possible and relevant.

- Try to reduce the number of people in high traffic areas, particularly if these are used more regularly as part of a temporary circulation regime. This might be achieved through using different entrances and exits, or changing the timings of use by different groups.
- Mark areas using tape to help people keep to the advised social distance limits.
- Consider introducing temporary pedestrian walkways to allow people to maintain social distancing when moving around – this will also be relevant in external areas.

v. Common Areas

Agree between all users how communal or common areas are used, such as kitchens or toilets.

The following could be considered:

- Physically moving tables/chairs so they are at the advised social distance limits.
- Staggering use times, or introducing a rota so that people are not using spaces at the same time – this should be carefully considered in context, depending upon the specific situation relevant to the church building and how it is used.
- Where the above is not possible, create additional separate space for different users.
- Marking areas using tape to help people keep to the advised social distances limits.
- Considering the use of outside areas for activities if the location is suitable and safe.

Where you cannot keep to the advised social distances limits, you need to think about how to keep common areas clean and prevent transmission by touching contaminated surfaces, including:

- How frequently you need to clean common areas.
- Identifying objects and surfaces that are touched regularly and decide how frequently to clean them.
- Setting clear guidance and lines of responsibility for the use of kitchen and toilet facilities to make sure they are kept clean.

## 8. STEP 5: Safety First

Once the risks and planning arrangements have been implemented for re-opening the building, there are the considerations for how the building will be used in practice. This has to be undertaken with the primary consideration being, first and foremost, each person's safety. Section i. provides broad considerations for reopening and using chapels and worship spaces generally for **all** activities outlined in the guidance. It also provides the framework for using a chapel or worship space for prayer and public worship. Subsequent sections assume reference to these general points, and therefore give specific considerations relating to specific contexts such as communion, weddings or funerals.

i. General Considerations for using a Chapel or Worship (including Prayer and Public Worship)

- Limits on numbers attending for prayer and public worship should be decided locally on the basis of the capacity of the place of worship following a risk assessment and adhering strictly to current social distancing recommendations.<sup>3</sup>
- To limit the length of time people are sat together, it is advisable that services are adapted to be undertaken in the shortest reasonable time – a **maximum** of 30 – 45 minutes should be considered.

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<sup>3</sup> Also see *Government Guidance for places of worship section 5 – Restrictions on Capacity*; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july>



- At the end of a service it is advised that those attending leave the building as soon as practical. Formal or informal fellowship, including refreshments, after the service is discouraged.
- It might also be considered having different services either during Sunday or other days of the week to suit particular groups such as those who are over 70 or clinically vulnerable.
- (A) Steward(s) at the entrance should manage how people enter and exit the building; this may include monitoring spaces, to avoid reducing social distancing.
- Before and after use, the worship area should be thoroughly cleaned.
- Before and after use of the worship area, leave doors open.
- If practical it should also be considered leaving doors opening during a service as part of a wider ventilation strategy while the building is occupied. This could include open doors, but also open windows to give as much **natural** ventilation as possible.
- Use suitable temporary markings<sup>4</sup> on pew seating, or arrange loose seating to maintain the advised social distance limits between worshippers (note: this should include adjacent, in front and behind). This could be adaptable for those from the same household.
- In main entrances and exits, the advised social distances limits must be clearly marked on the floor, as these areas may be more susceptible to people congregating.
- Hand sanitisers should be available at entrances/exits.
- A small number of face masks should be available for members of the congregation if required.
- Communal books of any sort are not to be used preferably (or should be stored away after use for a minimum of 48 hours). However it is preferable that any words or texts should be displayed using a projector or through individual printed material, which can be removed or destroyed, though it is best not to be handing anything to those who are attending.
- Please consult *Copyright guidance* on the Methodist Church website, for both online (including projection) and printed materials: [www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/copyright-guidance](http://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/copyright-guidance)
  - We have put together *Copyright guidance* to support you through the issues that we are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this guidance remains important as churches begin to reopen. The key point to remember about copyright is that anything that you have not created entirely from scratch is 'third-party material.' Third-party material will have, unless it has been made available freely, a copyright holder. Use of the material without the copyright holder's permission, correct licence, or other concession infringes their copyright.
  - As you return to worshipping in church buildings you need to remain aware, especially if you are using a projector or are producing pew sheets (including any that may be emailed to those who are not attending in person) rather than using books, that you are not necessarily automatically covered by the licences and concessions (e.g. from CCLI and ONE LICENSE) that you may use for standard church services.
  - You can find information about these licences on the *Copyright matters* page for *Singing the Faith* [www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/about-singing-the-faith-plus/copyright-matters](http://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/about-singing-the-faith-plus/copyright-matters)

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<sup>4</sup> For delicate fabrics or furniture of historic value please ensure maker material is suitable and will not cause damage.

- Some of the usual restrictions around needing permission have been relaxed to take account of the changes to worship in response to COVID-19, however as Government restrictions on meeting together relax, these temporary copyright concessions are likely to be removed and the permissions tightened up again. Therefore, *Copyright guidance* explains the options available both for the current situation and for any remote worship in the future. It includes materials that are available under licences and concessions, but we also advise where materials may need permissions.
- The Methodist Church has issued a copyright waiver to cover the period while we are experiencing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes any of our own original materials in the Methodist Worship Book (there is further information about the Methodist Worship Book in *Copyright guidance*).

**COVID-19 copyright waiver:** *The Methodist Church in Britain has made some copyright concessions during the pandemic, which allow any use of content that is our exclusive copyright in any worship context by any medium or method, providing it is non-commercial, to the end of this Connexional year (31/08/2020), and providing it is acknowledged as 'Used with permission. [Details of content] from [details of publication/source] © Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes. The Methodist Church in Britain'.*

- *Copyright guidance* covers liturgy, scripture, hymns and songs, music, poetry, images and videos. Copyright information specifically for *Singing the Faith* is here <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/about-singing-the-faith-plus/copyright-matters/>
- Individual worshippers can bring their own books and take them away afterwards.
- If a congregation cannot be accommodated safely, then Managing Trustees should very seriously consider alternatives arrangements, bearing in mind that there is no obligation to re-open the church at this point. Alternatives include:
  - Continued use of online live-streaming services (see [www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/copyright-guidance](http://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/copyright-guidance));
  - Using other rooms with links for sound and/or vision;
  - Having multiple services.
- The use of music (live or recorded) is allowed and all musical instruments, **except wind instruments**, can be used. Use of music, which may be copyrighted, is also covered in the copyright guidance: [www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/copyright-guidance](http://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/copyright-guidance)
- Singing as a congregation, or as a choir, is not currently allowed as it may currently increase the risk of virus transmission.
- Individual (i.e., solo) singing is allowed, as long as it can be accommodated safely, ensuring that others are protected from potential virus transfer through increased social distancing, screens or other solutions. This should be clearly part of the risk assessment process, so that Managing Trustees are assured that it can be safely undertaken.
- Those leading a service are encouraged to use a PA system to avoid projecting their voice and risk transferring the virus. If a PA system is not available, then increased social distancing, screens or such like solutions are suggested.

ii. Specific Considerations for Communion

- The elements essential to the celebration of communion are allowed, namely bread and grape juice.
- Careful thought needs to be given to the form of the elements and to how they will be distributed. Wafers are preferable, and can easily be sourced online.
- It is important, also, to remember that communion received in 'one kind' (i.e. bread only) is perfectly valid in our tradition and that of our ecumenical partners. This may be considered as an option if there are concerns over safely distributing of grape juice as outlined in more detail below.
- Those handling any specific items related to the celebration of communion should wash their hands thoroughly before and after, or alternatively wear gloves. It is advisable to keep hand sanitiser available during the service to allow for frequent cleansing of hands, for instance just before, and if necessary during, distribution.
- Care should be taken in the preparation of the sacraments to ensure that individuals do not come into contact with the elements. It is recommended that shared receptacles are not used (i.e. no common cup and a common plate only if great care is taken, as described below), and if possible items which involve minimal preparation should be used.
- If there is to be an act of passing the peace, it should occur only verbally and at a proper distance.
- Speaking over the sacrament is not allowed unless it is securely covered. The prayer of thanksgiving should therefore happen over covered elements, or be offered at an appropriate distance from them when uncovered. The breaking of the bread and lifting of the cup should happen in silence.
- The distribution of the sacrament should be undertaken with a view to maintaining current social distancing measures. Any persons distributing and receiving communion should ensure that they can do this in such a way as to avoid contact between each other, or alternatively to wear gloves. If contact is made then both parties should immediately wash their hands.
- It is preferable to use wafers, and either distribute them at arm's length, ensuring that there is no physical contact between minister and communicant, or to allow communicants to take their own wafer from a common plate, on which the wafers have been spaced apart. If a larger loaf is used in the consecration, it should not be distributed, except for the minister's consumption, unless there is absolute scrupulousness about hand-cleansing, keeping an arm's length away from communicants, and ensuring that hands do not touch when placing the bread in their palms.
- Similarly, if wine is to be distributed, individual cups should be used and offered to communicants to take from the tray themselves.
- If individuals are distributing the elements, they should do so in silence, so as to avoid increasing the possibility of infection.
- All items used in the celebration of communion should be disposed of safely or thoroughly washed after use, ensuring that those handling them wear gloves to avoid transfer of the virus.
- Clear guidance should be given to the congregation before the service begins about how it will proceed and the arrangements for receiving the elements.

iii. Specific Considerations for Baptisms

- The Government makes reference to baptisms within the context of what it defines as Other Life Cycle ceremonies, which is part of the overall reopening churches guidance.<sup>5</sup>
- Although this is not normally part of Methodist tradition, if baptisms are carried out separately to a normal service they should have no more than 30 people in attendance, and social distancing should be strictly adhered to following a risk assessment.
- Note that 30 is a **maximum** number as a guide and that Managing Trustees have an obligation to assess if this is a safe number to accommodate. If after risk assessment it is found that a chapel can only accommodate a lower number safely, then this would be the maximum for this particular chapel.
- When the baptism takes place during a normal service then the number could be greater than 30 as long as it remains within the maximum number of people who can be seated in the chapel safely, as calculated in the risk assessment.
- If possible, ceremonies should be concluded in the shortest reasonable time.
- Water is required for the ceremony, and that is acceptable, but attention should be given to hygiene guidance including handwashing prior to and after the ceremony, and only small amounts of water are to be used to avoid splashing. A shell or other small receptacle can be used for the imposition of the water.
- Only a minimum number of people should gather immediately around the child or adult being baptised to avoid being splashed by water and in order to maintain social distancing.
- If the person being baptised is a baby or infant, then they should be held by their parent or guardian or other member of the child's regular household only.
- It should be considered how those who fall within a vulnerable group are able to attend safely as it is important that those who wish to attend are able to do so safely.
- All spoken voices should use a PA system where possible or practical. Specifically projecting or raising voices should be avoided.
- It is important to liaise and communicate with the parties involved in advance. This will ensure that controls and expectations on the day are managed sensitively:
  - Communication of agreed arrangements in the chapel.
  - Basic arrangement for cleaning and hygiene.
  - Knowledge of numbers attending and potential seating plan.
- Ability to assess if there are parties who are clinically vulnerable and therefore being able to make additional arrangements and advise others to be aware and sympathetic to this.

iv. Specific Considerations for Weddings

- The Government has produced additional supporting [COVID-19 Guidance for small marriages and civil partnerships](#)<sup>6</sup>.
- Marriage ceremonies should have no more than 30 people in attendance, and social distancing should be strictly adhered to following a risk assessment.
- Note that 30 is a **maximum** number as a guide and that Managing Trustees have an obligation to assess if this is a safe number to accommodate. If after risk assessment it is found that a chapel can only accommodate a lower number safely, then this would be the maximum for this particular chapel.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july>

- If possible, ceremonies should be concluded in the shortest reasonable time, and limited as far as reasonable to the parts of the marriage ceremony required in order to be legally binding under the law of England and Wales.
  - In terms of social distancing it should also be noted that this will also apply to those administering the service, the marriage couple or those taking a lead role in the marriage service. Unless of course any are members of the same household or social bubble.
  - Where rings are exchanged, those involved should wash their hands before and after and the rings should be handled by as few people as possible.
  - All spoken voices should use a PA system where possible or practical. Specifically projecting or raising voices should be avoided.
  - It should be considered how those who fall within a vulnerable group are able to attend safely as it is important that those who wish to attend are able to safely.
  - It is important to liaise and communicate with the parties involved in advance. This will ensure that controls and expectations on the day are managed sensitively:
    - Communication of agreed arrangements in the chapel.
    - Basic arrangement for cleaning and hygiene.
    - Knowledge of numbers attending and potential seating plan.
- v. Specific Considerations for Funerals
- The Government has produced additional supporting COVID-19: Guidance for managing a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>6</sup>
  - Funeral ceremonies should have no more than 30 people in attendance, and social distancing should be strictly adhered to following a risk assessment.
  - Note that 30 is a **maximum** number as a guide and that Managing Trustees have an obligation to assess if this is a safe number to accommodate. If after risk assessment it is found that a chapel can only accommodate a lower number safely, then this would be the maximum for this particular chapel.
  - The guidance suggests the following can attend, in addition to the Funeral Director and staff, church steward and minister:
    - Members of the person's household;
    - close family members;
    - or close friends if family members are unable to attend;
  - It should be considered how those who fall within a vulnerable group are able to attend safely as it is important that those who wish to attend are able to safely.
  - All spoken voices should use a PA system where possible or practical. Specifically projecting or raising voices should be avoided.
  - It is important to liaise and communicate with the parties involved in advance. This will ensure that controls and expectations on the day are managed sensitively. The Funeral Director may be able to facilitate many of these communications and arrangements so that they minimise the additional responsibility for organisation on the bereaved. Such arrangements and communications could include:
    - Communication of agreed arrangements in the chapel.
    - Basic arrangement for cleaning and hygiene.
    - Knowledge of numbers attending and potential seating plan.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

- Ability to assess if there are parties who are clinically vulnerable and therefore being able to make additional arrangements and advise others to be aware and sympathetic to this.
  
- vi. Specific Considerations for Children and Children's Services
  - It is very important that young children are supervised by their parent or guardian **at all times**.
  - They should also ensure that their children are following the recommended hygiene guidelines, and help them with this if necessary.
  - Managing Trustees might also consider providing child friendly signage to help them understand what is required.
  - Any children's play equipment, books, toys, soft furnishings etc. that are hard to clean should be put in storage.
  - Outdoor playgrounds are permitted as long as they can be easily cleaned.<sup>7</sup>
  - Any objects used in children's talks or similar activities during a service or as part of separate teaching should not be shared or handled by more than the person using them; a similar approach should be adopted for any pencils, pens, paper etc. used as part of this teaching.
  - As with the worship itself, any separate children's activities or talks during a service should ensure that social distancing measures are able to be put in place between each child.
  - It could be that once this is risk assessed, Managing Trustees decide that to carry out separate children's work is not possible and maintain everyone's safety. It is therefore perhaps better to consider changing, adapting or having additional services to suit children and young people so that their spiritual needs are also catered for as part of main worship planning.
  
- vii. Specific Considerations for House Groups

There is no specific Government guidance on this area of church fellowship, but it is suggested that House Groups should not meet in physical form unless they can meet all the general guidance outlined in Coronavirus outbreak FAQ's: what you can and cant do after 4 July – <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do-after-4-july>

It is particularly relevant that Managing Trustees consult the guidance on public gatherings and meeting people in small groups when assessing this. House groups and other fellowships are, of course, encouraged to continue to meet in online forms and to keep in contact in other ways, as far as is possible.
  
- viii. Specific Considerations for Offerings

In all cases, it is strongly advised that offerings are carried out in ways that avoid the use or transfer of coins and notes. This might be facilitated through standing orders or other electronic money transfer systems. If traditional offerings cannot be avoided, then this should be collected in a single receptacle, by one individual, and any cash then placed in a suitable safe place and left for at least 72 hours. No individual should be asked to handle money unless they are willing to do so.
  
- ix. Cleaning and Hygiene
  - Refer to the separate guidance produced on [Cleaning Churches during Covid-19](#).

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms>

- Ensure that sufficient handwashing facilities are available that provide running water, soap and paper towels. Where a sink is not nearby, provide hand-sanitiser in shared spaces – particularly in entrance areas.
  - Use signs and posters to increase awareness of good handwashing technique (see **Step 6**).
  - Provide regular reminders on avoiding touching your face, and to cough/sneeze into your arm.
  - Set clear guidance for the cleaning of kitchens and toilets to make sure they are kept clean.
  - Set clear guidance on how to handle and store cleaning materials/products safely ([COSHH Guidelines](#)) and when cleaning procedures need to be followed.
  - Clean surfaces such as doors, sinks, toilets, light switches and bannisters more regularly.
  - Ensure that bins are positioned in practical areas for ease of use and are emptied throughout the day.
  - Spaces should be well ventilated using natural ventilation (opening windows) where possible.
  - Prop doors open where safe to do so, bearing in mind fire safety and security, to limit use of door handles and aid ventilation.
  - Work together with other churches or building users to ensure that proportionate supplies of soap, anti-bacterial gel and cleaning products for all areas of the building are available.
- x. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Ensure that PPE is available to church members if Risk Assessments suggest this is necessary when using the building; please refer to the following link for more details.

## 9. **STEP 6: Provide Training**

Managing Trustees should consider ways in which these measures are implemented and managed that are proportionate to their specific situation and building. In most cases, this could be facilitated through agreeing with members who can undertake specific responsibilities, either within a current or additional role. This might also be considered as shared roles between smaller chapels across a district as part of a phased opening plan. This is particularly relevant where a greater number of members could fall into a group classed as vulnerable. It is important that these practical roles are shared so that a small number of people are not overburdened.

However this is agreed, it is important that each of these individuals is provided with information and training proportionate to the role. This is not an exhaustive or prescriptive list, but Managing Trustees may wish to consider the following roles through the Action Plan:

- Overall 'Responsible Person' for COVID-19 safety and safeguarding matters
- Steward(s) at entrance/exit
- Steward(s) within worship space to allocate seats and ensure social distancing
- Cleaning team (either within or outside the membership)
- Someone with responsibility for listening to concerns or ideas from a welfare perspective

## 10. **STEP 7: Communicate Effectively**

- i. Agree how plans will be communicated
- Find communication media suitable for all church members.
  - Avoid confusion and 'mixed messages' which could jeopardise any safety measures.
  - Allow for regular updates if plans are changed or updated.

ii. Information and guidance

- It is important that all users of the building are provided with information on the guidance and procedures for using the building. This should be facilitated through a number of means, depending upon specific circumstances:
  - Send out information directly to leaders or those responsible for groups prior to reopening the building or them using it; or
  - Make guidance available to everybody immediately upon entering the building;
- It is also recommended that signage is placed strategically around the building to remind building users of their responsibilities and any restrictions which are in place. This is specifically covered in the Signage section below

iii. Signage

- This is essential to successful communication and can include:
  - Information on how to use the building;
  - Directions towards specific entrances or exits;
  - Directions towards rooms to avoid unnecessary movement around building;
  - Directions towards specific rooms for user groups;
  - Hygiene considerations such as hand washing.

iv. Other Considerations

- It is important that all building users are aware of restrictions so they can prepare in advance.
- Consider how you will pass information and guidance to people who don't have English as their first language or others who may struggle with written and verbal communication or have disabilities such as a visual impairment.

**11. STEP 8: Constantly Review**

- The designated Committee should hold regular reviews with the 'Responsible Person'.
- Hold conversations with interested parties, listening to and acting on their concerns.
- Implement changes to the Risk Register and Action Plans if necessary.
- Ensure the Action Plan aligns with any wider Government or Connexional guidance.
- **NOTE: it is important that Managing Trustees use this period of assessment, experiment and reflection to decide if reopening is a viable option. It is suggested that it would also be acceptable at this point to decide that it might be better to close the building again and focus on alternatives means of worship, mission and ministry as outlined in Section 8i above**

**12. Where to ask questions or get additional Support**

This guidance is provided to help support Managing Trustees in the steps they need to consider in reopening their church buildings. We appreciate that there is a lot to think about and discuss, and although it is written to be as comprehensive as possible, there may be specific situations or arrangements which are not covered here. If you require any further support or have questions, please contact the following:

Connexional Property Team (<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/>)

General Queries: [property@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:property@methodistchurch.org.uk) or 020 7467 5271

Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas: [conservation@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:conservation@methodistchurch.org.uk) or 0161 235 6739



**Pastoral enquires:** [mvw@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:mvw@methodistchurch.org.uk)

**Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes** ([www.tmcp.org.uk](http://www.tmcp.org.uk))

**Legal Enquiries:** [legal@tmcp.methodist.org.uk](mailto:legal@tmcp.methodist.org.uk) or 0161 235 6770

**Finance Enquiries:** [finance@tmcp.methodist.org.uk](mailto:finance@tmcp.methodist.org.uk) or 0161 235 6770