

COVID-19 Advice on the Conduct of Public Worship

Issue Date	Version	Issued by
7 th August 2020	2	The House of Bishops Recovery Group

15. Can we use communal service sheets and hymn books etc?

It is best not to use communal service sheets or books that can be touched repeatedly by different individuals, and which may be difficult to clean. Individual service sheets should not be handed out at the entrance as this is likely to breach physical distancing. However, they may be placed on pews/seats before the service, and then taken home by worshippers.

Alternatively, people could print off their own service sheets and take them home afterwards. Similarly, people should be encouraged to bring their own bibles and take them home with them. In circumstances where worshippers cannot bring their own books, churches should keep a selection of clean books for individuals to use. Clean books should be quarantined for 48 hours since their previous use and should be quarantined for 48 hours again after use.

17. Can we sing?

There should be no group singing inside churches when worshippers are present.

If worshipping in a churchyard small groups of professional singers (those who are employed to do so) will be able to sing in front of worshippers. Singing in groups should be limited to professional singers only and should be limited to a small set group of people. Both the singers and the worshippers should be outdoors.

When inside churches, where essential to an act of worship, one individual only should be permitted to sing or chant, and the use of plexi-glass screens should be considered to protect worshippers from them, as this will further prevent transmission and the screen can be easily cleaned.

Groups of professional singers are now able to rehearse and record in churches and church halls for broadcast. See the following guidance for information on how this can be done safely. Volunteer choirs and non-professional singers may not rehearse in churches and church halls or record there for broadcast.

You are advised only to play musical instruments that are not blown into. Organs can be played for worship, as well as general maintenance, but should be cleaned thoroughly after use.

19. Can we use microphones/PA systems?

Yes, if you have one then you should make use of it. Those speaking as part of a sermon should be wearing masks, so using a microphone will help people to hear and understand them. Ideally individual lapel microphones or static (fixed) microphones should be used rather than hand-held, and those using them should not touch the microphone to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus, especially if it is a fixed microphone – for example on a lectern – that will be used by multiple people through a service. Lapel microphones should only be touched by the person using them and should be cleaned (for example with alcohol wipes) or left untouched for 72 hours between uses.

21. Should people wear face coverings?

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.

COVID-19 Advice on opening cathedral and church buildings to the public

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8. Can I now open to visitors and tourists?

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.

If you are subject to a local lockdown, or other local restrictions, you will need to confirm what this means for your building. Your local authority will have more information.

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.