

## Further Pastoral Guidance from the Bench of Bishops

### Effective until further notice

#### Updated Guidance

This update guidance is issued in the light of recent amendments to Welsh Government Regulations relating to the re-opening of places of worship for private/personal prayer.

### Church buildings: re-opening for private/personal prayer

Welsh Government has announced that places of worship may be re-opened for individuals or households for private (personal) prayer only from Monday 22 June.

- Places of worship cannot actively organise activities such as services and prayers that will encourage people to gather.
- Furthermore, religious activity involving physical contact, speaking in unison, singing or chanting and activities which utilise shared equipment will not be permitted
- A person cannot act as a leader of devotions, a form of service or prayer of any sort
- A Covid-19 risk assessment must be completed by each place of worship before opening.

A cautious approach to re-opening, based firmly on Welsh Government guidance, is essential. What has been announced is the giving of permission. There is no requirement, from Welsh Government or the Bishops of the Church in Wales, to re-open at this time. Any church contemplating re-opening must first undertake a detailed risk assessment. **Guidance on what this involves is available [here](#).** This includes a template risk assessment form. This will need to be submitted to your Archdeacon (or other nominated person) in advance of any re-opening.

Whilst we all look forward to the day that all our churches can open safely, we urge local churches not to rush reopening. Only consider re-opening if you can do so effectively and safely within the guidelines. Match your opening arrangements to your capacity to address necessary safety measures. Our primary concern must be the health and wellbeing of our clergy, staff, volunteers and visitors.

### Use of buildings

The Welsh Government Regulations permit a cleric to record or broadcast a service (without a congregation) from church buildings. Any such events should be held in accordance with diocesan guidelines, or otherwise with the explicit permission of the diocesan Bishop.

The Welsh Government Regulations also permit clergy to visit their churches, and for other church officers and volunteers to visit churches only to undertake a voluntary or charitable duty, where it is not reasonably practicable to undertake that duty from home. Site inspections can be undertaken by clerics, or by another person nominated by the Incumbent, Ministry/Mission Area Leader, Area Dean or Archdeacon. We ask that such visits are kept to a reasonable minimum.

The trustee body responsible for the church building can also now consider allowing contractors and local volunteers to undertake essential and necessary works to their church and churchyard subject to suitable distancing and hygiene arrangements.

The use of church buildings for essential voluntary services (such as existing foodbanks, soup kitchens and homeless shelters) is permitted by the Welsh Government Regulations. Church buildings may also, upon the request of the Welsh Ministers or a local authority, be used to provide urgent public services. All reasonable measures should be taken to ensure that social distancing practices and other hygiene precautions are followed while those services are provided. Any new use of a church building for essential voluntary / public services should be expressly supported by the incumbent or Area Dean and the diocesan bishop.

Church halls must currently remain closed although Welsh Government is considering whether some relaxation may be permitted particularly in relation to nursery school provision. We will update this guidance as soon as this is clear.

Further guidance on the care and use of church buildings is being issued by the officers of the Representative Body. Visit: [Covid 19 - Church buildings guidance](#)

### **Pastoral visiting**

Clergy and others duly licensed or commissioned should exercise their ordinary pastoral ministry from a distance, by phone and online. Pastoral visits should only be undertaken where essential; such visits should generally be to the doorstep and social distancing measures must be scrupulously observed. Individual Bishops may issue more detailed advice to their clergy on what they consider to be 'essential' visits and may be consulted by clergy in any cases of doubt.

### **Funerals**

The Bench remains of the view that funeral services should not take place in churches at the current time, but the bishops are continuing to carefully consider this matter. The current Government Regulations permit funerals to take place in churches, but the church holds legal responsibility for ensuring that social distancing is adhered to. The Bishops do not want clergy to feel pressured into taking services until such point as they are confident that they can open and operate safely. As church communities gain confidence through re-opening for private prayer with all the attendant risk control measures, they will be in a better position to manage funerals.

Funeral services at the graveside may continue. Clergy and others duly licensed may also preside at funerals in crematoria. However, the Bishops strongly urge ministers who fall into any of the UK Government's categorisations of persons at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus not to undertake such ministry personally, and to delegate to colleagues instead. The full list of such categories is available [here](#).

In accordance with the most recent Welsh Government Regulations, attendance at these funerals must now be limited to the person responsible for arranging the funeral and a small number of mourners (who may be accompanied by a carer if necessary) invited to attend by the person responsible for arranging the funeral. Our view remains that for funerals at the graveside the 'small number' should not exceed ten. Everyone attending a funeral must take all reasonable measures to stay two metres away from someone not of their household.

We encourage clergy to communicate carefully with funeral directors, and to confirm that the funeral director will assume responsibility for compliance with the Regulations, including inviting mourners to be present and ensuring that social distancing measures are observed. The funeral should be kept brief, omitting optional parts of the funeral service.

The Church in Wales permits fees due under Welsh Church (Burial Grounds) Act 1945 to be waived in exceptional circumstances. We are sure that clergy will be sensitive to the current circumstances, and clergy are reminded that they are permitted to waive their ministry fees if they consider it appropriate to do so.

In due course we will issue guidance on services of remembrance for use once we are able to return to our church buildings.

## **Marriage**

Marriages cannot currently take place in churches. There are two exceptions:

- Marriages by Surrogate's (Common) Licence can take place where either party is terminally ill. If you receive such a request, you should approach your Bishop for approval. Such approval will be based on a demonstration of a robust risk management strategy.
- If a couple wish to marry because of another extreme pastoral emergency, it may be possible to obtain an Archbishop of Canterbury's Special Licence for a wedding outside of a church, and clergy should discuss the matter with their diocesan bishop before then contacting the Archbishop of Canterbury's Faculty Office at [faculty.office@theanctuary.com](mailto:faculty.office@theanctuary.com).
- Services for the Blessing of a Marriage are not permitted.

## **Baptism**

Baptisms cannot currently take place in churches, and can only take place at home, hospital, hospice or other location in case of an extreme pastoral emergency, where baptism may be administered by a lay person. The order for emergency baptism is appended below.

## **Prayer and witness**

The duty of the people of God to witness to Christ is not diminished at this time; neither is our obligation to pray without ceasing for our communities and all in need. We commend all that is being done in God's service to care pastorally for our communities, and to enable worship, prayer and devotion to continue at home.

We continue to hold all who are anxious, all who are unwell, and all who are grieving in our prayers, asking that the presence of the risen Christ may be near to us all and give us assurance, peace and strength at this painful and anxious time.

### **An Order for Emergency Baptism**

In an emergency, if no ordained minister is available, a lay person may be the minister of baptism. Before baptizing, the minister should ask the name of the infant / person to be baptized. If, for any reason, there is uncertainty as to the infant / person's name, the baptism can be properly administered without a name (so long as the identity of the person baptized can be duly recorded).

The following form is sufficient:

The minister pours water on the person to be baptized, saying

*I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

*Amen.*

Then all may say the Lord's Prayer and the Grace.

Any person who has administered baptism privately in an emergency should make a careful record of the date and place of baptism and of the identity of the person baptised. He / she should forward details to the parish priest as soon as possible and without delay.

The parish priest should ensure that the customary record is entered in the baptismal register.