



Public gatherings to combat coronavirus has been updated by the Church of

The new advice makes clear that, while these important life events can currently continue to be marked, they will have to be very significantly scaled back to meet the need for social distancing.

It also makes clear that where families would like to rearrange, the Church would work with them to make this possible.

In the case of weddings, it recommends that the numbers attending the ceremony should be limited to the legal minimum of five people: the priest, the bride and groom and two witnesses.

Apart from the couple themselves, everyone else should observe a social distance as far as possible. The guidance makes clear that traditions such as the priest touching the rings or the couple's hands as part of a prayer or blessing are not required.

It also clarifies that the reading of banns will not be possible as public worship services have been suspended. But couples can instead apply for a licence through a different procedure and those whose banns have already been read can proceed.

The guidance recommends streaming where possible but acknowledges couples may wish to postpone their wedding or proceed but hold a public blessing at a later date.

The advice recommends similar measures for baptisms, with numbers limited to the candidate, their parents (or guardians or carers), the godparents and the minister.

It adds that only the clergy and parents should join the candidate at the font, with godparents maintaining a social distance. There is also detailed guidance on hygiene, including making clear that the priest should not hold the child and that water should be administered with an appropriate implement such as a shell.

Incumbents have an obligation to baptise the children of parishioners and in cases such as where a child is in danger cannot delay doing so. However, the guidance acknowledges that families may wish to postpone a baptism and encourages clergy to help rearrange as an appropriate time.

The Bishop of Manchester, Dr David Walker, said: "Couples and parents, friends and families will have been planning for months, even years for their special moment, whether a wedding or a christening.

"Now it can go ahead – but with only the minimum required in attendance. You may need to cancel or postpone.

"Whatever decision is made, God's love and blessing will still surround all those who would have been there that day.

"Prayers will still be offered, and there will be a special day to look forward to in the future.

"We encourage those who would have been there to hold couples and families in their prayers, and pray that everyone will know God's love is holding them at this time."

More information

- [Guidance for parishes on Coronavirus COVID-19](#)
 - Read a blog by The Revd Dr Sandra Millar, the Church of England's Head of Life Events, [for families planning wedding and christenings](#).
 - [A beginners guide to live streaming is also available](#).
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