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The lengthy period of lockdown, to varying degrees, and the necessity for people to stay at home or isolate, has been very difficult for everyone.

As the restrictions come and go, many church congregations and local communities are carefully examining which activities can safely run and how. Gathering outdoors is generally safer, to prevent infection from the COVID virus, and so where conditions permit could be a good alternative to meeting indoors.

Remember, the guidance produced by [the government](#) and the [central Church](#) on keeping safe, and also the instructions of the Bishop in your diocese, should be carefully followed.



Re-awakening and re-imagining Church during and after lockdown; using your outdoor space for church activities.

Government guidance is clear that outdoor activities are safer than indoor ones. This can be an opportunity to notice and be thankful for God's creation; noticing the trees, plants, birds, and insects around you, and feeling the sunshine and wind (or refreshing rain!) on your face.

Churchyards are also often full of fascinating monuments which tell the story of your community over the centuries. Sometimes they contain imagery and poetry and express joy and faith, as well as sadness, even perhaps unease, for example monuments of people related to the Slave Trade. These can offer opportunities for reflections on life, remind people of their shared past, and encourage discussion about our place in the world, and how we might prayerfully work towards creating a better one.

Below are a range of resources that you may like to try out in your churchyard, local park, or (if you are fortunate enough to be able to) on a walk in the countryside. You may also be able to find joy and wonder from your armchair looking out the window, viewing nature photos or videos, or in your garden.

## **Starting point**



### Vital things to remember

- All activities need to be **risk assessed carefully to ensure they can take place safely, considering a range of factors**, and follow the latest guidance. Search for “outdoor worship and churchyards” on the [COVID guidance page](#), where you can also find a template “risk assessment for outdoor worship”.
- Check what your **Bishop has decided for your diocese**, and follow this ruling.
- If you are planning to do **Eucharistic worship outside** you need to ask your **diocesan bishop's permission**.

### Key questions to ask yourself

Are you simply **moving** indoor activities outdoors, are you **adapting** the nature of the activities to reflect your outdoor setting, or do you want to move more fully towards a **‘Forest Church’** model? The answer will affect the kind of resources you need. None of these are wrong, but they are different start-points.

**What activities within your church community are suited to being carried out outdoors?** Some churches might be comfortable moving worship outdoors, whereas others might think this a step too far. Perhaps you might instead gather in small groups outdoors for prayer and reflection? Or create a nature or history trail sheet for families around your churchyard?

**What physical distancing and cleaning requirements are appropriate in your circumstances?** This requires careful consideration of the practicalities ([see the latest national guidance](#)).

### Practicalities

#### COVID19 considerations

From July 19th 2021, legal limits on the numbers of people allowed to meet indoors and outdoors have been removed, including all capacity limits in churches and other venues, as well as removal of the 1 meter+ social distancing rules.

There are no nationally-determined limits on the number of people, including choirs or any other amateur performance groups, who can gather indoors or outdoors.

Outdoor worship continues to be safer with regards to the virus spreading than indoor situations and, where conditions and circumstances permit, is a helpful option.

You can refer to our [national guidance and risk assessment framework](#), to help you make local decisions about what is right for your church.

#### How will you make sure everything is audible?

Will you keep numbers low? We suggest you do. If not, some kind of microphone and sound system will be needed. Portable, waterproof sound systems can be purchased for around £150–£200, enabling music to be played as well as public address. Waterproof systems can be disinfected between users.

#### Will you stream it for those unable to attend because they are self-isolating??

Find practical guidance about how to stream your services on our website [here](#).

#### Will you cancel in the event of rain?

In the event of rain or high winds, who makes the decision about going ahead, cancelling or moving inside?

How will this decision be communicated?

If you move worship back inside the church, ensure you follow the risk assessment for indoor worship.

#### Do you need to let your neighbours know?

It is important that any immediate neighbours of the church are aware that a gathering is planned, and understand the precautions that are being put in place to ensure there is no risk to those living nearby.

#### Does anything require input from your insurers?

It is important that your insurer is aware of what you are planning so they have the opportunity to advise on risks, and confirm that your gathering is covered for public liability.

# Principles for taking church activities outdoors

- **Leave the space as you found it.**
- **Keep it manageable.** Think carefully about the group size that you can manage safely. The current COVID guidance will help you work out the maximum group size, but you should also think about what will work well with worship. You should not be shouting, so amplification may be needed to communicate effectively outside while practising physical distancing. The context is important too – you need to think about road noise, neighbours and other users of the outdoor space, such as those tending graves for example.
- **Be in the space, don't try and make it like 'normal' church. It isn't.** Attentiveness to place is fundamental to outdoor worship. Worship can be shorter, more informal and more inclusive.
- **Allow the place itself and the Holy Spirit to lead you.** Encourage people to relax and be themselves. With children that means active exploring, piling sticks, looking for signs of life and having fun. Adults can be encouraged to be mindful, to share their experiences with each other, and perhaps to create an artwork with found materials.
- If you are leading a trail around the churchyard, whether to look at memorials or nature (or both), remember to tread lightly and to help maintain physical distancing. You can point things out without handling them.
- **You are visiting other species' homes, so treat it with respect.** You may not necessarily see them because until they get to know you the residents will scuttle away. But don't be surprised if they start to observe you. Birds especially are known to take an interest in spiritual matters outside. No one knows why it is but many have commented on it.
- **Be mindful this may be an active place of commemoration.** As in a church, be respectful to others in your demeanour and actions. While children should be encouraged to enjoy themselves, noise should again be kept down to a reasonable level to avoid disturbing others.
- **Use silences far more.** Listen and watch for the presence of God in the world around you.
- **Go with the seasons of nature.** The church seasons are, in some senses, linked. For example the birth of Christ, the Light of the World, is celebrated just after the winter solstice, so the days have become fractionally longer. Easter, resurrection and rebirth comes as spring gets going. By embracing this people will see how much more tightly bound the church calendar and nature's timings are than they might have previously thought.
- **Meet in the round, suitably spaced, or go for meditative walks.** If you just sit in rows and do 'normal' church outside you'll be missing a great opportunity and people will be disappointed because it'll be neither one thing nor another.
- **Be sure that we are not taking from nature without giving back.** There needs to be balance in the mix somewhere that includes a commitment to environmental awareness in daily life rather than just taking what we need for our spiritual wellbeing and then going back to business as usual.



**There's no such thing as the wrong weather, only the wrong clothes!** Sturdy footwear at least is a must, the outdoors, including churchyards, can be uneven, slippery and mucky! Always exercise reasonable care, especially if you are leading a group.





The resources below have been suggested by people around the country who regularly lead outdoor worship; **thank you to everyone who has shared photos and resources with us.**

### Prayer and liturgy resources — free online

- Whilst this practical leaflet from Gloucester Diocese is focussed on [Easter prayers outdoor](#), much of it is useful all year round.
- Find family-friendly prayers on [Graces and Prayers for the Earth](#).
- [Faith and Worship](#) — this particular link is to the Summer prayers, but there are many themes to explore.
- [Wild worship field guide](#) from The Sanctuary Centre. This “spotters guide” allows you to reconnect with the awe and wonder in God’s creation. Look out for the nature items on the list and use the related scripture to inspire worship while looking at, or experiencing, it. Great for children and all who are young at heart!
- Register with the Engage Worship site to get access to [free downloadable resources for outdoor worship](#).
- [God revealed in creation Prayer Stations](#) from the Sanctuary Centre. These 12 prayer stations are designed to be used outside — either individually or as a series to form a prayer walk — and aim to help people both connect with God through creation and use natural settings to stimulate prayer for others. They can be done in any order and/or with a selection chosen to fit your specific circumstances and surrounding natural environment.
- [Sensio Divina — The Mystic Christ website](#), literally ‘Divine sensing’, a contemplative meditation to connect and dialogue with Divine presence in a place, object, or natural phenomenon (Jer 23:24) and come to a deeper understanding of God through nature (Rom 1:20).
- [Green Faith](#) offer five Christian Eco-Spirituality tips, below, with resources provided under each. They have this simple but important observation, “Remember — Jesus regularly prayed outdoors. This simple reminder offers people a new way to connect with Jesus, as well as with the earth.”

### Prayer and liturgy resources — books to purchase

- [Outdoors Worship](#).
- [Wild Worship by Rachel Summers](#) is suggested for families/children.□The link is to Wild Worship; you can also find Wild Lent and Wild Advent.
- [The Celtic Wheel of the Year](#).
- [The Book of Uncommon Prayer](#).
- [The Earth Cries Glory](#).
- [Creative Ideas for Wild Church](#).
- As well as their free resources, Engage Worship have an [Outdoor Worship book](#).
- [Worship in the Garden](#).
- [The Lives Around Us: Daily Meditations for Nature Connections](#).
- [Into The Garden - Cultivation as a Tool for Spiritual Formation and Community Renewal](#).
- [The Iona Abbey Worship Book](#).

### Forest Church

- Join the [Forest Church group on Facebook](#) and find resources there. People are starting to experiment with different models which follow physical distancing , for example people saying the same prayers at the same time in different places, so it’s a good resource to dip into.
- A [short overview of running a Forest Church session](#) from the Diocese of Gloucester.
- This [Grove Booklet](#) gives a nice short introduction and is only £4.□There are theological chapters or you can dive straight into the practical ‘how to’ chapter.
- A blog post on [devising rituals for Forest Church](#).
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For further information, you might want to purchase one of the following books / articles:

1. Bruce Stanley's book is one which many Forest Church facilitators read when they are getting started, and is a good starting place: "[Forest Church: A Field Guide to Nature Connection for Groups and Individuals Paperback](#)".
  2. A [theology of Forest Church](#).
- You might also find inspiration in the linked but separate [Wild Church, on the River Dart](#).
  - [A Rocha UK's Wild Christian scheme](#), is a community of families and individuals exploring the connections between Christian faith, the natural environment, and how they live. You can sign up for a free monthly email, which includes a biblical reflection and ideas on how to enjoy, nurture and defend nature.

#### Resources linked to particular festivals or days

- [The Church of England's Resource Book: Times & Seasons](#) has a chapter relating to the [agricultural year](#). You could find suggestions here for late summer festivals and early autumn i.e. Lammastide and Harvest Festival respectively.
- See also the Church of England's online resources on [Festivals](#) and [Festival Churches](#).
- St Francis Day is 4 October and time for Pet Services, and pets during this period have been loyal companions. [The Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals](#) has some worship ideas.

#### Nature-based organisations offering free online activities suitable for churchyards

Many nature-based charities offer activities which can be used as a part of outdoor worship. A suitable structure might be prayers to start, a nature-based activity that gets everyone looking and noticing, then gather to talk about what they have found, something that connects back to faith (thankfulness, a reading, a poem), and a liturgical ending of some kind. Here are a few examples of where you can get activities from:

<https://www.wildlifewatch.org.uk/activity-sheets>

<https://www.countrysideclassroom.org.uk/resources/705>

<https://www.bigbutterflycount.org/>

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/education-pack/>

#### Resources for understanding and recording memorials

The Church of England has a programme of digital recording of its burial grounds, the National Burial Grounds Survey. A map is being compiled showing the location and boundary of every Anglican burial ground, waiting to be filled in with detail. See the links below for more information, and to find out how to research and tell the stories of your community.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/churchcare/churchcare-news/national-burial-ground-survey-leeds-diocese>

<http://www.debs.ac.uk/>

<https://www.atlanticgeomatics.co.uk/burial-ground-management-system>

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission website; <https://www.cwgc.org/>

## Practical examples from around the country

- St James's Piccadilly "Eco Garden Liturgy".
- "Blessing on the Beach" from the Loaves and Fishes project (from the Environment Groups of the Blackburn Anglican Diocese and Churches Together in Cumbria, the Lancaster Roman Catholic Diocese Faith and Justice Commission, Churches Together in Lancashire and CAFOD Lancaster).
- "Outdoor worship: connecting people with God in the outdoors" from Thurloxtton.
- Chipping Norton Deanery has created a set of "Pilgrim Paths": walks with places to stop and reflect.
- A "churchyard prayer walk" from Holy Trinity Hurstpierpoint.
- "Mossy Church" liturgy, from a project run on a housing estate in Scunthorpe.
- "Local Prayer Spaces" from the Diocese of Salisbury.
- St John's Sharow have created a labyrinth for spiritual reflection.



If you know of a good example, please send it to [environmentprogramme@churchofengland.org](mailto:environmentprogramme@churchofengland.org) and we may be able to include it here.

We are indebted to the **many** people around the country who shared their experiences and examples with us to help us create this page, with particular



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Also of Interest



Biodiversity



[your churchyard](#)

The practical path to net zero carbon

[Find ways to reduce energy use and associated carbon emissions](#)



The Agricultural Year



[around the agricultural year](#)

Festival Churches

[Find out more around the potential of Festival Churches](#)

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