COVID-19

SAFER CHURCHES

Helping public places to reopen safely
Churches are places that help to support and sustain the public life of many communities across the country. This Covid-19 Safer Spaces guide is to assist staff in adapting their church to enable safe reopening and worship.

Developed by architects IF_DO, in partnership with the Church of England, this free-to-use guide sets out clear stages of how to safely reopen churches across the UK. Visual diagrams illustrate the spatial adaptations required for worship and other essential services to recommence as safely as possible.

As an architecture practice, IF_DO is focussed on the design of social infrastructure - places that help to improve lives for people and foster stronger and more resilient communities. These places will be critical to the social recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Covid-19 Safer Spaces project has been developed to provide expert guidance on how they can be safely adapted.

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Future guides will assist with pastoral services
The overview diagram below illustrates the core elements for the initial reopening of Churches across the UK. The key details the graphical components used throughout the guide.
01

Sanitising the space but not the experience. Small interventions such as the introduction of hand sanitiser stations, clear signage and circulation routes will help to create a safer environment in the church, while allowing people and services to return.

02

Optimising the use of space so no one is left out. The requirements of social distancing will limit the number of parishioners able to attend larger ceremonies, such as Sunday services. This guide suggests seating arrangements to optimise the number of people able to attend safely.

03

Worshipping in safety. While singing will not be possible at initial reopening, the use of bibles and prayer books can be made safer by limiting how much they are shared. The use of projectors or lending of books to individuals or households will allow for safer collective worship.

04

Sustaining a welcoming environment. Churches are the focal points of many communities across the country, extending their services far beyond worship. Further guides for community centres and foodbanks will help to assist churches in reopening their pastoral services.

05

Unfolding the church. Many churches have external open space that might be used to allow for social gatherings, such as collective worship and discussion groups, in compliance with social distancing guidance.
ELEMENTS
Entering the Church

- Introduction of 2m distance markers
- Barriers introduced to guide one-way system
- With face-covering:
  - Social distancing must comply with current government guidance at all times.
- Without face-covering:
  - Clear signage to direct one-way system, protected from the weather if possible
- Hand-sanitiser station available upon entering and leaving the church
- Furniture arranged at safe distance from circulation routes

Exiting the Church

- Parents are to be responsible for children throughout service
- Parents are to be responsible for children throughout service
INITIAL OPENING

CIRCULATION

Single Entrance / Exit
Nave to be used for filing into seats, beginning with front row first. Aisles are used for exiting in single file using one-way system, beginning with back row. Level access should be reserved for the elderly and those with limited mobility for a period of time either before or after the service.

Multiple Entrances / Exits
In the case of multiple entrance/exit, dedicate one for entrance and another for exit. Circulation to be single-file, one-way system from entrance to seating. Seating to be filled from the front (beginning with North/South transcepts). Maintain safe distance from clergy. Aisles are kept free for circulation during services. Entrances with level access should be reserved for wheelchair users or those with limited mobility.
Furniture arranged to comply with social distancing guidance, with some sections dedicated for use by households. Furniture to be a safe distance from circulation routes. Services should be limited so high-contact surfaces like furniture can be quarantined for 72-hours. Seating with arm-rests or close to a pillar should be reserved for those who require physical support.

**Pews**

Some pews will need to be cordoned off to ensure social-distancing

The use of pews can be alternated between services or quarantined for 72 hours

**Chairs**

Larger areas of seating to be reserved for households
INITIAL OPENING

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Projection

If possible, projectors can be installed to replace prayer and hymn books.

Projection screens can display readings to replace the need for individual books.

Personal Prayer Books

Parishioners could bring personal prayer books, or have prayer books loaned by Church where possible.

Individual prayer books can be loaned to parishioners or households rather than distributed at the start of each service.

Hymn books might also be loaned once singing is permitted again.

If used during service, prayer and hymn books to be quarantined for 72 hours.

Individual prayer and hymn books could be loaned to individuals.
Single Use Service Sheet

Clear signage indicating instructions such as 'please take service sheets away with you after use'

'Single Use Service Sheets' to be taken and disposed off by user after service

Offerings

Offerings to be made via card payment if possible

If offerings are made with cash, the donations box is to be quarantined for 72 hours
**MEETING SPACES**

**INITIAL OPENING**

**Vestry**
Limited to essential use with limited capacity determined by size of room

- High-contact surfaces such as chairs to be taken out of use to limit capacity of room
- Windows opened to ensure ventilation
- Sanitiser stations to be available in spaces with larger gatherings

**Office**
Removal of any non-essential furniture with limited capacity when in use.

- Screens to be installed on office desk to protect staff
- Furniture to be arranged to adhere to social-distance guidance
- Free-standing air filtration units can help improve air quality.

Furniture to be arranged to ensure social-distance guidance is upheld and circulation is still enabled.
Staff Kitchen

Dedicated to essential use with limited capacity determined by size of room. This space should be reserved for staff only.

Existing arrangement of furniture does not comply with social distance guidance

Disposable paper towels to replace tea-towels

Sanitiser stations to be provided in key areas

High-contact surfaces to be disinfected regularly

Windows opened to ensure ventilation

Furniture reduced to ensure social distance guidance upheld
**General Facilities**

**Toilets**

**Single Person / Disabled**
- High-contact surfaces to be disinfected regularly
- Disinfectant to be provided in order for users to sanitize surfaces after use
- If possible, high-contact surfaces such as soap dispensers, taps and hand-dryers to be fitted with hands-free sensors

**Multiple Cubicles**
- Alternating cubicles taken out of use to limit the number of users at one time
- Windows opened to ensure ventilation
- Sanitiser stations to be provided
- Where less than 2m apart, alternating sinks, hand dryers and urinals should be taken out of use to allow for required social distancing
- Disinfectant to be provided in order for users to sanitize surfaces after use
**Collective Worship Outdoors**

In compliance with current social distancing guidelines, utilising outdoor spaces could enable some collective activities to continue.

Furniture arrangement to adhere with social distance guidance and cleaned after use or quarantined for 72 hours.

Hymns can be sung by small groups of professional singers.

Temporary seating to be arranged in compliance with social-distancing guidance.

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**Outside Space & Activities**

While some activities, such as small discussion groups, will not be possible within church buildings between services it may be possible for these to take place outside, such as in church yards or local parks. Staff should be encouraged to reach out to the local area and extend their services off site.

Single-use service sheets.
CASE STUDIES
CASE STUDY

URBAN

St. Francis of Assisi, Radford, Coventry

Limits for communal worship should be decided on the basis of the capacity of the place of worship following an assessment of risk.

The congregation’s entrance to the church is a small porch adjoining the south-aisles.

The congregation sits on chairs facing the altar, with a projector suspended above the pulpit.

A sanitising station located directly inside the entrance, followed by a table offering single-use service sheets will follow. Signage directs parishioners to their seats via a one-way-system, leading them down both aisles into the transcepts. Areas of seating are dedicated to households in compliance with social distancing guidance. After the service, parishioners will then circulate along the nave and aisles to exit through a door located on the north side.
St Mary the Virgin, Ewelme, South Oxfordshire

Limits for communal worship should be decided on the basis of the capacity of the place of worship following an assessment of risk.

CASE STUDY
RURAL

The congregation’s entrance to the church is a small porch adjoining the south-aisles.

In-built wooden pews are arranged along the nave and aisles.

A sanitising station is located directly inside the entrance, followed by a table offering single-use service sheets will follow. Signage directs parishioners to their seats via a one-way-system, leading them down both aisles and the nave, filing in from the front first. The route out will lead parishioners back the way they came, exiting through an alternative door, with a sanitizing station located close by. Private prayer in St John’s Chapel will follow the circulation routes described above.
This guide has been developed with and should be read alongside the Church of England Coronavirus (Covid-19) guidance for churches, and all relevant Government guidance. Please note that knowledge of Covid-19 and best practice guidelines in response to it are evolving, and that this document may be updated to reflect ongoing learning.

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www.covid19saferspaces.org
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