

Guidelines for Fresh Expressions of Church during COVID-19

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24 th September 2020	1	The House of Bishops Recovery Group

The Recovery Group has been set up to support the Church of England as government guidance changes through the COVID-19 pandemic. This document has been prepared with information available by the issue date. It will be kept under review and updated as the situation develops, with each update issued as a new version. The current version will always be available to download from the Church of England website via the [Coronavirus FAQs page](#).

Fresh Expressions are so varied and different in what they do, where they meet and how they work it's impossible to create guidelines that fit every context. This document isn't intended to lay out what you should do: rather to point you to relevant guidance from the government, so you make your own risk assessment.

Because ultimately that's what is needed: **a risk assessment**, which is what we all need to do under any circumstances because what we do as fresh expressions of church needs to prioritise safety by mitigating risks. It's just that right now there are some significant and different risks than we've been used to before.

Covid19 is still being understood, and so as new discoveries arise the understanding of what is risky changes or grows. We advise you to take the most cautious approach to your risk management. A basic question to ask yourselves: are we doing things as safely as we possibly can?

Point 1: What you are doing is an act of worship.

We're all used to the discussion about whether fresh expressions are 'proper church', and we would argue that it might look and feel very different but it is an act of worship, even if those taking part wouldn't understand that term.

Therefore the relevant guidelines for you to follow will be outlined in the Church of England's "[Advice for the Conduct of Public Worship](#)". It doesn't matter if the advice for youth or children's activities or education settings fit you better, it's an act of worship so you'll need to base your risk assessment on these guidelines. The link above will always take you to the most up-to-date guidance, based on the Government's advice.

These guidelines and advice are intended to take the principles of what is known about spreading the virus and apply them to different settings. Fundamentally they're about these principles:

- Hand hygiene, social distancing and face coverings to reduce the risk of infected people sharing the virus
- Sanitising surfaces where the virus could survive and be passed on
- Minimising people touching objects and surfaces in order to prevent infection

- Minimising numbers of people (especially adults) gathering in enclosed spaces as it's not yet clear how long the virus lingers in the air
- Not sharing food outside a formal catering environment where risk is managed professionally

Second Principle: Pay attention to the detail

Do a “virtual walk-through” of your gathering from preparation of the space, equipment and materials and the set-up process and then right through to clearing up, storing equipment and materials, disposing of rubbish etc. Sanitising, hand hygiene, minimising cross-contamination and protecting team members needs to be considered at all times, as well as the flow of people in and out of the space, where they will spend time whilst in the space, what they'll do, how they move about the space, who they can and can't interact with safely etc.

Make sure all your leaders, helpers etc know what is expected, and what they can and shouldn't be doing.

Think about signs to reinforce key messages such as hand washing, social distancing etc, if that would be helpful.

Don't forget to set up systems to collect people's data to comply with test and trace requirements

A note about buildings

Many fresh expressions don't meet in buildings, and although this does make some of the guidance in the 'Advice on the Conduct of Public Worship' document irrelevant to you, this is still the guidelines to refer to as if it is an act of worship then these guidelines apply –there is specific advice of the C of E coronavirus website about outdoor worship.. You may find it easier than those meeting in enclosed spaces in some ways, but you'll still need to bear in mind the fundamental principles (in the bullet points above) and think in detail how they apply to your setting.

Many fresh expressions don't meet in church buildings, and therefore you will need to refer to the risk assessment that has been prepared by the venue manager and then understand and comply with the practices proscribed by the venue.

If you meet in a public building that isn't a place of worship at any other time, like a community centre or school, and you are the only group using the building for the duration of your gathering, then it is counted as a place of worship while you are using it.

If the place you meet in has other users or activities going on at the same time of your gathering, for example in a roped-off section of a café that is also open to the public at the same time, then different guidance will apply and you will need to go with the practices proscribed by the venue manager even if these restrict you more than the 'Conduct of Public Worship' advice.

In summary

We want fresh expressions to continue to gather in order to offer love and support and a place of belonging for people, so that they can encounter God's love and plan for them as grow as disciples.

We need these gatherings to be as safe as possible, and the guidelines the Church of England issue do the work of interpreting government guidance for us so we don't have to.

But ultimately, we need to do our own risk assessments, taking seriously the practices we can all do to minimise the risk of Covid19 being spread during our gatherings.

Praying for wisdom, creativity and grace for you in this time - Heather Cracknell, Head of Development for Fresh Expressions, Archbishop's Council