

GENERAL SYNOD
THE ELECTRONIC REGISTER BOOK OF SERVICES FORM AND CONDITIONS
2023
EXPLANATORY NOTES

The draft Electronic Register Book of Services Form and Conditions 2023 sets out the form which must be used if a church or chapel chooses to keep its register book of services in electronic format and the conditions on which such form may be used.

Background

1. Amending Canon 41 was enacted at the November 2020 Group of Sessions of the General Synod with the intention of giving churches the option of keeping their service registers in an electronic format should they choose to do so. The intention of the amendment was to give a parish the benefit of quick and efficient access to the data, increased security, and the ability to automatically collate and export the data for parish returns.

2. Amending Canon 41 amended Canon F12 (Of the register book of services) by substituting new paragraphs F12.2 to 4:
 2. *Every service held at the church or chapel, including the Occasional Offices and whether or not a service of public worship, shall be recorded in the register book, together with—*
 - (a) *the name of the officiating minister,*
 - (b) *the name of the preacher (if the preacher is not the officiating minister),*
 - (c) *the number of persons attending the service and, so far as it is practicable to ascertain, the number aged under 16 and the number aged 16 or over,*
 - (d) *in the case of the celebration of the Holy Communion, the number of communicants (as well as the total number of persons attending) and, so far as it is practicable to ascertain, the number of communicants aged under 16 and the number aged 16 or over, and*
 - (e) *if desired, notes of significant events.*

3. *The form in which the register book may be kept includes any electronic or other form approved by the General Synod, subject in either case to any conditions approved by the Synod.*
 4. *In a case where the decision is taken to keep the register book in an electronic or other form approved under paragraph 3—*
 - (a) every service held after the decision takes effect shall be recorded in that form, and*
 - (b) services already held in the calendar year in which the decision takes effect may (but need not) be recorded in that form.*
3. The form and conditions in GS 2291 are made pursuant to Canon F 12.3 which provides for Synod to give approval for the form in which the register book is kept and impose conditions on its use.

Form and Conditions

Form

4. This provides that the electronic register book of services must be kept in the form, or a form substantially similar to, that contained in the Schedule. The Schedule sets out the fields which will appear in the online form and indicates those that require a mandatory entry.

Conditions

5. Condition 1 provides that an electronic register book of services may only be kept in the form approved by General Synod under Canon F 12.3.
6. Condition 2 provides that where a parish church, a parochial chapel, a chapel of ease, a chapel of a conventional district, a guild church, or a Cathedral church wishes to use an electronic register book of services the PCC, Guild Church Council, District Church Council or Chapter must first pass a resolution to that effect. Every service held after that decision takes effect must be recorded in that register, and services already held in the calendar year in which the decision takes effect may (but need not) be recorded in that form (see Canon F 12.4)
7. Condition 3 provides that where a parish church, a parochial chapel, a chapel of ease, a chapel of a conventional district, a guild church, or a Cathedral church wishes to

cease using electronic register book of services the PCC, Guild Church Council, District Church Council, or Chapter, must pass a subsequent resolution to that effect. Once the resolution takes effect the church or chapel must revert to the use of a hard copy register book.

8. Condition 4 provides that any resolution passed must state the date upon which the use of the electronic service register shall take effect or cease.

9. Condition 5 provides that any personal data may only be recorded in an electronic register book of services if to do so is in accordance with current data protection law. Presently, under GDPR in order to process personal data a lawful basis (Article 6 GDPR) must exist and, for special category personal data (such as that linking a person's name to their religious beliefs), one of the exceptions in Article 9(1) is also required. For the officiating minister and preacher there is a lawful basis under Article 6(1)(c) as recording the names is required by Canon and processing is carried out in the course of legitimate activities with appropriate safeguards by a not-for-profit body with a religious aim (Article 9(2)(d)).

Commencement

10. Work has been undertaken to test the facility and the full functionality of the site is now ready for use. The form and conditions will come into force on the day they are approved by General Synod.

Amendments to the Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978

11. Section 8 of the Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure 2020 amended the Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978 so that it will be consistent with that amendments that have been made to Canon F 12. It is intended to commence these provisions once the form and conditions have been approved.

Legal Office
Church House

January 2023

Annex: Guide to using an electronic register book of services

Introduction

1. Canon F 12 (Of the register book of services) provides that a register book of services shall be provided in all churches and chapels. It further sets out that every service, including Occasional Offices, shall be recorded in the register book and prescribes the information that must be included.
2. The purpose and function of an electronic register book of services is the same as the paper register books. It will continue to be the case that the minister or other relevant person will record the necessary data, but the electronic form will also give quick and efficient access to that data, along with increased security and the ability to automatically collate and export the information.
3. Any church or chapel that keeps a register book of services may decide to keep the register book of services in an electronic form.
4. Where a parish church, a parochial chapel, a chapel of ease, a chapel of a conventional district, a guild church, or a Cathedral church wishes to use an electronic register, the PCC, DCC, Guild Church Council or Chapter, as the case may be, must first pass a resolution to that effect. Likewise, where a decision is made to cease using an electronic register and return to a paper-based book, a resolution to that effect must be passed by the same body. In either case the resolution must state the date upon which the change will come into effect.
5. The obligations to record data in Canon F 12 extend only to physical services held in a church or chapel. It will be possible to record more information than is legally required, such as the number of persons estimated to have watched a live-stream service, but inputting this data will be optional.
6. The electronic service register will be made available via an online facility available at www.achurchnearyou.com ("ACNY"). ACNY is a website which is owned by the Archbishops' Council and administered by the Digital Communications Team at Church House, Westminster. ACNY has a page for every church in England, and the incumbent or priest-in-charge of each church can claim the right to administer the page for their church. Once the priest has claimed administration rights, they can grant

editing rights to up to five other people (usually churchwardens, PCC members or church staff).

7. The online form is designed to be intuitive and easy to use. It should take just a few minutes to enter the information for any service. The ACNY website has a support desk that can help users with technical queries (<https://achurchnearyou.zendesk.com/hc/en-us>). Further guidance documentation will be made available to ACNY users so they know how to access and use the electronic register.

How the electronic register will work

8. The administrator and editors of the ACNY page for the relevant church will be able to view the register book fields and add information for a service.
9. To input the data the relevant person should log onto the ACNY website and click on the church for which you are recording service information.
10. In the menu to the left of the page, click on the menu item "Service register" and a form will appear with fields for to enter the information. All fields marked with an asterisk must be completed.
11. Where the church has already added a service into ACNY so that it appears as an event in the publicly accessible page, the administrator or editor will be able to click into that service to add the information without having to create the service entry anew.
12. The electronic register is contained within a longer *optional* data collection form. The optional fields in the longer form will change from time to time as ACNY functionality evolves. The fields that must be completed to satisfy the requirements of Canon F12.2 are clearly indicated.
13. Users will also have access to the 'dashboard' which provides a summary of the service data. Unlike a hardcopy register book the ERB will not become full and the data entered will remain on the dashboard.

14. ACNY can be accessed using any standard device – desktop computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone. An administrator or editor will be able to add the service details even if they are in a location with no broadband access or mobile phone signal; they will be able to access their page and add the information, and then the next time their device obtains an internet connection the information will automatically upload.
15. Once users have completed the service register entry they will be able to download all of their service data into an Excel spreadsheet.
16. Apart from the administrator and editors, the only people who will be able to view (but not edit) the data are the ACNY database administrators.

Parish Returns

17. The statistical information which is entered into the form (i.e., the numbers of persons attending the service, the number of communicants, and the numbers who are under or over 16) will be automatically transferred to the Parish Returns database. The statistical information will not include any names or personal data. The statistical information will be pre-populated into the annual return for that church so that when a church officer logs into the Parish Returns website to complete their annual return, they will find several of the questions have already been automatically answered. It will be possible to manually override the pre-populated figures if the person completing the return wishes to do so. The relevant dioceses and the Data Services Team will have access to the database and will be able to view summaries of the statistical information.

January 2023

Example: Service of the Word

The screenshot shows the 'Service Register' page. The top navigation bar includes 'Churches and Benefices All Saints', 'Resource Hub', 'Editor help centre', 'Safeguarding', 'Account', and 'Log out'. The left sidebar contains various menu items, with 'Service register' highlighted. The main content area features a heading 'Service Register' followed by an introductory paragraph explaining the register's purpose and a list of instructions. Below the text are two buttons: 'Record a service' and 'Export'. A section titled 'Previous services' lists a 'Service of the Word' on '04 DEC 2022 10:15 A.M.' with 'View', 'Edit', and 'Delete' options. A 'Help' button is visible in the bottom right corner.

The screenshot shows the 'Add a Service' form. The top navigation bar is identical to the previous screenshot. The left sidebar is also identical, with 'Service register' highlighted. The main content area features a heading 'Add a Service' and a feedback link. A red banner reads 'PLEASE FILL OUT ALL REQUIRED FIELDS MARKED WITH (*)'. The form includes a 'For Service' section with a 'Select Service' dropdown menu. Below this is a text box with instructions. The 'Please Select The Type(s) Of Service*' section has a search input field. The 'Date*' field is a date picker with the format 'dd/mm/yyyy'. The 'Time*' field is a time selector with the text 'Select a time'. A '1/4' indicator is visible in the top right corner of the form area.

Attendees

2/4

Tap the field and type the number, or use the + and - buttons if you are counting live.

In person attendees

Number of adults (16+) attending service in person *

Number of children (under 16) attending service in person *

Online attendees

Estimated number of people viewing online

If none leave blank.

Give the number of people who watched the whole service. If this is not available, then use the nearest equivalent. If you broadcast your service "live" and make it available on "catch-up", report the total attendance within a week of broadcast.

For more advice see <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/25032>

Total attendees

0

People and notes

3/4

Officiant*

Preacher Was The Same As Officiating Minister

Preacher If Different To Officiating Minister

128 characters

Sermon Subject

128 characters

Notes

Note any significant events here. If there was a reason that attendance levels were unusual, note that here. 1000 characters