

## Getting our Churches and Buildings Ready to Reopen



**The following offers practical guidance in conjunction with other advice  
on readying our Church Buildings for reopening**

**Version 2**

**As God's people we can worship in our homes, online etc but for many of us our church buildings are places where we meet with God as we meet with each other.**

**We are looking forward to being able to reopen our buildings for private prayer where helpful and for the resumption in stages of our Sunday services and eventually other activities.**

## Introduction

Our Churches have remained empty for many weeks now and reopening of them will require careful consideration and some 'housekeeping duties'. We will not suddenly resume normal church life.

Please note that nothing advised below is to be taken to supersede official advice and policy. You will need to plan for resumption, which means talking about it now.

This document should be read in conjunction with the video presentation on our website:

[Return to Church Presentation](#)

## Check the building is safe for return

During lockdown there have been weekly inspections where possible to check the security and condition of the building whilst temporarily vacant.

See advisory note on [Temporary Vacant Buildings Guidance to COVID-19 Insurance Update & Inspection.](#)

If you have a **Charity Shield Policy** with **Methodist Insurance**, then please check the latest advisory note ['Methodist Insurance Update - Temporary Closed Premises Condition'](#) on our website.

Prior to re-opening to congregational members, you should carry out a risk assessment of the building(s). This can be done by a walk through each room looking for any potential hazards. Take a note of any concerns you have and steps that will need to be taken to mitigate or remove the risk.

Is everything in good working order. Equipment, chairs or tables may have been moved prior to closure causing a fire hazard or blocking an escape route for example. Note also, that as part of your Covid-19 strategy by implementing the necessary social distancing measures; this may involve stacking chairs or furniture to one side. Again, care should be taken to ensure they do not become a topple or fire/obstruction hazard.

## A generic **Risk Assessment** for the return of congregational members has been produced:

See [Return to Church – Risk Assessment](#), which focuses on the management of people using the building, offers links to Governmental agency advice and suggests control measures which should be in place and agreed prior to any reopening.

## Getting Our Church Building Ready for Limited Reopening

- Ensure that the church building interior is appropriately cleaned paying particular attention to edges and corners where build up usually occurs. Some buildings may have been susceptible to unwanted animal visitors and so any droppings etc should be cleaned accordingly.

Should there be large quantities of waste for example or, a bird has been locked in, it may be worth considering professional cleaners as some animal waste can carry health implications.

- Deep cleaning can leave a heavy smell of disinfectant or chemical residue. Also, the air in the building may be stale and old. It is recommended to 'air' the building by opening doors and windows to allow the free passage of fresh air through the building. This will also help to minimise mould spores etc that may have built up through inactivity.

If nobody has been accessing your Church and Halls for some weeks, then the virus will not have survived on hard surfaces. However, even if it has only been visited for security or a single person livestreaming worship, clean every surface that might have been touched within the last week. Remember pews/chairs, tables, microphones, pulpit/lectern, door handles, etc

*This is also an ideal time to clean children's toys, books, and shelves that they can reach – regardless of any worries about coronavirus we have a responsibility to maintain a safe and healthy environment.*

Do not assume your usual anti-bacterial cleaners will be effective unless they have also been tested on viruses. Soap and water are still the best defence against the fatty layer around the virus. Cleaning as you go/immediately after use is far more effective than a weekly (or less often) deep clean.

- Run all the taps for a minimum of 20 minutes (to minimise the risk of legionella) and flush and clean toilets. Run the water from all taps and other hot and cold water-outlets for at least 20 minutes to ensure the water system has been thoroughly flushed through. Hot water should be heated to 60<sup>o</sup>c to kill off the bacteria then flushed on the first cycle. If you have any concerns seek appropriate professional help/advice.

[Managing Legionella During Covid Lockdown - UK](#)

[Managing Legionella During Covid Lockdown - RoI](#)

- Consider checking the key safety systems in your Church to ensure they are fully functional.
  - Electrical Systems
  - Emergency Lighting and other lighting
  - Fire Alarm Systems; (including smoke and heat detectors)

- Heating Systems; Oil Supply; fridges.
- Security Monitoring and Access Systems; all need cautionary checks to ensure they are still fully operational.

## Each time the Church Building is used

- If ministers or volunteers/staff are likely to use the building as part of a rota, make sure those bits of the church that are touched often (doorknobs, light switches etc) are thoroughly cleaned between use.
- An attendance register should be completed which records everyone who uses our Church and Halls. This should be carried out by 1 designated person during each session, who will keep the visitor book/pen etc. back from visitors. This is to minimise cross contamination and to support Contact Tracing should the need arise.

Visitors and congregational members should be advised of the requirement for personal contact information in the displaying of signs and also verbally on entering the building.

### ***See Appendix 1***

All should be reassured that under GDPR the information will **ONLY** be used for the purposes of Contact Tracing and the information will be securely held for a period of 4 weeks. The information should be destroyed four weeks after date of completion. **The information must NOT be used for any other purpose.**

Those unwilling to provide details should not be allowed access to the Church.

- Do not share Bibles, prayer books etc. Each person should bring their own books and take them home. All Hymn books and Bibles should be removed from the pews and entrance halls to avoid contamination.
- Collections should be a designated 'drop in' method – no passing of plates.
- Consider not producing a news sheet as this could also be a source of cross contamination. Continue to use social media, telephone, and other remote means to share any news or messages.
- Make sure hand-sanitizer is available at the entrance door and that everyone cleans their hands upon arrival.
- If toilets or washing facilities are available, make sure that there are disposable paper towels, and that there is plenty of liquid soap. Ensure the heating system has sufficient hot water available for washing. Remove cloth hand towels and deactivate electric hand dryers.
- If services are being streamed in the Church, the filming should be done either with a fixed camera or by a member of the ministers or lay preachers' household. A cleaning regime must be applied as you leave to ensure all surfaces/switches etc touched are cleaned.

- Lock the church after use. (*ensure no one has entered the building during this time and that no animals or birds have got in*).

The advice above also applies if others need to enter the church building, for example, workers to undertake necessary maintenance.

### On an ongoing basis

- Run taps and flush toilets
- Perform a general clean of the Church building interior paying particular attention to those bits of the church that are touched often (doorknobs, light switches etc). These areas should be cleaned on a regular and frequent basis.

The key message is to **Keep Safe**, and do not put yourself or others at unnecessary risk. Keep vigilant & focussed as these will be unfamiliar systems and methods to what we are used to. Please follow the continuing government guidelines.

**Thank you.**

# NOTICE

To gain access to this building you are required and agree to give your name and address for the purposes of

## Contact Tracing

Be assured that your details will **NOT** be used for any other purpose and will be destroyed after 4 weeks.

Unfortunately for the protection of others, failure to disclose will result in you not being able to access this building.

Thank you for your co-operation on this matter



**Generic Risk Assessment for dealing with the current  
Covid-19 situation in the workplace/Churches**

**We look forward to the re-opening of our buildings for worship.  
These guidelines are to help you to do that safely.  
If you have questions or need further guidance please contact your District Superintendent**

## Risk Assessment

Covid-19 is a new illness that can affect your lungs and airways. It is caused by a virus called Coronavirus. Symptoms can be mild, moderate, severe or fatal.

This is an advisory **generic Risk Assessment** for dealing with the current Covid-19 situation in the workplace/Churches. It is not likely to cover all scenarios and each Church/employer should consider their own unique circumstances. Please keep up to date with HSE & HSENI advice and Government Covid-19 guidelines to workplaces in this fast changing situation.



What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed	Controls Required	Additional Controls	Action by who?	Action by when?	Done
Spread of Covid-19 Coronavirus	<b>Staff</b> <b>Visitors to Church</b> <b>Volunteers</b> <b>Cleaners</b> <b>Contractors</b> <b>Delivery Personnel</b> <b>Vulnerable Groups</b> <i>Elderly, Pregnant workers, those with existing underlying health conditions</i> <b>Anyone else who physically comes in contact with you in relation to your place of worship</b>	<b>Hand Washing</b> Hand washing facilities with soap and water in place.  Stringent hand washing taking place.  <b>See hand washing guidance.</b> <a href="#">Best Way to Wash Your Hands</a>  Drying of hands with disposable paper towels. <a href="#">Research on Paper Towels</a>  Church Staff/Volunteers are encouraged to protect the skin by applying appropriate emollient cream regularly <a href="#">Emollient Cream Awareness</a>  Gel sanitisers in any area where washing facilities not readily available	Employees & Volunteers to be reminded on a regular basis to wash their hands for 20 seconds with water and soap and the importance of proper drying with disposable towels.  Also reminded to catch coughs and sneezes in tissues Follow Catch it, Bin it, Kill it and to avoid touching face, eyes, nose or mouth with unclean hands. Tissues will be made available throughout the workplace.  Encourage staff to report any problems and carry out skin checks as part of a skin surveillance programme <a href="#">Skin Health Surveillance</a>  To help reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) reminding everyone of the public health advice <a href="#">Public Health Agency Advice - NI</a> <a href="#">HSE Coronavirus - Rol</a>  Posters, leaflets and other materials are available for display. <a href="#">HSE Sign &amp; Poster Resources - Rol</a>			



## Risk Assessment

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed	Controls Required	Additional Controls	Action by who?	Action by when?	Done
		<p><b>Cleaning</b> Frequently cleaning and disinfecting objects and surfaces that are touched regularly particularly in areas of high use such as door handles, light switches, reception area using appropriate cleaning products and methods.</p> <p><b>Social Distancing</b> Social Distancing - Reducing the number of persons in any work area to comply with the 2-metre (6.5 foot) gap recommended by the Public Health Agency</p> <p><a href="#"><u>Social Distancing Guidance - UK Public Health Measures - Rol</u></a></p> <p>Taking steps to review work schedules including start &amp; finish times/shift patterns to reduce number of people in the church or halls at any one time.</p> <p>Redesigning processes to ensure social distancing in place.</p> <p>Conference calls to be used rather than face to face meetings.</p>	<p>For guidance and direction please follow the Government advice via the link below. <a href="#"><u>Cleaning Guidelines for a Non-healthcare Setting</u></a></p> <p>Strictly adhere to COSHH guidelines and manufacturers instructions.</p> <p>Rigorous checks will be carried out by appointed Circuit/Society officials to ensure that the necessary procedures are being followed.</p> <p>Staff/Volunteers/Visitors to be reminded on a daily basis of the importance of social distancing both in the workplace and outside of it.</p> <p>Management checks to ensure this is adhered to.</p>			

## Risk Assessment

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed	Controls Required	Additional Controls	Action by who?	Action by when?	Done
		<p><b>Wearing of Gloves</b> Where Risk Assessment identifies wearing of gloves as a requirement of the job, an adequate supply of these will be provided. Staff/Volunteers will be instructed on how to remove gloves carefully to reduce contamination and how to dispose of them safely.</p> <p><b>Respiratory Protective Equipment</b> <i>Public Health guidance on the use of PPE (personal protective equipment) to protect against COVID-19 relates to health care settings.</i> <i>In all other settings individuals are asked to observe social distancing measures and practice good hand hygiene behaviours</i></p> <p>Wearing a cloth face covering is recommended in situations where it is difficult to practice social distancing. Wearing of cloth face coverings may help prevent people who do not know they have the virus from spreading it to others.</p> <p><a href="#"><u>Guidance on safe use of face coverings</u></a></p>	<p>Staff/Volunteers to be reminded that wearing of gloves is not a substitute for good hand washing.</p> <p>A face covering is not the same as the surgical masks or respirators used as part of personal protective equipment by healthcare and other workers; these supplies should continue to be reserved for those who need them to protect against risks in their workplace, such as health and care workers and those in industrial settings like those exposed to dust hazards.</p> <p>Face coverings should not be used by children under the age of 2 or those who may find it difficult to manage them correctly, for example primary school age children unassisted, or those with respiratory conditions.</p> <p>You can make face coverings at home; the key thing is it should cover your mouth and nose. You can find guidance on how to do this on the link below. <a href="#"><u>How to make and wear a face covering</u></a></p>			

## Risk Assessment

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed	Controls Required	Additional Controls	Action by who?	Action by when?	Done
		<p><b>Symptoms of Covid-19</b></p> <p>If anyone becomes unwell with a new continuous cough or a high temperature trying to get in, or in the Church, they will be sent home and advised to follow the stay at home guidance.</p> <p>Line managers will maintain regular contact with staff members during this time.</p> <p>If advised that a member of staff/ Volunteer or visitor to your Church has developed Covid-19 and were recently on our premises (including where this person has visited other premises such as domestic place premises), the management team of the workplace will contact the Public Health Authority to discuss the case, identify people who have been in contact with them and will take advice on any actions or precautions that should be taken.</p> <p><a href="#">COVID Advice - UK</a>  <a href="#">COVID Advice - Rol</a></p>	<p>Internal communication channels and cascading of messages through line managers will be carried out regularly to reassure and support employees in a fast changing situation.</p> <p>Line managers will offer support to staff who are affected by Coronavirus or has a family member affected.</p> <p>An attendance register should be completed which records everyone who uses our Church and Halls. This should be carried out by 1 person keeping the visitor book/pen etc.. This is to support Contact Tracing should the need arise.</p>			

## Update on Methodist Insurance position during Covid-19 Lockdown.

14<sup>th</sup> May 2020

The following extract and guidance have been received from Methodist Insurance and are for information purposes to help ensure your buildings remain suitably covered during the current period of temporary closure.

*[Methodist Insurance] outlined that as a company they did not intend to apply the usual unoccupied restrictions in cover given the premises is temporarily closed. The position has changed slightly as the standard definition of unoccupied in our Charity Shield Policy would mean that as the premises has been vacant for more than 30 consecutive days, several of the insured events would be excluded. These are riot, malicious persons, storm, escape of water, escape of oil, accidental damage and glass.*

*However, as it has never been our intention to unduly penalise [policy holders] for the temporary closure of the building due to the Covid-19 outbreak, we have agreed a way forward to ensure that the unoccupied premises cover restrictions do not apply. In order to maintain full cover with no restrictions, we simply need to ask that you take the appropriate risk management measures to help protect the building (which I'm sure you are already doing). These are set out in the attached '**Temporary Closed Premises Condition**'.*

*As long as you endeavour to implement the risk management measures **as far as possible**, there will be no reduction in the level of policy cover, no increase in premium and no increase to the policy excess.*

*I would expect that the vast majority of the risk management measures are already being complied with and I don't foresee any particular concerns with these but please do let me know if you wish to discuss these in any further detail.*

*I would just point out that this change affects only those policies insured on our Charity Shield Policy and so it does not in any way impact on the Churches insurance.*

Below is the attachment and guidance they have issued.

## Temporarily Closed Premises Condition

In respect of **Temporarily Closed** premises the following risk management measures should be implemented as far as is possible:

- (1) where there will be no need to re-enter the premises during the period of temporary closure you must turn off electricity gas and water supplies at the mains (and where reasonable to do so drain down water systems) other than those services required to maintain
  - critical business infrastructure required to allow the continuance of the organisations operations and support temporary home working arrangements
  - intruder alarms
  - fire alarms
  - sprinkler installations
  - other fire suppression security or other risk protection systems or devices
- (2) you must maintain in full and efficient working order and keep operational all
  - alarms
  - sprinkler installations
  - fire suppression systems
  - locks and all other protective and security devices including gates and other perimeter security protection at the premises
- (3) where water systems have not been drained down and / or where there is a sprinkler installation you must maintain the central heating system to prevent freezing and
  - i. the sprinkler system should be inspected to ensure it is operating correctly whenever such buildings are inspected
  - ii. the temperature throughout the building must be maintained at not less than 7 degrees Centigrade (45 degrees Fahrenheit)
  - iii. where annual servicing and maintenance is due the sprinkler system must be serviced and maintained as soon as circumstance permit by an appropriately qualified engineer
- (4) you must
  - i. remove all internal waste and
  - ii. position all external bins as at least 5 metres from the buildings (or otherwise as far as possible where this is not possible) and secure the bins in position where this is possible

- (5) Provided any travel required to carry out an inspection is in line with the latest government advice you must undertake an internal and external inspection of such buildings at least every 7 days and
- i. rectify as soon as is reasonably possible any defects in the fabric of the building or any protective or security devices or installations
  - ii. maintain a record of inspections including the remedy of any defects
  - iii. remove accumulations of post from the letterbox during each inspection and take any other action to ensure the premises cannot be easily identified as unused or closed down

Where government travel advice does not allow the necessary travel to complete an inspection the need for an inspection is deferred until travel restrictions are lifted to a level that allows inspections to re-commence

- (6) you must put in place contingency plans in case the primary person(s) carrying out weekly inspections or responding to alarm activations need to self isolate or are ill so that weekly inspections and alarm activation responses can be maintained by another appointed person
- (7) you must tell us as soon as you become aware of any illegal entry to the premises whether or not any damage has occurred
- (8) you must review and update your risk assessment (including the fire risk assessment) of such buildings to reflect the temporary change in risk

Unless otherwise agreed or varied by us in writing.

## Advisory Note on Temporary Vacant Buildings due to COVID-19 Insurance Update & Inspection

### **For the attention of all Societies who have insured their properties with Methodist Insurance (MI).**

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK and Government advice on avoiding social contact to combat the spread of the virus, churches and other church properties are temporarily closed.

Buildings, whether temporarily closed or permanently unoccupied can be at greater risk from the likes of arson, antisocial behaviour such as vandalism or squatters, theft, and escape of water.

Due to the extension of 'Lockdown' in both Ireland and the UK, there has been concern that the 'grace' period whereby the level of insurance has been maintained even though the Church and other buildings insured (with MI) are unoccupied and pose a higher risk, may have expired.

**I can confirm that clarification has been received from Methodist Insurance that the continuing temporary closure of church buildings due to COVID 19 outbreak will not result in applying restrictions to the cover or charging any additional premiums, and that there has been no change to their insurance provision.**

This is welcome and reassuring news for all of us responsible for property.

Methodist Insurance do expect however that we continue to manage the risks associated with a closed building and the following pages below are intended to offer advice and a reminder of what to do.

**The following are helpful links as directed by Methodist Insurance for policy holders;**

<https://www.methodistinsurance.co.uk/church-insurance/methodist-insurance-temporary-policy-changes/>

<https://www.methodistinsurance.co.uk/risk-management/temporarily-closed-unoccupied-covid-19/>

**Please note that if you have not insured with Methodist Insurance, you must check with your current provider to fully determine the current coverage and support arrangements you have in place during this period.**

**Please remember to keep safe and follow Government guidelines during this difficult time.**

**The following is helpful Guidance for managing our temporarily closed churches and other church properties during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK and Government advice on avoiding social contact to combat the spread of the virus, churches and other church properties will be temporarily closing.

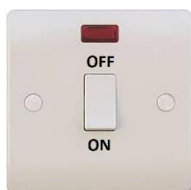
Buildings, whether temporarily closed or permanently unoccupied can be at greater risk from the likes of arson, antisocial behaviour such as vandalism or squatters, theft, and escape of water.

Highlighted below are some tips for the protection of your church and other properties whilst they are temporarily closed as a consequence of the COVID-19 outbreak.

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**Tip 1: Protect against electrical fires - turn off and unplug electrical equipment**

Electrical equipment should be turned off and unplugged, and electrical systems isolated at the main fuse board, with the exception of any:



- intruder alarms
- fire alarms
- security or other risk protection systems or devices.



These should be maintained to ensure they continue to fully and effectively protect the property at all times.



**Double check that there are no unintended consequences that may occur by doing so and that any sensitive equipment is powered off in line with manufacturer's instructions.**

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**Tip 2: Guard against escape of water losses**

Where there will be no need to re-enter church property during the period of temporary closure turn off any water supplies at the mains (and where reasonable to do so drain down water systems).

We recognise it may not always be appropriate to turn off or drain down water systems. Where this is the case a minimum temperature of 7°C (45°F) should be maintained within the property if possible.

If the water is left on make sure there are no taps left running or leaking fittings.

Be aware when it comes time to re-open the church that there could be an issue with water storage tanks or plumbing spurs which could become infected by legionella. It may be prudent to schedule testing and make sure you give time to run fresh water through your system.





### Tip 3: Protect your property

#### Securing the property against unauthorised access.

- Remove all internal waste and position all external bins at least 5 metres from the buildings (or otherwise as far as possible where this is not possible) and secure the bins in position where this is possible. *(this can help against malicious fires set in the bins potentially damaging the building).*
- Ask any willing neighbours in the vicinity of church property to report any suspicious activity.
- Check the oil tank is secure and free from leaks.
- Ensure if there are items of value in the church, these should be put away securely, in a safe if there is one, certainly they should not be left out on display.
- Be sure to check that the entire space is empty of people and animals that could be trapped before you lock up.
- It is probably best to continue restricting access to the entire site at this time, you should ensure all reasonable steps are taken to secure the site, if you have gates then close and lock them.



We do realise however that it is not possible for many to limit access to the churchyard or wider site.

**Any checking of the buildings needs to be done in accordance with the government guidelines on travel.**

### Tip 4: Try to periodically check the property



It may be reasonable for **one designated person** to enter the church to check that it remains safe and secure, provided they follow government guidelines and have access to appropriate materials to sanitise surfaces such as doorknobs.

Could the nominated person taking their permitted daily exercise or shopping for essentials pass by the church whereby avoiding additional travel from home?

This must **NOT** happen on a rota, as numerous people entering the building, would represent a transmission risk, and must be limited to essential maintenance checks only.

It may be necessary to have a contingency plan in place for checking the building should the original designated person take ill or need to isolate for a period of time. It would be prudent to record your visit/inspection and record your findings. *(template guide attached)*

### Tip 5: What about building works or servicing inspections

Essentially the building is closed. Should access be requested for servicing, changing timers, inspections etc. by 3<sup>rd</sup> party agents, negotiations should be had to rearrange same for a later date when restrictions are reduced or removed.

Any access that is required must be in accordance with government guidance for essential travel and social distancing.

- Servicing or surveying of telecoms infrastructure is an essential activity and the equipment provider may still require access to the equipment in particular where it relates to monitoring equipment such as intruder or smoke alarms.
- Correcting the time of the clock does not justify the risk and we do not recommend this happens while the current lockdown restrictions are in place.
- If you have building works on site and they have stopped please make sure that the site is left secure and if possible, alarms are set.
- Anything that could attract thieves and vandals should not be left lying around the site and should be put out of harm's way securely.



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### Tip 6: Review your health and safety arrangements

Review your health and safety arrangements, focusing on any additional precautions that might be necessary to secure the premises and protect people from danger.

**Again - Any checking of the buildings needs to be done in accordance with the government guidelines on travel**

## Vacant Property Inspection Log

### S A M P L E

Date Visited	Time	Inspection Type		Any Aspects of Note/Details	Signature of Inspector
		Interior	External		
16/04/20	13.20	Yes	Yes	No signs of issues, external doors checked. Gas in kitchens has been isolated. Alarm panel showing no faults. All sinks and basins checked for leaks. All windows checked and secured. Heating timer adjusted for short bursts throughout the day in the absence of frost protection. No signs evident of any attempted unauthorised access. No Lights have been left on.	S Kinghan
23/04/20	16.30		Yes	Checked all ground floor external windows. All external doors secure and locked. Carpark gate locked. No alarms could be heard.	S Kinghan

## Vacant Property Inspection Log

Date Visited	Time	Inspection Type		Any Aspects of Note/Details	Signature of Inspector
		Interior	External		