



**MCI Detailed Advice based on Northern Ireland Executive Guidelines<sup>1</sup>**  
**Version 1.0 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020**

These guidelines are to advise us as to when various activities in the life of the Methodist Church in Ireland and our ministry can restart in Northern Ireland. As good citizens we will not seek to recommence anything prior to the appropriate stages and dates, nor will we seek to recommence later than the appropriate stages and dates. In each context there will be factors specific to individual churches and individual ministers. These should all be discussed with the Circuit Superintendent, and the District Superintendent. Any potential deviation from the advice below needs approved by the District Superintendent.

It is expected that this Detailed Advice will change in the weeks ahead as Executive Guidelines develop. Each new version of the Detailed Advice will carry a number and date and it is important that you only refer to the current edition. We expect to issue revised Detailed Advice 24 hours after any official updates to the Executive Guidelines and will draw your attention to specific changes.

In line with *Coronavirus: Executive Approach to Decision Making* published on 12<sup>th</sup> May, this document lays out five steps: **Step 1: Step 2: Step 3: Step 4: and Step 5: No dates are currently given. These dates will be advised as the situation develops. We are not yet in Step 1.** Social distancing of 2m (6ft) is not stated in every case but must be assumed and adhered to.

## **1. PASTORAL VISITS**

All pastoral visits need to be arranged in advance for the duration of the pandemic. As key workers we are able to travel for emergencies, making sure to be dressed as a recognisable minister and carrying our letters of recognition as key workers to assist the PSNI and others to recognise why we are travelling. An emergency visit will include bereavement, serious illness, family crisis or cases where an individual is significantly struggling in our current context.

### **1.1 Emergency visits outdoors**

Pastoral visits can be done in an open-air setting in Step 1 i.e. it is a good day and we meet somebody in their garden with a maximum of 4 people present. In step 2 up to 10 people may be present and in step 3 up to 30 people may be present.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/execoffice/executiveour-approach-to-decision-making.pdf>

## **1.2 Emergency visits indoors**

1.2.1 Up to four people present: This is possible in Step 2 and includes those who are over 70 and who are considered vulnerable. Such visits will require wearing gloves and face coverings. This is not for a routine visit but could be for wider reasons than in 1.1.

1.2.2 Up to 10 people present: This is possible in Step 3.

## **1.3 Hospital/ Care Home visits**

This is currently unclear and will need to be discussed with the relevant institutions prior to any proposed visit and after considering personal protective equipment requirements, availability, and other protections.

## **1.4 Routine visits**

This is currently unclear but may be possible in Step 4 with social distancing involved. These are visits that are part of our ongoing pastoral work and not prompted by any particular need.

## **2. CHURCH FELLOWSHIP AND BUSINESS MEETINGS INDOORS**

2.1 Maximum of 10 people: Possible in Step 3

2.2 Larger than 10 people: Possible in Step 5

## **3. CHURCH SERVICES**

3.1 Churches may open for private prayer in Step 1. This will involve the church being staffed, cleaning of hard surfaces and the limited times being advised to the congregations. Please discuss this with your District Superintendent in advance.

3.2 Churches may have 'drive through' services in Step 1. This will require congregation remaining within their vehicle. A guidance sheet on organising 'drive through' services is attached to this email. Please discuss this with your District Superintendent who will guide you.

3.3 Congregations returning to church buildings for worship may begin in Step 4 with certain restrictions to be advised, including social distancing. It may also be that singing and Holy Communion are not possible on this date. Offerings should be placed in baskets without them being handed to people. No handshakes should happen. MCI guidance on how to ensure social distancing in the church building is being prepared.

3.4 It is currently unclear when we can restart creches during church services and other children's groups.

## **4. FUNERALS**

4.1 Larger numbers than the current restriction to a maximum of 10 at the graveside or funeral home are envisaged in Step 3, including limited to family and close friends with social

distancing and limited time required. We currently do not intend to open our church buildings for funerals before Step 4.

## **5. BAPTISMS**

5.1 Other than for emergency health reasons as requested by parents, baptisms will recommence when our church buildings are reopened in Step 4.

## **6. WEDDINGS**

6.1 Small weddings will recommence in Step 4 but will be under significant restrictions due to social distancing and other factors.

A larger wedding in a church may be possible in Step 5, still with some social distancing involved.

## **7. INVOLVEMENT OF THOSE AGED 70+ AND THOSE WHO ARE CONSIDERED VULNERABLE**

7.1 In the document there is no mention of measures for over 70s and those who are considered vulnerable. There is one reference to those who are 'shielding'. Therefore, we will continue to follow other current advice that advises those over 70 and those with underlying health conditions to shield themselves. There are others who have received an NHS letter advising them to clearly follow this advice due to their high risk of being hospitalised if they were to become infected with covid-19.

7.2 Many of our church officials fall into these categories. We assume that they will not be carrying out roles in the church that traditionally would take them outside of their home e.g. society steward, organist. Through discussion we will develop plans to deal with this, although some aspects of these roles could be carried out from home. However, if colleagues in these categories are clear that they wish to continue to be involved outside of the home, such colleagues are free to make this choice if government guidance permits it.

## **8. CHILDREN'S GROUPS AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS THAT MEET ON CHURCH PREMISES**

8.1 All organisations using MCI premises are required to comply with NI Executive guidelines. Activities must only resume at the appropriate time, follow safe social distancing measures, and adhere to approved cleaning procedures.

All external organisations must complete their own risk assessments in relation to safe practice and ensure that their public liability insurance is valid. Clarity as to when such groups can recommence, and under what circumstances will be given when it is confirmed by the NI Executive.

## **9. REFRESHMENTS AND CHURCH RUN CAFES**

9.1 Tea/coffee should not be served at Church functions or in association with worship services for the foreseeable future, until greater clarity is received from the NI Executive.

9.2 Cafes that operate on church premises and who meet professional standards are likely to be able to recommence in Step 5, in line with other catering establishments.

## **10. BUILDING WORKS IN CHURCH PREMISES**

10.1 This is possible under Step 1 if an appropriate risk assessment is drawn up that includes covid-19 considerations and is approved by the District Superintendent and Secretary of Conference.