

BISHOP AUCKLAND METHODIST CHURCH

'THE WAY FORWARD' – Keeping one another safe - v.2

Amended guidelines for the safe opening of our Church Premises
based on the Evangelical Alliance Ireland Guidelines

but adapted for usage in England using

(1) The Methodist Church Guidelines, (2) Government Guidelines, (3) HSE Guidelines.

Please note : Text in Blue (& italics) indicates changes made to v.2 of this document.

The Methodist Church in the UK's guidelines states : 'To encourage positive discussion, Managing Trustees should consider the following suggestions' :

1. Appoint a dedicated responsible person for Covid-19 related health and safeguarding matters as a single point of contact so that decisions can be made quickly and actions implemented efficiently. This person would be supported by 'a team' – as yet to be nominated who will review 'the action plan' on a regular basis and make changes as necessary.
2. *At the special Church Council Meeting held on Saturday, July 25th 2020 the members of the meeting nominated and agreed that Ralph Ingram should be elected to the post of Convenor for this (The Way Forward) group.*
3. Do not assume you can immediately do things as you used to do, saying 'no' or 'not yet' or 'not like this can be positive decisions.
4. *For the purpose of this report we are taking 'Social Distancing' according to the Government Guidelines and Methodist Church Guidelines and using 2 metres if possible still, otherwise at least 1.5 metre + as the minimum in our context following renewed risk assessment on 8th March 2021.*

	RED : Essential steps that all congregations should take. Failure to take such steps carries many risks. You may encounter legal difficulties, receive unwelcome attention from public authorities, negative publicity, a loss of reputation in your community. You may even be responsible for a new spike of infections.
1.	NUMERICAL LIMITS : 1) At present there is no number set for attendance at a 'worship' service held indoors. The criteria for numbers depends on the social distancing in place (as stated in 4 above), but this should be monitored and changed as required and changed according to the latest Government Guidelines in place. Households can be seated together with regards to social distancing rules. 2) For Weddings, Baptisms and Funerals there are various legal limits set by the government at different steps as we exit lockdown. These will be strictly enforced.

2.	<p>OUTSIDE & INSIDE THE BUILDING :</p> <p>Outside : Physical distancing begins before people enter the premises. Sanitisation procedures mean that the rate of flow as people enter and exit will be slower than normal. We must ensure that the people queuing observe the social distancing rule.</p> <p>Inside : The social distancing rule must be observed. People must keep their belongings (coats, bags, umbrellas etc) with them at all times. The cloakroom will not be in use.</p>
3.	<p>PHYSICAL CONTACT:</p> <p>There must be no physical contact with other people, i.e. hugs and handshakes.</p>
4.	<p>SIGNAGE :</p> <p>Clear signage is essential all around the building, including signage both outside and inside to encourage social distancing.</p>
5.	<p>SANITISATION :</p> <p>We must provide adequate sanitiser stations for both entering and exiting the building. A small number of face masks should be available for members of the congregation if required.</p> <p><i>Worshippers must use face masks (unless medically exempt) at all times within the church premises.</i></p>
6.	<p>REFRESHMENTS :</p> <p>At the end of the service it is advised that those attending leave the building as soon as practical. Formal or informal fellowship, including refreshments after the service is discouraged as this multiplies the risk of transmitting infection.</p>
7.	<p>SINGING, MUSIC & SPEECH :</p> <p>Singing as a congregation or choir is not allowed as it might increase the risk of virus transmission. The use of music (live or recorded) is allowed and all musical instruments except wind instruments can be used.</p> <p>The use of a PA system (if possible) is encouraged but if not available then increased social distancing, screens etc, are recommended. A Perspex screen in front of the lectern should be encouraged and the preacher instructed to speak from there and not wander about.</p>
	<p>AMBER :</p> <p>Precautions which may or may not be legally required but are still strongly recommended. Following these measures will enhance your congregations trust and help maintain a good witness to the wider community.</p>
8.	<p>SAFETY POLICY :</p> <p>It would be advisable to have a simple Safety Policy which is clearly communicated to church members. The more we communicate the more confidence they will have. The Methodist Guidelines do however instruct that over 70's or vulnerable people cannot be responsible for opening up or closing premises. It is recommended that the number of keyholders to the building is limited to ensure controlled access.</p>

9.	<p>LITERATURE :</p> <p>It would be wise to remove all literature and merchandise from the premises. Essential notices could be laminated for easy cleaning. Communal books of any sort should be removed. Notices of any sort should not be handed to the congregation. Any words or text could be displayed using the projector.</p>
10.	<p>TRACK & TRACE :</p> <p>It is highly advised to have a system for recording attendance at services, subject to GDPR compliance. Government Guidelines state that these records should be kept for a minimum of 21 days in order to comply with the NHS Track & Trace service. If anyone who has attended a church service and subsequently tests positive for Covid-19 we may expect the HSE to contact us seeking the names and contacts of everyone else who attended that service.</p> <p>We now have a Methodist Church 'Test & Trace' instructions and record Sheet, updated onto the website on July 14th. <i>Bookings for attending worship are entered onto the 'Eventbrite' system. There is also a government 'Q R code' for people to scan their phones onto using their 'Q R' app.</i></p>
11.	<p>ONE WAY SYSTEM :</p> <p>If our building has more than one entrance / exit we are advised to use a 'one way' system ensuring that if we do move around the building we take all our belongings with us.</p>
12.	<p>CLEANING :</p> <p>Coronavirus can survive for 72 hours on surfaces. If we are only having 1 weekly event in the church deep cleaning is not therefore necessary. However, if we are planning multiple events and mid week services then deep cleaning is advised. Before and after use the worship area should be thoroughly cleaned and if practical doors and windows should be left open to give as much natural ventilation as possible at all times, even during usage of the building,</p> <p>Note 1 : The Methodist Church guidelines indicate that the term 'deep clean' refers only to a more thorough clean than what happens throughout the day.</p> <p>The Health & Safety Executive clarification of 'Deep Cleaning' is : Deep Cleaning is a thorough clean of all frequently touched surfaces at least once a day.</p> <p>Note 2 : After examining all the information we have, nowhere could we find that Deep Cleaning involved specialist contract cleaners being used, such as is carried out in hospitals as and when the need arises.</p> <p><i>UPDATED INFORMATION – Our Cleaner is returning to work on March 25th.</i></p>
13.	<p>CHILDREN'S MINISTRY :</p> <p>The scientific advice is still not clear on children spreading the infection. It is important that young children are supervised by their parents/grandparents or guardian at all times to ensure that social distancing is carried out and to discourage the children from running around. We should ensure that children are following the recommended hygiene guidelines and help them if necessary. The Trustees should also consider using child friendly signage to help them understand what is required.</p> <p>Any children's play equipment, books, toys, soft furnishings etc that are hard to clean should be put into storage.</p> <p>Any objects used in children's talks or similar activity during a service or part of a separate teaching should not be shared or handled by more than the person using them. Similar approach should be adopted for pencils, pens, paper etc.</p>

14.	<p>FINANCIAL OFFERINGS :</p> <p>The passing around of collection plates is not allowed, the offerings should be collected in a single receptacle on exiting the building. Any cash collected should be put into a suitable safe place and left for at least 72 hours before being handled. No individual should be asked to handle money unless they are willing to do so. It is recommended that the offering should be made in a way which avoids the use of handling coins or notes and this could be facilitated by paying through the bank using Standing Orders.</p>
15.	<p>COMMUNION :</p> <p>If we decide to celebrate Communion it must be carried out in a way that is safe. Individual cups must be used and offered to the communicants to take from the tray themselves. The Methodist Church gives us very strict instructions in relation to the preparing of, and the carrying out of the service and this can be discussed in much greater detail between the Minister, the Stewards and the Communion Stewards using wafer only, no wine.</p>
16.	<p>EXITING THE BUILDING :</p> <p>Exiting the building we must adhere to the social distancing rule and be carried out under the guidance of the Stewards who will indicate to the congregation as to the order in which they will leave the building.</p>
	<p>GREEN :</p> <p>These are tips from other churches which could be of assistance with the 'new normal'.</p>
17.	<p><i>VULNERABLE WORSHIPPERS :</i></p> <p><i>The Government Guidelines states that both the clinically vulnerable, e.g. over 70's, and extremely clinically vulnerable is however advisory and they can choose how to manage their own risks. However, because of receiving the Covid 19 vaccine, some of the more vulnerable members of the congregation might feel more secure about returning to .worship.</i></p>
18.	<p>CAPACITY :</p> <p>Because of the need to limit numbers we should devise a way of ensuring that numbers who intend to come to a service do not exceed the total capacity allowed. [see point 10.]</p>
19.	<p>INFORMATION TO THE CONGREGATION :</p> <p>We should consider how to inform members what guidelines have been put in place at church so that they know what to expect upon their return, e.g. written details distributed to all members prior to their return, or even a video walk through to be put online.</p> <p><i>This has now been done.</i></p>