

PREPARING TO RE-OPEN OUR CHURCH BUILDINGS

Information from the four
Archdeacons for Clergy,
Licensed Lay Ministers, Lay
Chairs, Churchwardens and
PCCs issued on 22nd May 2020

Phases of re-opening

Re-opening a church or not?

Practicalities

Occasional offices

DIOCESE
OF EXETER



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
IN DEVON



pray



grow



serve
with joy

THE PHASES OF RE-OPENING

It is likely that permission will be given by the government and the national Church for our church buildings to re-open in a phased way over the next couple of months. We have drawn up this document to help clergy and PCCs think through the decisions and actions they need to take in preparation for this. In a Mission Community with more than one church building, we recommend that decisions about which churches will reopen and for what purposes are taken by the Mission Community as a whole.

This document covers the following:

- The likely phases of re-opening churches
- Whether to re-open a church or not
- The practical things to consider in relation to
 - Pray: reopening our churches for prayer and worship
 - Grow: how to deepen our church life
 - Serve: how best to serve our local community
- Occasional offices
- Bellringing
- Ministers over 70



THANK YOU to all our clergy and laity who are working so hard and so creatively in the current crisis.

The phases of re-opening

We cannot know for certain, but we anticipate the phases will be as follows:

Phase	What is likely to happen	Approx. Date
Phase 1	Clergy allowed back into their local church for private prayer and livestreaming of services, including Communion with one member of their household.	Current (as from 7th May 2020)
Phase 2	As well as the above, permission will be given to re-open churches for private prayer. Each incumbent and PCC will need to decide whether to open their church for private prayer or not. Some churches will open, others will remain closed. Anyone will be able to enter an open church, provided hygiene and social distancing measures are observed. In addition, permission may be given for small funerals and weddings to take place in church. National guidance will be issued about numbers in the congregation, in line with social distancing requirements.	From early to mid June
Phase 3	As well as the above, clergy will be allowed to take small Sunday/ midweek services in church. National guidance will be issued about numbers in the congregation, in line with social distancing requirements.	As yet unknown
Phase 4	Larger services will be allowed again in church.	As yet unknown

To Open or not to re-open?

- Even though permission will be given for all churches to re-open, this may not be possible for every church at the moment. Re-opening a church in Phase 2 and/or Phase 3 will involve cleaning on a regular basis. Given that many in our congregations will continue to self-isolate, you will need to consider whether you have the people to do this.
- No incumbent and PCC should feel they have to re-open their church. We hope though that Mission Communities (or Deaneries) will work together to decide which churches will re-open and which will remain closed with a notice signposting people to open churches.
- The decision about whether to re-open a church or not is a joint one between the incumbent and PCC. If agreement cannot be reached then the church must remain closed. This decision will need to be kept under review as the situation develops. For further legal advice on this please see the Coronavirus FAQs on the Diocesan website or speak to the Registrar.
- It could be possible to open a church for private prayer for limited periods each day or each week, as long as that was well-advertised.
- It could also be possible to decide to keep a church closed for the moment, but open it just for a wedding or funeral when those are permitted again.
- Small steps may be best – there's no rush to open all churches at once. How can you co-ordinate with your neighbouring churches in the Mission Community or Deanery?



Thinking ahead

- The national Church will soon issue guidelines about re-opening churches for private prayer, weddings and funerals. These will contain detailed advice about hygiene and social distancing measures. www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches
- Now is the time for incumbents and PCCs to think ahead and prepare for Phases 2 and 3. In order to help you do that we've set out below the sort of things you should consider as you decide what to do. We've used the three Diocesan priorities as a structure.



PRAY

Phase 2: Things for the incumbent and PCC to consider in deciding whether to re-open their church for private prayer, alongside national advice:

Hygiene and social distancing

- Notices on the door reminding people about hygiene and social distancing measures, including stressing the critical importance of using the sanitiser both going in and going out of church.
- Supplies of hand sanitiser in the porch/inside the main door (or water, soap and paper towels).

Cleaning the church

- The church will need to be cleaned regularly once it is open for private prayer. Each PCC will need to assess the pattern and frequency of regular cleaning, in the light of national guidance and given the likely numbers of people using the church.
- Do you want to rope off parts of the church to limit the area to clean?
- Be alert to advice about cleaning sensitive heritage items (pews etc). This will form part of the guidance which will be issued by the national Church.

Other practicalities

- No-one needs to monitor the church whilst it is open for private prayer. Clergy may want to be available in church at certain times for pastoral conversations.
- Do you want to limit the number of hours the church is open?
- Who will lock and unlock the church?
- Book and leaflet displays will need to be removed or covered over. Children's toys will need to be removed.
- If you decide to keep the church shut for private prayer, you will need a notice on the door pointing people to the nearest open church.

Church bells

- Team bellringing is unlikely to be allowed for some time, but a single bell may be tolled if it is possible to do so from ground level (see below).
- Could you ring a bell for the NHS on Thursday evenings or when Morning or Evening Prayer is said to remind people that the Church is praying for them?



NOTES /
ACTIONS



O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are
with me,
help me to believe that nothing
can separate me from your love
revealed in Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen

PRAY (CONT.)

Phase 3: Things for the incumbent and PCC to consider in deciding whether to re-open their church for small Sunday/midweek services:

- Most of the above for Phase 2 plus...

Services

- Do you need to re-introduce Sunday services at this point or could you continue with offering online worship?
- Will there need to be a series of small services on a Sunday so everyone who wishes can attend? How might you monitor numbers attending?
- How will you ensure social distancing in services?
- At what point will you re-introduce Communion services? The final decision on when to do this rests with the incumbent (see the FAQs on Diocesan website)
- Communion will need to be in one kind. There will be national advice on how to do this safely.
- There can't be any sharing of books or leaflets. Any service sheets would need to be taken home and disposed of.
- It is not yet clear whether congregations will be allowed to sing hymns because of the danger of spreading infection. Please wait for the national advice regarding organists, cantors and small choirs or worship groups.
- There can't be any sharing of the Peace for the moment, nor shaking hands at the door.
- Serving of refreshments will not be possible yet.

Cleaning the church

- The church will need to be cleaned after each service. Have you got the volunteers to do that? If so, who will arrange a rota?
- What equipment will the cleaners need? See the forthcoming advice from the national Church.
- How will you manage the use of toilets? Who will clean the toilets? Is it safer to keep toilets locked except for emergencies?

Other practicalities

- Who will want to access the church in advance of services? Organist, flower arrangers, servers? How will you ensure that they limit the things they touch and remain socially distanced? How will you remind them about sanitising hands? Who will clean access doors afterwards?
- If they are allowed, would small open air services with social distancing be a possible alternative over the summer?

Church halls

- We don't know when it will be possible to fully re-open church halls again either for church use or hire by community groups. Will you open the whole of your hall or only part of it? How will you keep the hall clean? Special arrangements are likely to be possible for nurseries and other essential services, please check with your Archdeacon for more information.



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GROW

As we journey together, how do we encourage those who have connected with us during the lockdown and help them to grow as new disciples; at the same time as re-engaging those who have lost connection with their local church through isolations (physical, or technological)? How can we find new ways of sharing the Gospel and continue to celebrate those traditions that have enriched the life of our communities in the past?



Growing through worship

- Do we continue with the new ways of worship we have discovered during the lockdown (for example telephone services, live-streaming, recorded services, or individually printed services sheets)?
- Do we move our online services into the Church? What are the technological barriers to streaming from the church? How do we ensure that we don't lose the creativity and innovation that we have discovered? If we do move our online services into Church, how do we make sure that a variety of people are involved?
- If we stop our telephone services, live-streaming, recorded services, or individually printed services sheets, who will not be able to access worship; who will we exclude?
- If we have engaged new people through our new ways of worshipping, what kind of experience of 'church' will they have if they come to our building during the early phases of re-opening? How will we ensure a welcome, bearing in mind the restrictions?
- If we can't have after service coffee, what effect will that have on the 'social' side of Sunday worship and what can we do as an alternative?
- How can we use music creatively in worship, if we are unable to sing? Can we use recorded music, soloists or musicians to create a worshipping atmosphere?
- How do we have conversations with families about how we welcome everyone back into church, especially around social distancing? Do we need to make any special provisions for family groups?
- How can we encourage on-line and digital giving, especially if we can no longer pass the collection plate around?



“British public turn to prayer as one in four tune in to religious services”

The Observer 3rd May 2020

GROW (CONT.)



Growing through creativity

- How do we encourage people to engage with prayer, if our churches are able to open for Private Prayer?
- Are we able to set up a Prayer Trail around the Church, pausing at key points such as the font or altar to pray? This 'Journeying' may also assist with ensuring social distancing and one-way systems around the church.
- Can we explore outdoor worship, Forest Church, or using our Churchyards as tools for mission?
- Are there symbols that have played a key role during the lockdown that could be used to help people connect with the Church? Is there a symbol that could mark the return to worship, when restrictions allow? Perhaps inviting the community to come and plant a sunflower, spring bulb, or tree as part of a re-opening ceremony? There will also be national resources exploring themes such as lament and thanksgiving.
- If we have introduced online Bible Study Groups or social meet ups, can these continue virtually after restrictions have been lifted? How do we encourage new people to join?

Growing through Communications

- How do we ensure that we are reaching people through our different communication channels (noticeboards, social media, parish magazines, flyers, personal contact); what message do we want to share with them? Is there a 'mantra', for example 'Church Open Every Day' or 'We're Open Online'?
- Is our website up to date with key contacts, information and service details?
- How do we communicate with our wider community about if, and when, we open?
- Could we carry out a simple audit about online worship asking the following kind of questions?
 - *Have you watched any of our online services?*
 - *What have you missed during the time church buildings have been closed?*
 - *Should we continue to offer online services?*
- If you need help or advice with communications or organising an audit / survey then our Comms Team will be happy to help.

NOTES / ACTIONS

SERVE

We want to make a difference in the world and witness to God's love and justice, especially in the communities and schools where we live.



Serving now

- How do we continue with the new relationships we have built in our community or with our neighbours? Are there new partnerships that can be forged when restrictions are lifted? How can the church play a role in bringing different groups together?
- How do we continue to provide the services, such as Foodbanks or food deliveries into the future?
- How do we continue to support schools that are currently open for children of keyworkers, and as they begin to welcome more children back? How do we ensure that food distribution continues for the most vulnerable pupils?
- How do we ensure those in nursing homes or residential care are visited, and previous pastoral care is re-established bearing in mind social distancing?
- Could we introduce a mini foodbank or community fridge?
- How can the Church be a visible presence in the community?
- How do we continue to support those who are self-isolating? How do we avoid a division between those coming back to services in church and those still self-isolating?
- How has the community engaged online? Are Church members promoting church services, events etc on social media or does the church need a virtual presence as well as a visual one?
- Could you produce 'We're here for you' or 'Can we pray for you' posters so people can email, text or telephone their prayer requests?

Serving in the future

- How do we mark the Pandemic as a community?
- How can we help support local business; farm shops, pubs, cafes or tourist venues? For example could we introduce a community gift voucher scheme or 'pay-it-forward'?
- How do we celebrate local heroes?



"Do your little bit of good where you are, it's those bits of good put together that overwhelm the world"

ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU

SERVE (CONT.)



- How do we 'promote' the fact the church is here for everyone at all times, but especially at times of joy and sadness? Could we promote the occasional offices such as baptisms, funerals and weddings, or memorial services or wedding blessings?
- How can we use the Church's festivals, to reach out to people?
- Could the church produce packs for children or families to keep them occupied during the summer; or is there an opportunity for some kind of community trail starting or finishing at the church?
- Are there local charitable trusts that the church can access to support the community or grants for special projects?
- How can we use our church building for the wider community? Do we have halls that need to be re-opened?
- How can we make technology more easily accessible to people in our community? Could we hold Tech Café or offer support to help people get online?

NOTES / ACTIONS



"As a civilised society, we have a duty to support those among us who are vulnerable and in need. When times are hard, that duty should be felt more than ever, not disappear or diminish."

ARCHBISHOP JUSTIN WELBY

OCCASIONAL OFFICES

In these constantly changing times please check the Church of England website for the most current information. We suggest that you don't make any firm commitments about dates for occasional offices and the number of people able to attend, until clear national guidance has been issued.

Baptisms

- We don't yet know when Baptisms will be allowed in churches once again, but it is likely to be after weddings and funerals.

Weddings

- We need to wait for the government to allow weddings in churches once again.
- To begin with it will not be possible to call banns. Couples will need to apply for a Common Licence, including swearing an affidavit in front of the Registrar or a Surrogate. The Registrar will issue advice about this shortly on the Diocesan website.
- We await advice on when it will be possible to start calling banns again.

Funerals

- We need to wait for the national Church to allow funerals in churches once again.
- The national Church will follow government advice on the number of mourners allowed.

Both weddings and funerals

- The national Church will shortly issue guidance about weddings and funerals in churches. There will also be liturgical resources for memorial services, which could be held later this year.
- It is not yet clear whether congregations will be allowed to sing hymns because of the danger of spreading infection. Please wait for the national advice regarding organists, cantors and small choirs or worship groups..
- Cleaning of churches and social distancing measures will be critical. If cleaning cannot be carried out by volunteers after a wedding, it may be possible to employ a professional cleaner.



www.churchofenglandchristenings.org



www.yourchurchwedding.org



www.churchofengland.org/life-events/funerals



www.churchsupporthub.org



"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

1 CORINTHIANS 13:13

OTHER ISSUES



Bells

- Team bellringing is not yet possible. See the advice on the Central Council of Church Bellringers website (updated on 11th May) www.cccbr.org.uk/coronavirus. This includes a useful document under Additional Information by Dr Philip Barnes and Dr Andrew Kelso helping bellringers think ahead about what may or may not be possible in the coming months.
- Tolling a single bell by those permitted to enter the church is now allowed, provided that can be done from ground level. You may want to consider tolling the bell if prayers are being said in the church to let the wider community know or at 8pm on Thursday evenings to thank workers in the NHS and care sector.

Clergy and Readers over 70

- Until now, the advice on our Diocesan website has been that clergy and Readers over 70 should not officiate at any services including funerals. We are changing that to remove the age limit. Now the advice says that clergy and Readers of any age with underlying health conditions should not officiate at any services including funerals. We still strongly urge those over 70 to take extra care, but it is now up to each individual to decide whether to take services or not, always at the invitation of the incumbent.

Vulnerable People

- Our prime concern at this time is to keep everyone safe and well. Clearly many congregations will have people who are continuing to self-isolate because they have an underlying health condition or because they remain anxious at the prospect of mixing socially as the lockdown is eased. Thank you for all you have done and will continue to do to support them during this national crisis.

NOTES / ACTIONS

HELPFUL INFORMATION & LINKS

Diocese of Exeter - Coronavirus Resources

www.exeter.anglican.org/resources/coronavirus-guidance

Church of England - Coronavirus Resources

www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches

Ecclesiastical Insurance - Advice for Churches

www.ecclesiastical.com/church/coronavirus

Parish Resources (including information on digital giving)

www.parishresources.org.uk/encouraging-giving-online

Church of England - Coronavirus Prayers

www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-parishes/coronavirus-covid-19-liturgy-and-prayer

Churches Covid Handbook - amazing resource with loads of helpful information for churches

www.covid.churcheshandbook.co.uk

Church of England's Faith at Home pages supporting children & families exploring faith

www.churchofengland.org/faith-action/faith-home

Archdeacon Contact Details

Mark Butchers: The Archdeacon of Barnstaple

01271 375475 archdeacon.of.barnstaple@exeter.anglican.org

Andrew Beane: The Archdeacon of Exeter

01392 425577 archdeacon.of.exeter@exeter.anglican.org

Douglas Dettmer: The Archdeacon of Totnes

01626 832064 archdeacon.of.totnes@exeter.anglican.org

Nick Shutt: The Archdeacon of Plymouth

01752 858382 archdeacon.of.plymouth@exeter.anglican.org



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