

Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals in Methodist Churches during the coronavirus pandemic

Baptisms

Baptisms can continue in the Methodist Church but inevitably there will be some major adaptations to protect everyone.

The Government's guidance on social distancing and self-isolation will have a major impact on all aspects of everyday life, including the way baptisms can be conducted for the immediate future.

It is advised that meetings between candidates or parents/guardians/carers and ministers are held by telephone, Skype etc. rather than face-to-face. If meetings can only be held in person, social distancing guidance will be followed.

Numbers of those attending the baptism should be kept to a minimum – the candidate, their parents/guardians/carers, godparents and the minister and no others. This should also be communicated to anyone in the wider circle of friends, family or colleagues in advance who may wish to attend. Sadly, those over the age of 70 and those with an underlying health condition are strongly discouraged from attending in the present circumstances.

For "pre-booked" baptisms: If candidates or parents/guardians/carers wish to postpone the baptism in light of the restrictions this is something that we should enable. Ministers are encouraged to offer a potential future date.

As public acts of worship are suspended all baptisms will be "stand-alone" events. No additional church personnel should attend the service, for example, no organists, stewards or sound system operator etc.

Where family relatives or friends are unable to attend given the restrictions on numbering, churches will be happy to explore ways to allow others to join the service, either through platforms such as Facebook live, Skype, etc or recording the service to send at a later date to anyone unable to attend.

Everyone attending the service must adhere to Government guidance on social distancing.

Where infants are being baptised, a parent/guardian/carer will be asked to hold the infant for the duration of the service, including for the baptism.

Service books, communal bibles and other items should not be used to minimise transmission risk. If a baptismal candle is used it should be handled by one person only. A parent or Godparent will be asked to light and hold the candle on behalf of the candidate and to remove it safely immediately after the service.

While a parent/guardian/carer holds the infant, the minister will use an implement (such as a shell) to pour the water. A parent/guardian/carer will be asked to wipe the forehead of the baptised person with paper towels which can then be thrown away.

The application of oil and signing of the cross will be done using an implement (such as a spoon) which avoids the need for direct physical contact.

Unfortunately, baptism by immersion is not possible during the current restrictions.

In keeping with the recommendations to limit social gatherings, there should not be a gathering after the baptism, and this should be arranged at a future date once Government advice permits.

Weddings

If you are due to get married in the coming months, we recognise that this may be a time of great concern. It may be possible for your wedding to go ahead with minimal numbers in attendance, or if you wish to rearrange the wedding day, your local Methodist Minister will do everything they can to help you do so.

It is advised that meetings between the couple and the minister are held by telephone, skype etc rather than face-to-face. If meetings can only be held in person, social distancing guidance should be followed.

The wedding should only be a small gathering – you only need minister, bride, groom and two witnesses. This should be communicated to anyone in the wider circle of friends, family or colleagues. Sadly, those over the age of 70 and those with an underlying health condition are strongly discouraged from attending in the present circumstances.

Where family relatives or friends are unable to attend given the restrictions on numbering, you can explore ways to allow others to join the service with the minister, either through platforms such as Skype, or recording the service to send at a later date to anyone unable to attend.

Apart from the bride and groom, government guideline on social distancing should be observed. Prayers should be said during the service for any who are unable to attend.

The Minister should not touch the rings to bless them, nor should he or she touch the couple's hands as part of a prayer or blessing.

No additional church personnel, (organists, Church Stewards, sound system operator etc.) need to attend the service.

For those going ahead with a small wedding it will be possible to have a blessing at a future date when you can gather with more friends and family in attendance.

If a couple wishes to cancel their wedding, then any fees or deposit paid to the church should be refunded in full, and if the couple wishes to postpone, the Minister will work with them to find a suitable future date wherever possible.

People should refrain from shaking hands or hugging, all present should refrain from doing so in light of guidance on physical distancing.

In keeping with the recommendations to limit social gatherings, there should not be a reception or other gathering after the marriage; this should be arranged at a future date once Government advice permits.

We will do our best to explain any changes or delays which may be an inevitable consequence of the current restrictions, but we are here to support you and to ensure your wedding can go ahead or be rearranged to a suitable date in the future.

Funerals

- Funerals can, and should continue in Methodist Churches as part of our pastoral response to the coronavirus crisis.
- The minister or trained local person under the direction of the Superintendent should make the arrangements by remote media (telephone, skype etc)
- The number of people attending a funeral should be kept to a minimum - with those in attendance observing suitable social distancing as per the government's advice.
- Those over the age of 70 and those with an underlying health condition are strongly discouraged from attending in the present circumstances.
- The service may be broadcast via social media or recorded to be shared later. The minister should explain to people what is happening (especially those not physically present)
- The service should include prayers and a message of Christian hope
- There is no requirement for a musician to be present
- Do not use communal hymn books or service books
- Church stewards who are classed as vulnerable should not be present
- People should avoid social contact, such as hugging
- There should be no social gathering such as a wake
- Consider offering a memorial service when the emergency is over
- Local councils will have guidance around what is possible or permissible in crematoria and cemeteries.