

GUIDE TO REOPENING & MANAGING YOUR CHURCH BUILDING

Version 1	10/07/2020	Simplification of previous guidance; update on building changes; update on car parks
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1. **Introduction**

The Government has outlined in its roadmap to lift lockdown restrictions, that certain measures will be relaxed in Steps. The reopening of church buildings for group prayer and worship was allowed from 4th July 2020, with other user groups associated with church buildings allowed to return over various timescale periods. It is important to note that the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales are reducing restrictions at different times to England. Please refer to the Connexional Property website for lifting restrictions in devolved administrations and relevant regional guidance.

The Government continues to update its COVID-19: Guidance for the safe use of places of worship – <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july>

Managing Trustees will be aware that Government policy decisions affect parts of Methodist Church property in different ways and at different times. We have therefore adapted this guidance from the original Connexional Guidance for the Reopening of Churches for Worship and Prayer to give an overarching **Guide to Reopening and Managing your Church Building**.

This is an overarching guide which introduces Managing Trustees to the practical steps they need to consider as they reopen their church building for various activities. This is then supported by individual ‘themed guidance’ for different user groups or activities, including worship and church services – published separately.

We hope that as Government policies continue to change, this will give a clearer picture of what Managing Trustees should be considering as they plan for different church activities, events and user groups.

2. **Reflection**

Before we consider the practical aspects of reopening our church buildings, it is very important that we take time to reflect:

“Church” can be wherever we gather or scatter, conscious of our calling as disciples of Jesus. We already knew this, but the lockdown has brought it into sharp focus. We are now permitted to open our buildings once more. A desire to “return to normal” is natural, but may not be practically possible or missionally necessary at this time. Our task in this moment is to consider what use of our buildings and what pattern of worship will best serve the discipleship of our people and the needs of our local community.

3. **Mission, Planning & Monitoring**

As we emerge from lockdown, these questions can help us discern what God has been doing in us and in our communities. In this context, we can consider what God would have us do with our buildings and how God would have us worship:

- What have you learned during lockdown as a church that excites you about worship? What have you learned about evangelism and building relationships with new people?

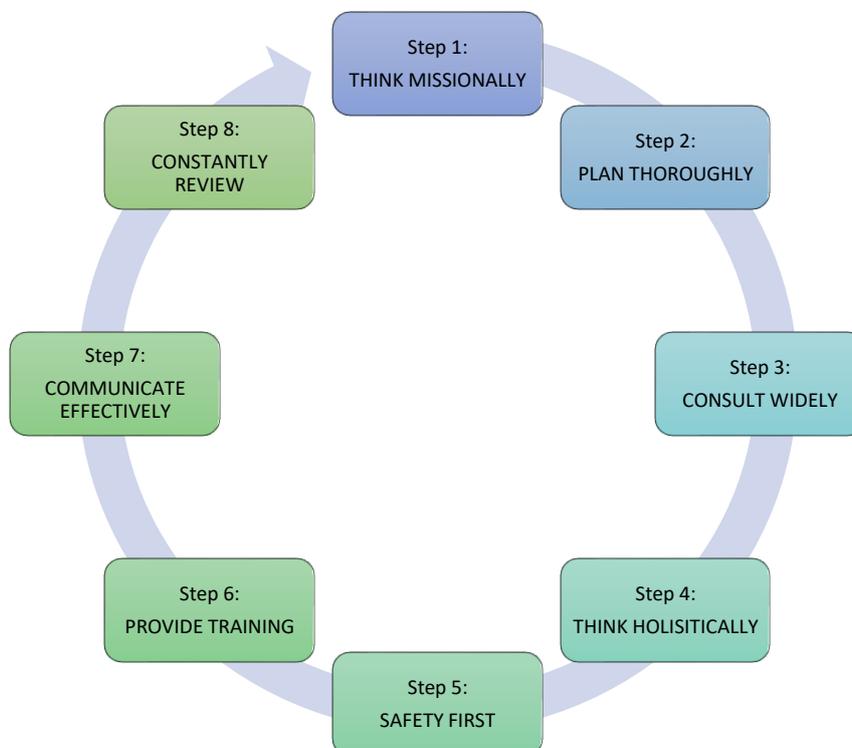
- What have you not grieved for or missed as a church during lockdown? What might you decide not to pick up again?
- How have you perceived God’s presence and hiddenness?
- What has lockdown taught you about the foundations of your mission as a local church?

Use these questions alongside your mission plan to work out God’s way forward for you. For help with writing or reviewing your mission plan, download the new ‘Mission Planning Workbook’, available from 1st August on www.methodist.org.uk.

Reopening our church buildings is a significant decision by Managing Trustees, and should not be taken lightly. It needs to be well planned – both before opening and then kept under review once the building is in use – and should be undertaken in the light of the church mission plan. To encourage positive discussion, Managing Trustees could consider the following suggestions:

- Allow time to fully consider matters, risks, approaches and options.
- Do not assume you can immediately do things ‘as you used to do’.
- Be creative, and remain open-minded to new ideas and approaches.
- Manage expectations, listen and learn from mistakes.
- Accept that saying ‘no’, ‘not yet’ or ‘not like this’ can be positive decisions.
- Work together and share ideas, within your Circuit or District or with other denominations.

This planning process is essential, as it checks and ensures that the church building accommodates the requirements for opening; or alternatively highlights what other considerations need to be discussed and agreed to make the building safe to open. This is a shared responsibility that should be ‘circular’ in process, not linear, i.e., each risk and action needs to be reviewed over time, so that processes can be monitored and changes made, if needed. This is summarised in the diagram below, with each heading forming an important step towards reopening your church building and using it safely:



4. STEP 1: Think Missionally

A decision to reopen should be taken in the context of the church's mission plan, which will need to be reviewed following the upheaval of lockdown. If you do not have a mission plan in place yet, you are strongly advised to take some time to write one, in consultation with church members, before making a decision to reopen for worship. Download the Mission Planning Workbook and contact your District Mission Enabler and/or Regional Learning Network Co-ordinator for help and advice.

The following review questions are suggested:

- i. What changes in your community have you noticed during lockdown? What new strengths have you observed? What new needs have arisen?
- ii. What has been the impact of lockdown on your church? What strengths have emerged? In what ways have you been weakened – e.g. members who have died, members shielding at home, furloughed staff, lost income?
- iii. Have any new dreams or visions come to light?
- iv. What priorities did you discern when writing your mission plan? Are these still the things on which you believe God would have you focus?
- v. What actions had you planned? Can they still take place - perhaps in a different way – or must they be set aside for now? What new actions might be possible?
- vi. What fruit do you long to see in your community as a result of your actions?

5. STEP 2: Plan Thoroughly

It should be borne in mind that reopening our churches is not mandatory, but remains the responsibility of Managing Trustees to decide; working with their circuits or districts to develop phased approaches if necessary, to suit their local situations and priorities. Any decision to reopen a church building should be based upon assessing the risks and putting plans in place to ensure that it is safe to do so, to fully meet the relevant COVID-19 UK Government guidance. It is acceptable to decide that it is not safe to reopen at this particular time, or that reopening should be carried out in a phased way.

The initial planning phase considers all areas of risk associated with opening and using the property, and should be undertaken before the building is reopened. The following actions are suggested:

- i. It will help to appoint a dedicated **responsible person** for COVID-19 related health, safety and safeguarding matters. This gives a single point of contact for everyone, so that decisions can be made quickly and actions implemented efficiently in response to issues going forward.
- ii. This does not have to be seen as a new role, as it might be undertaken by an existing office holder as a set of additional, temporary responsibilities. Alternatively, Managing Trustees working together within circuits could consider this as a shared role covering a number of chapels. If practical, this is encouraged, as it will be a good way of sharing resources, information, knowledge and ideas. This may help those areas who have smaller chapels or limited experience in this particular responsibility.
- iii. It is practical to have a delegated Committee to support this individual in decision making. This can be convened 'virtually', and will help with consistency of approach. Again, it may be appropriate, to help support individual churches if this were considered at a circuit level. It will help make better use of resources and ensure consistency of approach across an area.

- iv. It is **essential** that you undertake a [Risk Assessment](#) for the whole building. This is a legal direction within the Government's guidance, and more details can be found under existing Health and Safety legislation.¹
- v. Follow the outcomes of the Risk Assessment to produce a live² [Action Plan](#). This will outline what physical changes or provisions Managing Trustees need to instigate to manage risks throughout the property. This should be a practical document with achievable actions.
- vi. It is advisable to review the Action Plan weekly, or perhaps daily in the first few weeks, depending upon how the property is used and occupied, and make changes where needed.
- vii. It may be necessary for the **responsible person** to respond on an *ad hoc* basis if a particular issue arises during the course of a day; this is why the Risk Assessment and Action Plan should be seen as 'live' documents which evolve, to help improve processes by learning through implementation.
- viii. Meetings and discussions are important to ensure planning and ongoing monitoring processes are completed successfully. This communication should be easy and practical and take into consideration the need for social distancing. The medium used should therefore be proportionate to the discussion and actions required:
 - Use telephone, email or online meeting platform communications wherever possible;
 - Use digital images or recordings of an issue with emailed communication if needed;
 - If a property visit is required, then operate a timed system, so that only essential people are in the building and social distancing rules can be accommodated safely;
 - If attending in person and social distancing is not achievable, ensure suitable PPE is worn to avoid potential transfer of infection, e.g., masks and gloves.
- ix. Once a decision has been reached to reopen the property for the first time please refer to the Connexional Property Team's [Re-opening a Building Checklist](#), which covers the following:
 - Airing the Building
 - Outside the Building Checks
 - Checking Cleanliness of the Building
 - Electrics
 - Heating
 - Water Systems and Legionella
 - Organ Maintenance
 - Cleaning
 - COVID-19 Risk Assessment

6. **STEP 3: Consult Widely**

i. Generally

It is essential that Managing Trustees consult and engage with all those who use or access the building. This will ensure that every stakeholder's requirements are considered in the [Risk Assessment](#) and [Action Plans](#). These may include the following (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Church membership;
- Ministers;

¹ *Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974:* <https://www.hse.gov.uk/legislation/hswa.htm>

² *Where mentioned in this guidance, 'live' means a document which is reviewed and updated as part of a continuous process of reflection by those who have responsibility for it, on how well it is working in reality, and making changes to it if needed; it is not intended to be a one solution, static document. It forms part of Step 7 in this process.*

- Property Secretary or Property Stewards;
- Church group leaders such as youth workers or mission enablers;
- Those who care for the building, particularly those who clean it;
- The local community and groups who use the building and its facilities.

It is at this point that Managing Trustees should consult other specific Connexional Property guidance to suit the activities which are considering returning. This may be for worship or prayer, but equally be pre-schools, charity shops, some work activities and essential community activities. There are also considerations if you are undertaking repairs or construction work, which is also covered by separate Connexional Property guidance. All can be found under –

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/coronavirus-guidance-for-property/>

ii. Lease and Other Legal Obligations to Consider

It is essential that TMCP are consulted in relation to any impact on leases or legal obligations. Please contact TMCP if you have any queries relating to the lease or licence under which a Third Party uses the church premises. Specific information relating to COVID-19 and its impact on leases and licences can be found on the TMCP website in their [Lease COVID-19 FAQs](#) (FAQ 4 to FAQ 8 inclusive) and their [Licence COVID-19 FAQs](#) (FAQ 1 to FAQ 3 inclusive).

Please note:

- If Managing Trustees want to allow a Third Party to use more of the church building than is under the current lease or licence (to allow for social distancing), then this would need to be documented very carefully. Please contact TMCP so that full guidance can be provided depending on the circumstances.
- Any requests from tenants for rent concessions in view of COVID-19 must be considered and documented very carefully. Please refer to the guidance in the [Non Residential Leases – requests from Tenants to a Rent Concession](#) article on the TMCP website.
- Please bear in mind that the ability to limit rights that a Third Party exercises over communal areas will depend upon whether they are using Methodist premises under a lease or a licence. In relation to leases, please refer to [TMCP's Lease COVID-19 FAQs](#) (FAQ 7.1). Managing Trustees have more flexibility with licences but will need to consider whether the terms of the licence require formal change. Please contact TMCP for guidance.
- Please consider any services provided to a Third Party under a lease, e.g., cleaning, very carefully, bearing in mind not only the Government's guidance and guidance issued by the Methodist Church relating to COVID-19, but also their legal rights under the lease. Please refer to [TMCP's Lease COVID-19 FAQs](#) (FAQ 7.1).

iii. Insurance Matters

Please consult your insurer on any matters relating to property insurance. Methodist Insurance has provided a comprehensive set of COVID-19 guidance on their [website](#).

iv. Physical Building Alterations

In this guidance, it is not intended to suggest that physical changes to a property, either temporary or permanent are required or indeed encouraged. Managing Trustees might consider this though as a means of achieving a temporary, safe environment for building users

which will enable activities to resume in their church buildings. It could also be considered as part of a wider project or expansion of the church building for mission purposes in this regard.

Note: When a building or space is being repurposed as a place of worship i.e. you are using a building or space which you have not used previously for this purpose, a new fire risk assessment must take place.

If such considerations are undertaken, then it is important that Managing Trustees follow the correct process for obtaining advice and consent. This should include their District Property Secretary, the Connexional Property Team and Conservation Officer (if the building is listed or in a Conservation Area) for specific property advice and TMCP in the case of more major property changes and matters which will have an impact on lease or licence arrangements (see note 5ii above) .

7. STEP 4: Think Holistically

This guidance is intended to provide an overview of all general matters which Managing Trustees should consider in reopening their church building. It is essential that Managing Trustees consider the building as a whole, particularly where church buildings provide a mixture of spaces for other church or non-church activities. This should consider how different activities or users interact, rather than looking at each situation or user group in isolation. This will ensure that a ‘joined up’ plan is developed, and that risks and plans associated with all users of the building are considered and action plans are effective.

i. Numbers of Building Users

As part of initial planning and consultation, it is essential that Managing Trustees and other building users collectively assess how many people may be using the building at any one time during a typical week. This information forms an important basis of the Risk Assessment and may lead Managing Trustees to make changes to rotas and how the building is used by worshippers and other users. This will allow clear forward planning and ensure that all users are safe, whilst managing expectations for everyone and making changes where necessary.

ii. External Spaces and Car Parks

Managing Trustees should be aware that in assessing social distance measures this will also apply when travelling to and from a place of worship. Decisions to reopen car parks are to be made locally and practical measures such as changing the car park layout to help people socially distance should be considered. Government guidance covering this aspect of consideration can be found at -

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers>

iii. Common Areas between Different Building User Groups

Managing Trustees should be aware that controls within other users’ ‘separate environments’ will be developed by those users, but it is important for Managing Trustees to share their overall guidelines and controls to ensure that there is compatibility and co-operation in approach between everybody. This is important, as consideration should be given to the **points of contact or interaction** between different occupiers, rooms or properties, such as within communal or shared areas, for example. It is essential that these potentially high-risk areas of contact between building user-groups are risk assessed, Action Plans are clear and practical, and processes are managed and controlled very carefully. It is particularly important that there are clear agreements between users as to the allocation of specific areas of

responsibility; be it a particular room, a cleaning rota, or a cleaning standard. As a guide, such areas might include:

- Entrance doorways
- Corridors
- Washroom and WC facilities
- Kitchens
- Halls/Larger Rooms
- Outside spaces

This agreement is especially relevant if temporary accommodation changes are being made, beyond the arrangements set out under an existing lease or licence agreement, for example. It is important that if any changes are made, even temporary, to existing agreements then this is checked with TMCP – refer to their guidance set out in **Step 3** above.

iv. Property Access, Limitations, Means of Escape & Security Matters

Safe means of access and egress for every building user is essential, and is considered in the Risk Assessments and Action Plans, including the following general points:

- Limit the number of key holders to the building to ensure controlled access.
- Ensure that any church member unlocking does not fall into an ‘at risk’ category.
- Limit access to other parts of the building not in use at the time; this will help limit potential virus transfer and help manage the responsibilities on cleaning regimes.
- The Government has requested that churches in England assist the NHS Test and Trace service by keeping an accurate temporary record of visitors to church premises for 21 days. Please refer to [TMCP’s Guidance on Test and Trace](#) for further information and templates.
- Ensure that any access or areas in use do not have compromised fire-escape routes or means of escape to external areas.
- Ensure that any access or building limitations do not compromise security for the open parts of the buildings or other parts of the building.
- Ensure that if alternative access and egress points are used that they still allow fair and equal access to everybody in accordance with the requirements under the Equality Act 2010.

v. Moving around the Building

- Limit movement between different user group areas within the building(s) to maintain social distancing as much as possible and reduce potential virus transfer.
- Limit the number of people who use lifts or stairs if possible and relevant.
- Try to reduce the number of people in high traffic areas, particularly if these are used more regularly as part of a temporary circulation regime. This might be achieved through using different entrances and exits, or changing the timings of use by different groups.
- Mark areas using tape to help people keep to the advised social distance limits.
- Consider introducing temporary pedestrian walkways to allow people to maintain social distancing when moving around – this will also be relevant in external areas.

vi. Common Areas

Agree between all users how communal or common areas are used, such as kitchens or toilets. The following could be considered:

- Physically moving tables/chairs so they are at the advised social distance limits.

- Staggering use times, or introducing a rota so that people are not using spaces at the same time – this should be carefully considered in context, depending upon the specific situation relevant to the church building and how it is used.
- Where the above is not possible, create additional separate space for different users.
- Marking areas using tape to help people keep to the advised social distances limits.
- Considering the use of outside areas for activities if the location is suitable and safe.

Where you cannot keep to the advised social distances limits, you need to think about how to keep common areas clean and prevent transmission by touching contaminated surfaces, including:

- How frequently you need to clean common areas.
- Identifying objects and surfaces that are touched regularly and decide how frequently to clean them.
- Setting clear guidance and lines of responsibility for the use of kitchen and toilet facilities to make sure they are kept clean.

8. **STEP 5: Safety First**

Once the risks and planning arrangements have been implemented for re-opening the building, there are the considerations for how the building will be used in practice. This has to be undertaken with the primary consideration being, first and foremost, each person's safety.

i. These are addressed under **separate guidance sections in the Connexional Property Guidance** so Managing Trustees can address specific issues. Currently the specific guidance covers the following areas:

- Guide for using your Worship Space -
 - Guide for act of Holy Communion
 - Guide for Baptism
 - Guide for Weddings
 - Guide for Funerals
 - Guide for Children's Worship
 - Guide for House Groups
 - Guide for taking Offerings
 - Guide for Live-Streaming
 - Guide for Pastoral Visits
- Guide for Other Building Users –
 - Early Years Settings
 - Charity Shops or Outdoor Markets
 - Work Settings
 - Other Educational Settings
 - Cafés
 - Other Community Users
- Guide to Property Project, Repairs and Property Inspections

ii. Cleaning and Hygiene

Refer to the separate guidance produced on [Cleaning Churches during Covid-19](#).

iii. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Ensure that PPE is available to church members if Risk Assessments suggest this is necessary when using the building; please refer to the following link for more details.

9. STEP 6: Provide Training

Managing Trustees should consider ways in which all measures are implemented and managed that are **proportionate to their specific situation and building**. In most cases, this could be facilitated through agreeing with members who can undertake specific responsibilities, either within a current or additional role. This might also be considered as shared roles between smaller chapels across a district as part of a phased opening plan. This is particularly relevant where a greater number of members could fall into a group classed as vulnerable. It is important that these practical roles are shared so that a small number of people are not overburdened.

However this is agreed, it is important that each of these individuals is provided with information and training proportionate to the role. This is not an exhaustive or prescriptive list, but Managing Trustees may wish to consider the following roles through the Action Plan:

- Overall 'Responsible Person' for COVID-19 safety and safeguarding matters
- Steward(s) at entrance/exit
- Steward(s) within worship space to allocate seats and ensure social distancing
- Cleaning team (either within or outside the membership)
- Someone with responsibility for listening to concerns or ideas from a welfare perspective

10. STEP 7: Communicate Effectively

i. Agree how plans will be communicated

- Find communication media suitable for all church building users.
- Avoid confusion and 'mixed messages' which could jeopardise any safety measures.
- Allow for regular updates if plans are changed or updated.

ii. Information and guidance

- It is important that all users of the building are provided with information on the guidance and procedures for using the building. This should be facilitated through a number of means, depending upon specific circumstances:
 - Send out information directly to leaders or those responsible for groups prior to reopening the building or them using it; or
 - Make guidance available to everybody immediately upon entering the building;
- It is also recommended that signage is placed strategically around the building to remind building users of their responsibilities and any restrictions which are in place. This is specifically covered in the Signage section below

iii. Signage

- This is essential to successful communication and can include:
 - Information on how to use the building;
 - Directions towards specific entrances or exits;
 - Directions towards rooms to avoid unnecessary movement around building;
 - Directions towards specific rooms for user groups;
 - Hygiene considerations such as hand washing.

iv. Other Considerations

- It is important that all building users are aware of restrictions so they can prepare in advance.

- Consider how you will pass information and guidance to people who don't have English as their first language or others who may struggle with written and verbal communication or have disabilities such as a visual impairment.

11. STEP 8: Constantly Review

- The designated Committee should hold regular reviews with the 'Responsible Person'.
- Hold conversations with interested parties, listening to and acting on their concerns.
- Implement changes to the Risk Register and Action Plans if necessary.
- Ensure the Action Plan aligns with any wider Government or Connexional guidance.

NOTE: it is important that Managing Trustees use these periods of assessment, experiment and reflection to decide if reopening or remaining open is a viable option. It is suggested that it would be acceptable at this stage to decide that it might be better to close the building again and focus on alternatives means of worship, mission and ministry as outlined in Section 8i above.

12. Where to ask questions or get additional Support

This guidance is provided to help support Managing Trustees in the steps they need to consider in reopening their church buildings. We appreciate that there is a lot to think about and discuss, and although it is written to be as comprehensive as possible, there may be specific situations or arrangements which are not covered here. If you require any further support or have questions, please contact the following:

Connexional Property Team (<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/>)

General Queries: property@methodistchurch.org.uk or 020 7467 5271

Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas: conservation@methodistchurch.org.uk or 0161 235 6739

Pastoral enquires: mvw@methodistchurch.org.uk

Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (www.tmcp.org.uk)

Legal Enquiries: legal@tmcp.methodist.org.uk or 0161 235 6770

Finance Enquiries: finance@tmcp.methodist.org.uk or 0161 235 6770