

## GUIDE FOR OPEN AIR WORSHIP

Version 1	21 July 2020	First published
Version 2	28 July 2020	Updates and clarity on details following direct Government guidance

### 1. Introduction

This Guide is part of STEP 5: Safety First in the process for reopening and managing your church building. It provides specific guidance for Open Air worship as an alternative or in addition to using your church building, but should be read in conjunction with the **Guide to Using Your Worship Space**.

### 2. Definition of a Place of Worship

The Government guidance for reopening churches has the following definition of a ‘Place of Worship’:

*‘A place of worship refers to a building used for regular religious ceremonies, communal worship or similar gatherings by religious organisations. **It includes the use of surrounding grounds, for example, adjoining carparks, courtyards or gardens for which the venue managers are also responsible.***

*The guidance also covers premises when being used for religious gatherings, even when their primary purpose is not for religious gatherings, such as a community centre. These premises will only be able to be used where they are permitted to be open and additional guidance may be applicable.*

*This guidance does not cover public parks, private homes, cultural sites or other open spaces, such as woodlands which may be used for religious purposes. If people do want to engage in worship in these spaces, then the guidance relevant to that place should be adhered to.’*

The guidance now makes specific reference to Outdoor Worship<sup>1</sup>, with the general principles incorporated into Connexional guidance below.

### 3. Considerations for Worshipping on Church Grounds

If Managing Trustees are considering using their external spaces for worship, this has to be considered carefully and in a different way to assessing risk inside a church building. It has some merits, such as better ventilation, but can bring other unforeseen issues which are more specific to a church’s location and setting. It is suggested to base initial assessments on the following detailed considerations:

- It is acceptable for more than 30 people to pray or undertaken other forms of worship in adjoining grounds to a church building, as long it is COVID-19 Secure. Refer to the documents **Guide to Re-Opening and Managing Your Church Building** and the **Guide to Using Your Worship Space**, as the majority of guidance here can be transposed to external settings – e.g. limits on music and singing and social distancing etc.
- Still base all decisions on a risk assessment and ensure that a safe number of people can be contained in the space concerned. Worship services will be based on an assessment of who can be safely accommodated in the space, whilst ensuring all guidance is met. **A restriction on 30 people is still relevant for ‘life event’ services such as weddings and funerals.**

<sup>1</sup> Refer to <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>, section titled **Outdoor Worship**

- Consider the setting of the space, its openness, security, visibility and use by the public.
- It is important that there is an assessment of the ability to control numbers attending, as in a church building. This is the principle behind guidance which restricts ‘public gatherings’, where there is no control about who joins and how social distancing is managed.
- There needs to be a means of restricting access if required – e.g. agreeing who is attending in advance and having controls around collecting test and trace details. It is essential that people cannot just join a group, so that numbers increase beyond what has been assessed as safe.
- Consider the ‘pinch points’ around entrances and exits, and any queuing system you needed.
- It is important to consider access to toilet and washing facilities – access to these are essential, or at the very least access to hand sanitiser etc. Government guidance is clear that good ventilation helps reduce the spread of the virus, but hygiene facilities also need to be made available to everyone.
- Any risk assessment should also consider the security of those attending, and may need to consider the involvement of local partners (e.g. police).
- Dependent upon the openness of the setting, it should also be considered how an open air service may impact on neighbours, particularly around noise. It might therefore be considered a good opportunity to liaise with the community about this, to allay any fears, but also as an opportunity for invitation.
- As this activity is based on the Government’s guidance for Worship in Churches, the same restrictions on sharing of food and cutlery etc. still applies, except where it is part of the service of Holy Communion where specific Connexional guidance has been provided.

#### **4. Specific Considerations for Worshipping on Privately or Publicly Owned Grounds**

Government guidance confirms that it is not illegal under coronavirus legislation to pray in a public outdoor space. This does lead to other important considerations though, particularly if the land does not belong to one of those persons attending e.g. a public park. In all cases, the environment must be Covid-19 Secure and the guidance outlined above should be followed to reflect the setting. Please consider the following specific points:

- Gathering up to 30 people is permissible, but must consider –
  - social distancing guidelines;
  - individual groups do not interact with other groups attending;
  - groups must consist of no more than two households or six people if outdoors.
- Gathering of over 30 people is not permissible, unless included under a list of exempted organisations.<sup>2</sup> If anyone fits into this category, then they must consider the following –
  - Liaise with those responsible for the open space;
  - Ensure that it is safe to hold the event;
  - Ensure a risk assessment is undertaken;
  - Refer to all the other considerations suggested in Item 3.

#### **Important Note:**

It is very important that if you are considering outdoor worship in a public outdoor space that you also consult your local authority to ensure you have the right permissions and support in place. This type of support may include the local Police. You should therefore consider the wider implications on neighbours and resources if considering worship in this public outdoor setting.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july> - refer to section **Public Outdoor Spaces**

