

## GUIDE FOR CHURCH COUNCIL & OTHER CHURCH MEETINGS

Version 1	17/09/2020	Issue of original guidance
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### 1. **Introduction**

This Guide is part of STEP 5: Safety First in the process for reopening and managing your church building. It seeks to clarify how in practical terms Managing Trustees and other church members can hold formal meetings safely during the current restrictions, in order to fulfill any governance or planning responsibilities. There are a number of strands of Conference, Connexional and Government guidance which this document seeks to draw together to allow those holding meetings to decide on the right approach for the situation.

### 2. **Covering Meetings Generally – online versus face to face**

- i. Church meetings, church council and Synods, etc. Can be conducted either online or in person.
- ii. The **2020 Conference** passed a resolution effectively enabling church business meetings to be held electronically whilst the public health restrictions on physical meetings continue. This resolution applies particularly where it would otherwise be impossible to comply with Standing Orders, for example in appointing church officers for the coming year.
- iii. The Connexional Ministries Team have recently produced a guide for decision making during Covid for local church meetings and councils. This can be found under the heading [How do we best confer and make decisions during the COVID-19 Pandemic?](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/coronavirus/official-guidance/#conferring) (<https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/coronavirus/official-guidance/#conferring>).

### 3. **Considerations for Meetings held Online**

- i. Where practical, all churches, Circuits and Districts are encouraged to conduct meetings on an electronic ‘virtual’ basis. Recommended video-conferencing platforms include MS Teams and Zoom, the latter being particularly popular for meetings with a large number of participants.
- ii. The Connexional Team has issued guidance to enable Districts to host Synods by Zoom webinar, which you can read here: [www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/using-zoom-webinar-for-synods/](http://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/using-zoom-webinar-for-synods/)
- iii. Online ‘virtual’ meetings should be conducted in very much the same way as you would normally. Items will be discussed, conferred upon and then agreed. Only those participants to the meeting may take part in voting (Methodist Standing Orders do not allow for proxy voting).
- iv. Clearly, not all participants being in the same room presents challenges for meeting Chairs and there needs to be good discipline during the meeting such as ‘muting’ microphones when not speaking and ‘raising hands’ to indicate when participants want to speak. Further advice on running virtual meetings and meeting etiquette can be found here [www.icsa.org.uk/knowledge/resources/good-practice-for-virtual-board-and-committee-meetings](http://www.icsa.org.uk/knowledge/resources/good-practice-for-virtual-board-and-committee-meetings).
- v. However, it is important that running virtual meetings should not preclude any participants who are not so technically engaged and savvy, or do not have an internet connection, for example. Where possible, allowances should be made for such people, for example, enabling them to dial into meetings by telephone or supplying IT equipment.
- vi. As for all church business, please make sure you document everything properly and keep a record of all decisions made. You should state in the meeting minutes that the meeting was held electronically.

#### 4. **Considerations for Meetings held in Person**

- i. Under the Government's guidance for [Safe Use of Places of Worship](#)<sup>1</sup> it confirms that 'meetings and small gatherings' are permitted under the [Multi-purpose Community Settings Guidance](#)<sup>2</sup>.
- ii. This is outlined in the Connexional Property team's [Guide for Other Community Users in your Church Building](#) (found under the 'Guide for Other Property Users' tab). Please refer to this document for detailed guidances and suggestions, but below are the major consideration for holding a face to face meeting:
  - a. Consider the meeting location in the wider context outlined in detail in the [Guide to Reopening and Managing your Church Building](#), to ensure it is safe to use;
  - b. It is essential that the building and the spaces to be used are COVID-19 secure;
  - c. It is essential that Risk Assessments are produced to ensure the building is COVID-19 secure, as well as for the meeting itself, and any resulting mitigation actions implemented. This is a legal requirement under Health and Safety law and the HSE.
  - d. There is no cap to the number of people attending a meeting, as this is governed by the safe capacity limit of the space available in the risk assessment.
  - e. Consider the meeting in the wider context of the building, limiting movement around the building by people or the effects on other building users.
  - f. There should be no refreshments served during the meeting but participants can bring their own.
  - g. The Government has produced a [List of Priority Actions](#) as a guide to protect everyone using the building during this time:
    - i. Complete a COVID-19 Risk Assessment
    - ii. Clean more often
    - iii. Wear face coverings
    - iv. Make sure everyone is social distancing
    - v. Increase ventilation
    - vi. Take part in NHS Test and Trace
    - vii. Turn people with coronavirus symptoms away
  - h. Please Refer to Section 6 in the [Guide for Other Community Users in your Church Building](#) (found under the 'Guide for Other Users' tab) for other more detailed practical considerations for meetings, including entrance/exits, circulation and toilet facilities.

#### 5. **Further Guidance**

This is general guidance as it is not possible to address every local property situation, so if there are any queries arising from this guide, please contact the Connexional Property Support team on [property@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:property@methodistchurch.org.uk).

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<sup>1</sup> See <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>, under Section 1 - Introduction

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities>, Section 3d