

GUIDE FOR OTHER COMMUNITY USERS IN YOUR CHURCH BUILDING

Version 1	14 July 2020	First Published
Version 2	21 July 2020	Updated to reflect change in allowing small wedding receptions; additional user groups added and important note added regarding gyms, dance classes etc.
Version 3	28 July 2020	Added clarification on early settings that are allowed
Version 4	31 July 2020	Updated to reflect government policy for face coverings and wedding receptions
Version 5	18/8/2020	Updates include toddler groups and government links for Scotland and Wales
Version 6	22/9/2020	Updates to include the rule of 6, toddler groups, choirs & performing arts guidance, ventilation information and link for food & drink

1. **Introduction**

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 developed this guidance to work alongside the overarching [Guide to Reopening and Managing your Church Building](#).

This Guide is part of STEP 5: Safety First in the process for reopening and managing your church building. It provides specific considerations in relation to re-opening and managing church buildings which accommodate community activities and user groups. The relaxation in restrictions for these buildings is welcomed, but Managing Trustees should consider the planning for reopening their community buildings very carefully, as the Government guidance states –

‘Community centres, village halls, and other multi-use community facilities support a wide range of local activity. However, their communal nature also makes them places that are vulnerable to the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).’¹

This guidance has been produced to provide a generic framework to guide the reopening and use of church buildings for community activities. Due to its general nature, it may not cover every eventuality. If this is the case, then we would recommend that Managing Trustees contact the Connexional Property team for further guidance – property@methodistchurch.org.uk.

2. **Government Policy Basis**

The Government has now provided specific information for Multi-purpose Community Facilities, which also covers church halls and ancillary accommodation associated with Methodist Church buildings. The overarching guidance can be found at -

- In England: <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> or <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/use-of-church-halls-for-village-hall-and-other-charitable-purposes-cc18/use-of-church-halls-for-village-hall-and-other-charitable-purposes>
- In Scotland - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/pages/other-permitted-uses/>
- In Wales - <https://gov.wales/safe-use-multi-purpose-community-centres-covid-19>

¹ <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>

Important Update from 14 September 2020

- All spaces that are to be used for community groups should be [COVID-19 secure²](#), which means they meet the [7 Steps for Working Safely Together](#) for opening and running as outlined in the government guidance.
- Those in attendance should gather in groups of no more than 6 people. This relates to the maximum group size before attendees enter the building and therefore can sit together in church. It is not a directive to sit people together in groups of 6.
 - You can continue to space chairs and people as before with 2m distancing between groups.
 - Within each group of 6, those who are not in the same household should continue to practise social distancing.
 - Each group of 6 should **not** mingle with any other groups (see FAQ's below for more information).

3. Considerations Prior to Opening

Consider any specific community user group in the wider context outlined in detail in the **Guide to Reopening and Managing your Church Building**. It is essential that all spaces to be reopened for community users are [COVID-19 secure](#), which means they meet the [7 Steps for Working Safely³](#) together for opening and running as outlined in the relevant guidance:

- Early years and youth provision (refer to the [Guide for Early Years Education](#))
- Voluntary sector and other services - essential voluntary activities and urgent public services, such as food banks, homeless services, and blood donation sessions;
- Organised clubs or groups (*please note that there must be no interaction with those outside the group they are attending*);
- Meetings of civic, political or community groups;
- Church councils can meet but are encourage to meet remotely if possible
- MP/Councillor surgery or Ward meetings
- Public meetings and local consultations (e.g. planning);
- Retail and shop facilities;
- Place of Worship;
- Office Spaces;
- Outdoor Space;
- Holiday clubs, after-school clubs, tuition or other out-of-school provision for children and young people (up to the age of 18), this includes fitness, sports, sports-related or dance activities;

² England -

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/903464/staying-covid-19-secure-2020-230720.pdf

Wales - <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-08/keep-wales-safe-at-work-five-key-steps.pdf>

Scotland - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-general-guidance-for-safer-workplaces/>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/heritage-locations>

- Indoor gym facilities, including sports, fitness and dance (England and Wales)⁴;
- Indoor performances in front of a live audience – e.g. drama, comedy and music (England only).⁵
- Indoor play areas, including soft play and toddler groups (England and Wales)⁶. Please refer to the [Guide for Children’s, Young People’s and Intergenerational Worship & Activities](#) for more information.

(Important Note: the reopening for such activities must be carried out in partnership with the activity provider to ensure that the building can meet the specific technical requirements for operating such establishments under Covid-19 restrictions e.g. ventilation provision).⁷

Not yet permitted

- Large gatherings or celebrations;

Important Note regarding capacity:

Methodist church buildings which are able to ensure they are [COVID-19 secure](#) and follow the [7 Steps for Working Safely](#)⁸ will be able to hold more than 30 people (subject to assessment of the capacity limits determined by the risk assessment). **Those in attendance should gather in groups of no more than 6 people.** These considerations should be in partnership with those providing the community activity. Where community activities will have more than 30 people, Managing Trustees should take additional steps to ensure the safety of those involved and prevent large gatherings or mass events from taking place⁹.

If Managing Trustees **cannot** prove through their risk assessments that they are able to provide a Covid-19 secure community facility, then community user groups should limit their social interactions to 6 people, either from the same household or [support bubbles](#)¹⁰ or potentially up to 6 people from different households:

⁴ In England - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-phased-return-of-outdoor-sport-and-recreation>

Wales - <https://gov.wales/sport-recreation-and-leisure-guidance-phased-return-html>

⁵ Refer to Guidance on Performing Arts in England - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts>

⁶ England - <https://www.balppa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Indoor-Play-Areas-for-Children-Operational-Guidance-for-Soft-Play-Equipment.pdf>

Wales - <https://gov.wales/indoor-play-areas-children-coronavirus-guidance-html>

⁷ <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/equipment-and-machinery/air-conditioning-and-ventilation.htm>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/heritage-locations>

⁹ In England, specifically sections 2a, 3a, 3c, 3d - <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>

¹⁰ England - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/meeting-people-from-outside-your-household-from-4-july#making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household>

Scotland - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-what-you-can-and-cannot-do/pages/seeing-friends-and-family/>

Wales - <https://gov.wales/guidance-extended-households-coronavirus>

- In England, 6 people indoors and 6 people outdoors including children (including all children)¹¹.
- In Scotland – 6 people indoors and 6 people or 2 household outdoors (including children who are 12+ years)¹²
- In Wales – 6 people indoors and 30 people outdoors (including children who are 11+ years from extended household) ¹³

Specific Considerations:

- i. Managing Trustees should apply the Connexional guidance provided, locally, depending on circumstances, including a building’s size and type of activities it hosts, its users, how it is organised, operated, managed and regulated.
- ii. Managing Trustees have legal responsibilities under health and safety law and an obligation either as employer/coordinator (in relation to Church run community groups) or landlord or licensor (in relation to Third Party community groups) to make every effort to ensure the safety of the community group, staff or volunteers, those taking part, its own church members or other third parties involved in this activity.
- iii. Appoint a suitable church lead for health, safety and safeguarding matters so that the lead for the community group has a single point of contact going forward. This could be the same person highlighted in the [Guide to Reopening and Managing your Church Building](#).
- iv. Opening of church buildings should be limited to the areas needed by the community group where practical. This will ensure that once operational, clear monitoring of occupied spaces can be maintained for cleaning regimes and thereby reducing the potential virus spread.
- v. Liaise with the lead for the community group before attending site. Note: Users and hirers of a community facility have responsibility for managing risks arising from their own activities when they have control of premises and should take account of any guidance relevant to their specific activity or sector.
- vi. Ensure they have a copy of their site risk assessment and have shared it with you.
- vii. Ensure they have a live¹⁴ action plan in accordance with the Government guidance; and ensure you have a copy of this plan.
- viii. In co-ordination with this shared information, include in the [church risk assessment](#).
- ix. This should be seen as a holistic assessment as outlined in [Guide to Reopening and Managing your Church Building](#).
- x. In the planning process, it may be considered that other spaces not usually used by the community group are required to ensure that suitable spacing and social distancing can be achieved. This could be acceptable, but may have legal and insurance implications, covered in Sections 4 and 5.
- xi. A fire risk assessment should be undertaken if the building or space is repurposed, for example, when there is any change in use or type of use.

¹¹ England - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>

¹² Scotland - <http://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-staying-safe-and-protecting-others/pages/seeing-friends-and-family/>

¹³ <https://gov.wales/safe-use-multi-purpose-community-centres-covid-19>

¹⁴ NOTE: 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 own 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.

4. Lease and Other Legal Obligations to Consider

Please [contact TMCP](#) if you have any queries relating to the lease or licence under which a Third Party Early Years Provider 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 Early Years Provider to use more of the church building than is currently used 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.
- If Managing Trustees are already using the Standard Pre-School Licence which is provided by TMCP there should be no need to vary this to ensure that the Third Party Early Years Provider follows COVID-19 specific legislation or any additional guidelines or controls that the Managing Trustees need to impose to protect the safety of the building and other users due to COVID-19. Please refer to the [Re-opening Pre-Schools During COVID-19](#) article on the TMCP website.
- Although managing trustee liability is limited under the Standard Pre-School Licence, liability is only excluded so far as it is possible to do so by law. It is therefore critical that care is taken to fulfil the steps set down by the Government and the guidance produced by the Methodist Church in terms of risk assessments and keeping everybody safe, and also to ensure that insurance cover is not compromised (see the next point below). (Please refer to clause 8 of the Standard Pre-School Licence.)
- Please bear in mind that the ability to limit rights that a Third Party Early Years Provider 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 Early Years Provider 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).

5. Insurance Matters

Please refer to the [Methodist Insurance website](#) for more information.

6. Main Considerations for Managing Trustees in Reopening parts of their Building

Managing Trustees need to be aware that controls within different users' 'separate environments' may be easier to manage with clear guidelines and controls. It is very important that in any planning and proposed changes, that equal consideration is given to the connecting areas between different

occupiers, rooms or properties, such as within any communal or shared areas. It is essential that any critical areas of contact between building users are risk assessed, action plans are clear and practical, and then processes are managed and controlled very carefully so that clear plans and areas of responsibility are clearly allocated to a particular user to an agreed standard (e.g. cleaning regimes). For example, such areas might include:

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

This situation is especially relevant if temporary accommodation changes are being made, beyond the arrangements set out and agreed under existing lease or licence agreements. 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 Section 4i above.

The following practical guidance is intended to assist Managing Trustees when they are considering everything from their risk assessment & discussions with those running community activities, through to implementing changes to the property (in co-ordination with any provider if relevant). It is not intended as a definitive list, as each property should be assessed and changed accordingly to suit site and provider requirements.

Managing trustees should also be aware that they will have a greater responsibility for some of these considerations where this is a church run group, as opposed to one run by a third party. The points raised should therefore be carefully considered depending upon the specific situation:

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

As part of the planning, safe means of access and egress for every building user is essential. This should be considered in the risk assessments and action plans, and the following points should be considered:

- Limit the number of key holders to the building to ensure control access.
- Ensure that if a church member is unlocking then they do not fall into the extremely vulnerable¹⁵ categories.
- Limit access to the other parts of the building not opened; this will ensure management of any virus transfer and therefore implications on cleaning regimes.
- Ensure that everyone who accesses the building signs in and co-ordinate with the community groups the number of personnel on site to ensure that social distances can be maintained.
- Work with your community groups to ensure that any access or areas in use do not have compromised fire escape routes or means of escape to external areas.
- Work with your community providers to ensure that any access or building limitations do not compromise security for the open parts of the buildings or other parts of the building.

ii. Moving around the building

- Limit movement between different user group areas within the building(s) to maintain social distancing as much as possible.

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

- Limit the number of people who use lifts or stairs if possible/relevant.
- Reduce the number of people in high traffic areas, particularly if these are used more regularly by community group users as part of a temporary circulation regime.
- 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 may also include external areas for customers.

iii. Common areas

Agree how communal or common areas are used, such as kitchens, toilets or changing facilities. The following needs to be considered:

- Physically moving tables/chairs so they are 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 more carefully considered depending upon the specific situation relevant to the church building and how it is used.
- Where this is not possible, creating additional space for people.
- Marking areas using tape to help people keep to the advised social distance limits.
- Using outside areas if the locations are suitable and it is safe to do so.
- Refer to the [Guide to Food and Drink](#)¹⁶ for further information.

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

- How frequently you need to clean the common areas.
- Identifying objects and surfaces that are touched regularly and decide how frequently you clean them.
- Setting clear guidance and line of responsibility for the use of kitchens, toilets or changing facilities to make sure they are kept clean.

iv. Cleaning and Hygiene

- Follow the [Cleaning Churches during Covid-19](#) property guidance.
- Ensure that sufficient handwashing facilities are available that provide running water, soap and paper towels. Where a sink is not nearby, provide hand sanitiser in shared spaces – particularly in entrance areas.
- Provide regular reminders on avoiding touching your face and to cough/sneeze into your arm.
- Set clear guidance for the cleaning of toilets, showers and changing facilities to make sure they are kept clean.
- Set clear guidance on how to handle and store cleaning materials/products safely ([COSH Guidelines](#)) and when cleaning procedures need to be followed.
- Clean surfaces such as doors, sinks, toilets, light switches, bannisters, more regularly than normal in areas under the church's responsibility.
- Ensure that bins are placed in accessible positions and are emptied throughout the day.
- Where possible, all spaces should be well ventilated using natural ventilation (opening windows).

¹⁶ Under the 'Guide to Other Property Users' tab on <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/coronavirus-guidance-for-property/>

- Prop doors open, where safe to do so (bearing in mind fire safety and safeguarding), to limit use of door handles and aid ventilation.
- If there are ceiling fans, air conditioning systems or heating systems which blow air, the current advice states that the need for an adequate supply of fresh air through natural or mechanical ventilation has not changed and that improving ventilation may help reduce the risk. Please refer to please refer to HSE's [Guidance on Ventilation](#) or the [CIBSE Covid-19 Ventilation Guidance](#).
- Work together with other churches or building users to ensure proportionate supplies of soap, anti-bacterial gel and cleaning products for all areas of the building are available.

v. Information and guidance

- Provide all users of the building with information on procedures & guidance that have been introduced. This could include signs or notices.
- Use signs and posters to increase awareness of [good handwashing technique](#) and [good hand sanitiser technique](#).
- Consider how you will pass information and guidance to people who do not speak English as their first language and others who may struggle with written and verbal communication or have disabilities such as visual impairment.
- Holding conversations with any interested parties, listening to and acting on their concerns through recording and responding to these at the risk assessment stages and then reflection stages during implementation.

vi. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Ensure that PPE is available to church members/employees if risk assessments suggest this is necessary; please refer to the separate Connexional property guidance on this.
- Face coverings are mandatory in public indoor settings (England and Scotland only) and they should be worn to help reduce the spread of the virus. However, face coverings should not be seen as a substitute to other measures such as social distancing and good hygiene. Please refer to the [Guide for Face Coverings](#) for more information and exceptions.

7. Considerations for all Community User when the Building has Reopened

The following points should be monitored during community group sessions, so that changes can be made if initial plans are not working:

- Monitor the cumulative impact of many community groups re-opening in a small, local area and therefore consult wider community building owners if necessary to plan additional measures;
- Consider lowering capacity, even if it is safe to accommodate a larger number initially, so that other wider implications can be monitored safely, such as car parking, travel arrangements generally, queuing and use of shared facilities such as toilets.
- Consider changing established start and finish times for community users so that there is staggered entry and exit to avoid 'bottle-necks'.
- Noise – all community groups should ensure that steps are taken to avoid people needing to unduly raise their voices to each other. This includes – but is not limited to – refraining from playing music or broadcasts that may encourage shouting, including if played at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult.

- Collecting customer data – this is required by law for all community groups, but should be carried out by the community group themselves.
 - In England - Test and Trace - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/maintaining-records-of-staff-customers-and-visitors-to-support-nhs-test-and-trace>
 - In Scotland – NHS Inform - <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/communications-toolkits-and-leaflets/coronavirus-covid-19-communications-toolkit>
 - In Wales - Test, Trace, Protect - <https://gov.wales/test-trace-protect-coronavirus>
- Car Parking - the above advice on social distancing also applies when travelling to and from a community group. Decisions to use car parks should be a shared consideration for Managing Trustees and community groups so practical measures such as changing the car park layout to help people socially distance are considered. Guidance on social distancing relevant to transport, parking and the public realm can be found here:
 - In England - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers>
 - In Scotland – <https://www.transport.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/transport-transition-plan/advice-on-how-to-travel-safely/>
 - In Wales - <https://gov.wales/travelling-safely-coronavirus-guidance-public>

If Managing Trustees have specific queries relating to Community Users, then please contact the Connexional Property team at property@methodistchurch.org.uk.

FAQ's with answers provided by the Ministry for Housing, Community & Local Government

Q. Are activities for children and young people, such as youth groups, allowed more than six attendees?

- Yes. Activities for children organised by a business, charity or other public organisation, taking place at a COVID-19 secure premise, will be able to continue without applying the 6 person limit to the children involved or to the organisers. Such activities also must not take place in private dwellings.
- Out-of-school settings and youth groups are exempt from the rule of six but protective measures still apply; that there should be no more than 15 children per small, consistent group and should have at least one staff member per group.
- For the purposes of this exemption, young people are below the age of 18.
- If at a hired venue or outdoors, they must undertake a rigorous risk assessment for the event alongside the private owner or relevant local authority, and ensure that safeguards are in place to allow for strict social distancing between attendees.
- All attendees should provide contact details for the purposes of NHS Test and Trace.

Q. Are community workshops, support groups, keep fit, bereavement groups, Employment drop ins etc in community venues allowed?

- Most formal support groups will still be able to take place and some will be able to have any number of people present. The list of support groups is [here](#)
- Informal groups can still take place in Covid Secure premises (but not private homes) with multiple groups of six, provided that these groups do not mingle.

Q. Are Choirs/bands (i.e. more than 6 people singing/playing) permitted for 'performances' in PoW? (Amateur choirs are capped at 6)

- Performing professional choirs will be regarded as being at their place of work and on that basis will not be subject to the rule of six - but they will of course need to follow the guidance published on the performing arts. We are discussing and agreeing with Government Departments how the new rules will impact amateur choirs and will update our advice as soon as we can.