

## **Further Pastoral Guidance from the Bench of Bishops**

### **Effective until further notice**

#### **Updated guidance**

This updated guidance is issued in the light of recent amendments to Welsh Government Regulations relating to the re-opening of places of worship.

#### **Church buildings: wider re-opening**

Welsh Government has announced that places of worship may be re-opened for individuals or households for communal led worship from Monday 13<sup>th</sup> July.

This phase of re-opening (the amber phase) gives the legal right for churches to be opened for individual or households to now visit places of worship for:

- Private prayer
- Communal worship including led prayers, devotions or meditations
- Holy Communion subject to appropriate risk mitigation measures (see checklist below)
- Baptisms subject to appropriate risk mitigation measures (see checklist below)
- Funeral and marriage services (for invited guests only) can be undertaken and separate [guidance on this is available here](#)

The Bench remains of the view that a cautious approach to re-opening, based firmly on Welsh Government guidance, is essential. What has been announced is the giving of permission. There is no requirement, from Welsh Government or the Bishops of the Church in Wales, to re-open at this time.

Any church contemplating re-opening must first undertake a detailed risk assessment. [Guidance on what this involves is available here.](#) This includes a template risk assessment form. This will need to be submitted to your Archdeacon (or other nominated person) in advance of any re-opening. **Following such approval, worship services may begin again from Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July.**

Whilst we rejoice that we can now return to worship in our churches, we urge local churches not to rush re-opening. Only consider re-opening if you can do so effectively and safely within the guidelines. Match your opening arrangements to your capacity to address necessary safety measures. Our primary concern must be the health and wellbeing of our clergy, staff, volunteers and visitors.

### **Use of buildings**

The Welsh Government Regulations continue to permit a cleric to record or broadcast a service (with or without a congregation) from church buildings. Any such events should be held in accordance with diocesan guidelines, or otherwise with the explicit permission of the diocesan Bishop.

The Welsh Government Regulations also permit clergy to visit their churches, and for other church officers and volunteers to visit churches only to undertake a voluntary or charitable duty, where it is not reasonably practicable to undertake that duty from home. Site inspections can be undertaken by clerics, or by another person nominated by the Incumbent, Ministry/Mission Area Leader, Area Dean or Archdeacon. We ask that such visits are still kept to a reasonable minimum.

The trustee body responsible for the church building can also now consider allowing contractors and local volunteers to undertake essential and necessary works to their church and churchyard subject to suitable distancing and hygiene arrangements.

The use of church buildings for essential voluntary services (such as existing foodbanks, soup kitchens and homeless shelters) is permitted by the Welsh Government Regulations. Church buildings may also, upon the request of the Welsh Ministers or a local authority, be used to provide urgent public services. All reasonable measures should be taken to ensure that social distancing practices and other hygiene precautions are followed while those services are provided. Any new use of a church building for essential voluntary / public services should be expressly supported by the incumbent or Area Dean and the diocesan bishop.

It has also been announced that Community centres (including Church halls) can be re-opened from Monday 20<sup>th</sup> July and Welsh Government will publish guidance to support them to restart more public services at the discretion of local authorities. We will need to see the details of this provision and will issue further guidance on how to re-open these safely in coming days. It is clear that permitted activities in such halls will be limited to vital public services as defined by local authorities.

Further guidance on the care and use of church buildings is being issued by the officers of the Representative Body. Visit: [Covid 19 - Church buildings guidance](#)

### **Pastoral visiting**

Clergy and others duly licensed or commissioned should exercise their ordinary pastoral ministry from a distance, by phone and online. Pastoral visits should still only be undertaken where essential; such visits should generally be to the doorstep and social distancing measures must be scrupulously observed. Individual Bishops may issue more detailed advice to their clergy on what they consider to be 'essential' visits and may be consulted by clergy in any cases of doubt.

### **Baptism**

Baptisms can now take place in churches and specific guidance has been provided by the Representative Body on this at <https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/clergy-and-members/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/guidance-conducting-baptisms>. Baptisms can also take place at home, hospital, hospice or other location in case of an extreme pastoral emergency, where baptism may be administered by a lay person. The order for emergency baptism is appended below.

### **Prayer and witness**

The duty of the people of God to witness to Christ is not diminished at this time; neither is our obligation to pray without ceasing for our communities and all in need. We commend all that is being done in God's service to care pastorally for our communities, and to enable worship, prayer and devotion to continue at home.

We continue to hold all who are anxious, all who are unwell, and all who are grieving in our prayers, asking that the presence of the risen Christ may be near to us all and give us assurance, peace and strength at this painful and anxious time.

### **An Order for Emergency Baptism**

In an emergency, if no ordained minister is available, a lay person may be the minister of baptism. Before baptizing, the minister should ask the name of the infant / person to be baptized. If, for any reason, there is uncertainty as to the infant / person's name, the baptism can be properly administered without a name (so long as the identity of the person baptized can be duly recorded).

The following form is sufficient:

The minister pours water on the person to be baptized, saying

*I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.*

Then all may say the Lord's Prayer and the Grace.

Any person who has administered baptism privately in an emergency should make a careful record of the date and place of baptism and of the identity of the person baptised. He / she should forward details to the parish priest as soon as possible and without delay.

The parish priest should ensure that the customary record is entered in the baptismal register.

**Bench of Bishops**

13<sup>th</sup> July 2020