

Opening Our Church Doors Onto Safer Spaces

As we look to opening our church buildings, we have the opportunity to consider how safe our buildings and church practices are. This is not just in reference to hand sanitizers and social distancing, but in the welcome we give, the physical environment people will walk into, and in how we present ourselves. The period of lockdown has been an opportunity for us to take stock about what it means to “Be Church”.

How can we best help those who have suffered, and are suffering with, trauma, loss and hardship? How can our physical environments, along with what we say and what we do, promote healing? If we look at how we “do church” through the lens of those who have suffered trauma and loss, can we see anything that could be done differently?

Caring for Individuals

Be prepared for individual or family stories of trauma; having been unwell, bereaved, furloughed, made redundant, going out of business or facing financial difficulty

Be alert to poor emotional wellbeing linked to the effects of isolation, separation and fractured relationships

Try to spot physical signs of abuse or neglect, including self-neglect. Notice what has changed about your congregation

Some people will be changed and will need to reflect on their experiences. Church leaders should prepare for this by identifying and briefing some pastoral visitors as key listeners (over the phone, or Zoom etc.), available via a safe and confidential contact system.

Returning to Activities on Church Premises

What activities need to be prioritised as buildings begin to reopen? What activities need a review? Are there some things being done in church that need to be put aside? With others, pull together your existing building use and activity risk assessments as a benchmark to start a review of each of the activities

How will we include in our physical meetings those who have only engaged so far in online or remote church? How will this be done safely?

Think about your church demographic – who are the members and who come to take part in activities? How will this affect your planning and your pool of volunteers?

How will children be supervised at church activities and by whom? How will this be done safely?

Adapting the Physical Environment

As you risk assess the church buildings, (<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/coronavirus-guidance-for-property/>) take the opportunity to bear in mind those who have suffered trauma, loss and hardship and how the physical environment may appear to them. For example, you may want to consider the prominence of collection plates and requests for donations - people who have lost their jobs during the pandemic may no longer be in a position to support the church financially.

Safeguarding

What fresh safeguarding concerns might the re-starting plan prompt? Are you clear about how to recognise, respond, record and refer these?

What structures are in place to ensure all volunteers are safely recruited? You need to bear in mind that these will be the 'front line' welcoming people into the church who may have suffered trauma. Are they the best people for this role?

Those subject to Safeguarding Contracts – how have they been accessing church activities during lockdown? Has this been agreed by the Monitoring and Support Group (MSG)? How will they access church activities as buildings begin to reopen? MSG's need to be discussing these matters and contacting the Regional Safeguarding Officer for advice.

Make sure that the local church is aware of and following the Methodist Church guidance about online communication with both adults and young people: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/coronavirus/official-guidance/>

Church safeguarding officers should collate information about local services offering more specialist support and guidance. They should also access the websites of their local Children's and Adult Safeguarding Partnerships in order to provide an online resource for listeners and church leaders. This information can also be posted in church

Checklist

- Are the contact details up to date and visible for your Church, Circuit and Regional Safeguarding Officers?
- Are your Church and Circuit Safeguarding Officers being included in your re-opening planning?
- Have you conducted a church safeguarding review to plan safe recruitment, training and activity risk assessments based on your new church plan.
- Do you have wider information available that can signpost people to support organisations? (A helpline poster is available from the Safeguarding Admin Assistant neregsafe.office@gmail.com this can be put on notice boards, around the building and the back of toilet doors)