

COVID-19 Risk Assessment for reopening Witton Park Methodist Church for Worship

Address Low Queen Street, Witton Park, Bishop Auckland, DL14 0DG

Area of Building Assesses Church Building

Assessment undertaken by John Purdy

Date to be reviewed

Version 1 [21 July 2020]

2 (12 April 2021)

The following is added:

Further to the risk assessment of summer 2020, and following different periods of lockdown and suspension of church services, and in the light of a reduced risk to most of the congregation by the roll out of vaccinations to the over 50s, the following changes are recommended.

1. Reduce the spacing of people and social distancing from 2 metres to 1.5+ metres (with the plus being the continued wearing of masks, and the seating organised in such a way that people do not directly face one another.)
2. The maximum number of people the building can safely accommodate following advice be increased to 32
3. To add the following to enable outdoor worship within church grounds:
 - a) The church car park to be available for outdoor worship needs to be kept clear of all cars, and enable chairs to be set out.
 - b) The chairs similar to inside the chapel be spaced 1.5 metres between pods of people (if masked - see (f) below), with a mix of single seats, double seats, and where necessary family 'pod' groups of larger numbers.
 - c) The police notified of any such outdoor services, and the residents of neighbouring houses made aware.
 - d) Stewards to be more aware of extra responsibility for safety, in that numbers still need to be kept

within set limits, and the discouragement of others to gather inappropriately in the close vicinity who are not part of the controlled and accounted group meeting for worship.

e) The chapel entrance to be used for the preacher, and any necessary sound equipment. The chapel toilet facilities also to be available, and the chapel usable if weather or safety considerations mean a move indoors is advised.

f) The advantage of singing is noted, but the risk of propelling further airborne particles and virus is also understood. Without masks the congregation would need to be more widely spaced. Thus maximum capacity of 60 reduced to 30 and at least 2 metres (if not more) between people if unmasked singing were allowed.

4. All to be aware of government and Connexional advice as steps out of lockdown proceed, and stewards to regularly check up-to-date guidance and regulations.

Hazards/Risks <i>Think about the areas where contact takes place</i>	Persons Affected <i>Anyone who comes in contact</i>	Likelihood 1-Seldom 2-Freq 3- Almost Certain	Severity 1-Low 2-Med 3-High	Risk Rating 1-2=Low 3-4=Med 6-9=High	Notes/Additional Covid-19 Controls or actions to reduce Risk	Action Plan <i>What needs to be done and by whom?</i>
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SECTION 1: RISKS/ISSUES TO REOPENING CHURCH BUILDING - Individuals aged 70 years and over - Government guidance states. "Certain groups of people may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, including people who are aged 70 or older, regardless of medical conditions. Individuals who fall within this group are advised to stay at home as much as possible and, if they go out, to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside of their household."

Many of our Church Stewards and key leaders are aged 70 or over, and thus fall in the category of being at increased risk.	Church Stewards Preacher Congregation	3	3	9	Some of the Church Stewards may feel they are willing to help with reopening and Worship but should we as a Church be asking them to take that risk? Others may be self-isolating or unwilling to help at the moment. We cannot open without Church Stewards.	Church Stewards to confirm if there are sufficient available for safely reopening the church. If sufficient Church Stewards are available Working Group to consider whether we should ask them to take the risk.
Many of our Property Stewards and key leaders in maintaining the building are aged 70 or over, and thus at increased risk.	Property Stewards	3	3	7	Our Property Stewards may feel they are willing to help with reopening and Worship but should we as a Church be asking them to take that risk? Property Stewards are needed to take the lead in preparatory work for reopening.	Property Stewards to confirm if they are available for preparatory work. Working Group to consider whether we should ask them to take the risk and/or seek alternatives.
Many of our volunteer cleaners are aged 70 or over.	Volunteers	3	3	9	Some of our volunteers may feel they are willing to help with reopening and Worship but should we as a Church be asking them to take that risk? We could bring in contract cleaners.	Working Group to consider whether we should ask volunteers to take the risk and/or what alternatives might be possible. Treasurer to guide on finance available to bring in outside cleaners

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Some of our Communion Stewards are aged 70 or over.	Stewards Preacher Congregation	3	3	7	Some of the Communion Stewards may feel they are willing to help with reopening and Worship but should we as a Church be asking them to take that risk? Others may be self-isolating or unwilling to help at the moment.	Church Stewards to confirm if there are sufficient Communion Stewards available for reopening the church and Working Group to consider whether we should ask them to take the risk. Working Group to consider whether there are alternative ways to hold Communion, or if Communion should be held at all.
Many of our occasional offices Stewards are aged 70 or over. (Weddings, Funerals and Baptisms)	Stewards Minister Wedding Guests Funeral family Funeral directors Baptism families (inc. infant)	2	3	6	Some of the Stewards may feel they are willing to help with reopening and Worship but should we as a Church be asking them to take that risk? Increased level of children is a risk at Baptisms	Church Stewards to confirm if there are sufficient Stewards available for reopening the church for these special occasions Working Group to consider whether we should ask them to take the risk, or not open for occasional offices

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Many of our congregation is aged 70 or over.	Whole Church	3	3	9	<p>Some of the congregation may wish to attend Worship but should we as a Church be asking them to take that risk? Others may be self-isolating or unwilling to attend at the moment.</p> <p>Applying 2 metre rule restricts numbers</p> <p>Zoom service already exists and helps meet the need for some to worship</p>	<p>Pastoral Visitors and Stewards to contact as many members as possible to gather their views on attending Church if it reopens. Are members happy with 3 step process already outlined on website etc.?</p> <p>Working Group to consider if by opening some feel 'compelled' to take the risk, or if reopening should be delayed to a later date.</p>
Many of our Events Stewards are aged 70 or over.	People attending other events	2	3	6	<p>Some of the Stewards may feel they are willing to help with reopening the building to others but should we as a Church be asking them to take that risk?</p> <p>Added use of building will require more cleaning, and possibly 'deep cleaning' if not carefully planned.</p>	<p>Church Stewards to confirm if there are sufficient Stewards available for reopening the church to others</p> <p>Working Group to consider whether we should ask them to take the risk, or not open to other groups/events</p>

SECTION 2: RISKS/ISSUES IN PREPARING TO REOPENING CHURCH BUILDING FOR FIRST TIME

Cleaning of Church before reopening	Whole Church	2	2	6	<p>Cleaning Churches states, "When reopening the building for the first time, a deep clean for Covid-19 is not necessary but a normal clean is recommended." Advice exists on what is necessary before reopening.</p>	<p>Confirm volunteers are available to clean prior to reopening. If not, consider what alternatives might be possible.</p>
On-going cleaning after reopening	Whole Church	2	2	6	<p>Cleaning Churches states, "...if there are 72 hours between groups using the building, then cleaning for Covid-19 is not required." This indicates if we are only opening for Sunday Worship, or one mid-week activity elsewhere in the building, a normal cleaning rota</p>	<p>Confirm volunteers are available for regular cleaning. If not, consider what alternatives might be possible.</p>

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					(weekly for toilets and monthly for general Church clean) would be sufficient, except where additional activities take place.	
Church made Covid-19 secure					<p>Determine maximum numbers that would be allowed given social distancing requirements of 2 metres.</p> <p>Establish a one-way system including arrangements for wheelchair users.</p> <p>Decide where anti-bacterial wipes/liquid and sanitising stations should be, the amounts required, purchase supplies and set up</p> <p>Ensure processes are in place for reordering supplies, e.g. who reorders etc</p> <p>Decide where signage/floor markings are required and set up</p> <p>Ensure arrangements are communicated to Church Stewards and members along with any restrictions/requirements</p> <p>Set up track and trace process, forms etc for Church visitors (including review and disposal of forma after 21 days)</p>	<p>Working Group/Property Stewards</p> <p>Working Group/Property Stewards</p> <p>Working Group/Property Stewards</p> <p>Working group/Property Stewards</p> <p>Working group/Property Stewards</p> <p>Working Group/Church Stewards</p> <p>Working Group</p>

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Use of audio/visual equipment	Whole Church / Tech Team / Preacher	3	2	5	The use of books etc by the congregation is discouraged. The use of audio/ visual equipment is encouraged, for playing recorded music, displaying service information etc. This would require the preparing of slides and people willing to set up and operate the equipment during Worship. Additional recording / streaming of video / audio to congregation at home enables more people to access worship and to do so in a safe manner.	Working Group Tech Team (expanded!)
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SECTION 3: RISKS/ISSUES FOR SUNDAY WORSHIP

Entrance to, and exit from Church building	Church Stewards Congregation Preacher	2	2	6	<p>Ensure entrance and exit doors are kept open as much as possible to reduce need to touch door handles, and allow increased ventilation before, during and after service.</p> <p>Ensure door handles are wiped with anti-bacterial wipes before service commences and after service concludes</p> <p>Ensure anti-bacterial wipes/spray and paper towel/roll are available in front and rear entrances for use as required during services times</p> <p>Ensure hand sanitiser is available at front and rear doors for people to use as the enter/leave the premises</p>	Church/ Door Stewards
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					Ensure all complete track and trace forms and number limit is enforced.	
Main body of Church before, during and after Worship	Preacher Congregation	2	3	8	Ensure social distance requirements are adhered to Ensure maximum capacity is not exceeded (maximum 30 but maybe less when Church marked out for social distancing) Ensure audio/visual equipment is sanitised before and after use, e.g. by wiping controls/remote/ mics with anti-bacterial wipes Ensure an orderly exit after the service – one row at a time, discourage groups/individuals from chatting in the building and along path and in car park.	Church Stewards
Vestry – entrance way	Preacher Church Stewards	2	2	6	Ensure doors, light switches are sanitised before and after use Ensure hand sanitiser is available for use by Stewards and Preacher Ensure social distance between stewards/preacher is maintained	Stewards and Preacher to discuss the need to use vestry beforehand (if vestry prayer is not needed, it reduces numbers of stewards needed and reduces interpersonal contact)
Toilets	Congregation Door Stewards	2	3	7	Ensure paper towel dispenser is adequately stocked (fabric towel is discouraged) Ensure adequate supply of anti-bacterial handwash is available	Church Stewards (Shorter acts of worship and reduced time in building should reduce need for toilet facilities)

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	Church Stewards Preacher				<p>Ensure adequate supply of anti-bacterial wipes are available for toilet user to wipe seat, cistern handle and door handle</p> <p>Ensure waste bin available in toilet for disposal of anti-bacterial wipes</p> <p>Ensure social distancing is maintained if there are queues for the toilet</p>	
Collection	Congregation Church Stewards	2	2	5	<p>Encourage giving through standing orders/other electronic money transfer schemes wherever possible</p> <p>Giving plate cannot be passed around.</p> <p>The offertory plate can be left on a table and then afterwards should be stored for at least 72 hours before the collection is counted</p> <p>No individual should be asked to handle money unless they are willing to do so.</p>	<p>Church Treasurer/Gift Aid Secretary</p> <p>Steward (or whoever takes collection)</p> <p>Church Stewards/Church Treasurer to discuss who counts the money where and when to enable both Covid-19 security and financial security</p>

SECTION 4: SPECIAL SERVICES – The Methodist Church has produced on guidance on special considerations for Communion, Weddings, Funerals and Baptisms. This is attached at the end of this document. I suggest these will need to be discussed with the Minister and relevant parties, i.e. Church Stewards, Wedding Stewards, Funeral Stewards and Baptismal Secretary, as to how they should operate.

Specific Considerations for Communion

- The elements essential to the celebration of communion are allowed, namely bread and grape juice.
- Careful thought needs to be given to the form of the elements and to how they will be distributed. Wafers are preferable, and can easily be sourced online.
- It is important, also, to remember that **communion received in 'one kind'** (i.e. bread only) is perfectly valid in our tradition and that of our ecumenical partners. This may be considered as an option if there are concerns over safely distributing of grape juice as outlined in more detail below.
- Those handling any specific items related to the celebration of communion should wash their hands thoroughly before and after, or alternatively wear gloves. It is advisable to keep hand sanitiser available during the service to allow for frequent cleansing of hands, for instance just before, and if necessary, during, distribution.
- Care should be taken in the preparation of the sacraments to ensure that individuals do not come into contact with the elements. It is recommended that shared receptacles are not used (i.e. no common cup and a common plate only if great care is taken, as described below), and if possible, items which involve minimal preparation should be used.
- If there is to be an act of passing the peace, it should occur only verbally and at a proper distance.
- Speaking over the sacrament is not allowed unless it is securely covered. The prayer of thanksgiving should therefore happen over covered elements, or be offered at an appropriate distance from them when uncovered. The breaking of the bread and lifting of the cup should happen in silence.
- The distribution of the sacrament should be undertaken with a view to maintaining current social distancing measures. Any persons distributing and receiving communion should ensure that they can do this in such a way as to avoid contact between each other, or alternatively to wear gloves. If contact is made then both parties should immediately wash their hands.
- It is preferable to use wafers, and either distribute them at arm's length, ensuring that there is no physical contact between minister and communicant, or to allow communicants to take their own wafer from a common plate, on which the wafers have been spaced apart. If a larger loaf is used in the consecration, it should not be distributed, except for the minister's consumption, unless there is absolute scrupulousness about hand-cleansing, keeping an arm's length away from communicants, and ensuring that hands do not touch when placing the bread in their palms.
- Similarly, if wine is to be distributed, individual cups should be used and offered to communicants to take from the tray themselves.
- If individuals are distributing the elements, they should do so in silence, so as to avoid increasing the possibility of infection.
- All items used in the celebration of communion should be disposed of safely or thoroughly washed after use, ensuring that those handling them wear gloves to avoid transfer of the virus.
- Clear guidance should be given to the congregation before the service begins about how it will proceed and the arrangements for receiving the elements.

Specific Considerations for Weddings

- The Government has produced additional supporting COVID-19 Guidance for small marriages and civil partnerships.
- Marriage ceremonies should have no more than 30 people in attendance, and social distancing should be strictly adhered to following a risk assessment.
- Note that 30 is a maximum number as a guide and that Managing Trustees have an obligation to assess if this is a safe number to accommodate. If after risk assessment it is found that a chapel can only accommodate a lower number safely, then this would be the maximum for this particular chapel.
- If possible, ceremonies should be concluded in the shortest reasonable time, and limited as far as reasonable to the parts of the marriage ceremony required in order to be legally binding under the law of England and Wales.
- In terms of social distancing it should also be noted that this will also apply to those administering the service, the marriage couple or those taking a lead role in the marriage service. Unless of course any are members of the same household or social bubble.
- Where rings are exchanged, those involved should wash their hands before and after and the rings should be handled by as few as people as possible.
- All spoken voices should use a PA system where possible or practical. Specifically projecting or raising voices should be avoided.
- It should be considered how those who fall within a vulnerable group are able to attend safely as it is important that those who wish to attend are able to safely.
- It is important to liaise and communicate with the parties involved in advance. This will ensure that controls and expectations on the day are managed sensitively:
 - o Communication of agreed arrangements in the chapel.
 - o Basic arrangement for cleaning and hygiene.
 - o Knowledge of numbers attending and potential seating plan.

Specific Considerations for Funerals

- The Government has produced additional supporting COVID-19: Guidance for managing a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic.
- Funeral ceremonies should have no more than 30 people in attendance, and social distancing should be strictly adhered to following a risk assessment.
- Note that 30 is a maximum number as a guide and that Managing Trustees have an obligation to assess if this is a safe number to accommodate. If after risk assessment it is found that a chapel can only accommodate a lower number safely, then this would be the maximum for this particular chapel.
- The guidance suggests the following can attend, in addition to the Funeral Director and staff, church steward and minister:
 - o Members of the person's household;
 - o close family members;
 - o or close friends if family members are unable to attend;
- It should be considered how those who fall within a vulnerable group are able to attend safely as it is important that those who wish to attend are able to safely.
- All spoken voices should use a PA system where possible or practical. Specifically projecting or raising voices should be avoided.
- It is important to liaise and communicate with the parties involved in advance. This will ensure that controls and expectations on the day are managed sensitively. The Funeral Director may be able to facilitate many of these communications and arrangements so that they minimise the additional responsibility for organisation on the bereaved. Such arrangements and communications could include:
 - o Communication of agreed arrangements in the chapel.
 - o Basic arrangement for cleaning and hygiene.
 - o Knowledge of numbers attending and potential seating plan.
 - o Ability to assess if there are parties who are clinically vulnerable and therefore being able to make additional arrangements and advise others to be aware and sympathetic to this.

Specific Considerations for Baptisms

- The Government makes reference to baptisms within the context of what it defines as Other Life Cycle ceremonies, which is part of the overall reopening churches guidance.
- Although this is not normally part of Methodist tradition, if baptisms are carried out separately to a normal service, they should have no more than 30 people in attendance, and social distancing should be strictly adhered to following a risk assessment.
- Note that 30 is a maximum number as a guide and that Managing Trustees have an obligation to assess if this is a safe number to accommodate. If after risk assessment it is found that a chapel can only accommodate a lower number safely, then this would be the maximum for this particular chapel.
- When the baptism takes place during a normal service then the number could be greater than 30 as long as it remains within the maximum number of people who can be seated in the chapel safely, as calculated in the risk assessment.
- If possible, ceremonies should be concluded in the shortest reasonable time.
- Water is required for the ceremony, and that is acceptable, but attention should be given to hygiene guidance including handwashing prior to and after the ceremony, and only small amounts of water are to use to avoid splashing. A shell or other small receptacle can be used for the imposition of the water.
- Only a minimum number of people should gather immediately around the child or adult being baptised to avoid being splashed by water and in order to maintain social distancing.
- If the person being baptised is a baby or infant, then they should be held by their parent or guardian or other member of the child's regular household only.
- It should be considered how those who fall within a vulnerable group are able to attend safely as it is important that those who wish to attend are able to safely.
- All spoken voices should use a PA system where possible or practical. Specifically projecting or raising voices should be avoided.
- It is important to liaise and communicate with the parties involved in advance. This will ensure that controls and expectations on the day are managed sensitively:
 - o Communication of agreed arrangements in the chapel.
 - o Basic arrangement for cleaning and hygiene.
 - o Knowledge of numbers attending and potential seating plan.
 - o Ability to assess if there are parties who are clinically vulnerable and therefore being able to make additional arrangements and advise others to be aware and sympathetic to this.

Guidance - COVID-19: guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic - Updated 17 July 2020

Complete Government guidance should be read - <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>

It includes:

- **Face coverings**

Face coverings are currently mandatory on public transport and will be mandatory in shops and in supermarkets from 24 July 2020. People are also encouraged to wear face coverings in enclosed public spaces where there are people they do not normally meet, such as a place of worship. Relevant guidance on face coverings is available on GOV.UK.

- **Protecting the vulnerable**

There should be a particular focus on protecting people who are clinically vulnerable and more likely to develop severe illness. Actions should include:

Religious leaders, lay people, family, volunteers, staff and members of the public, including children, staying at home and self-isolating if they have a new, continuous cough or a high temperature or loss of or change to sense of smell or taste. This is to minimise risk of spread of COVID-19 to friends, the wider community, and particularly the vulnerable.

Individuals who are shielding should continue to follow the government's advice on shielding.

If anyone becomes unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 in a place of worship they should go home immediately and be advised to follow the stay at home guidance, which covers NHS Test and Trace. If they need clinical advice, they should go online to NHS 111 (or call 111 if they don't have internet access). In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. They should not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

Other people who may have been in contact with the person who has become unwell should wash their hands thoroughly after the interaction, but they do not need to take any other specific action unless they develop symptoms themselves or are advised to do so by NHS Test and Trace. If they do develop symptoms they should follow the stay at home guidance.

- **Individuals aged 70 years and over attending the place of worship**

Certain groups of people may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, including people who are aged 70 or older, regardless of medical conditions.

Individuals who fall within this group are advised to stay at home as much as possible and, if they do go out, to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside of their household.

You should consider informing these groups in particular of the symptoms of COVID-19 and current stay alert and social distancing guidance.