



The Diocese of Southwark

The Venerable Simon Gates
Archdeacon of Lambeth

The Venerable Moira Astin
Archdeacon of Reigate

The Venerable John Kiddle
Archdeacon of Wandsworth

The Venerable Dr Jane Steen
Archdeacon of Southwark

The Venerable Dr Rosemarie Mallett
Archdeacon of Croydon

The Venerable Alastair Cutting
Archdeacon of Lewisham &
Greenwich

Wednesday 20 May 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Use of Buildings as Lockdown Eases

This comes with our greetings, encouragement, and support. As lockdown eases, there are questions about the use of our buildings. We hope this letter helps you in decision-making.

THE LETTER GOES OVER TWO PAGES: PLEASE READ BOTH SIDES

You will find current guidance on the Church of England coronavirus page:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>. National guidance was issued on Thursday 7 May and Wednesday 20 May.

Note particularly:

1. records should be kept of who entered the building and when
2. Coronavirus is not the only virus: run taps for five minutes and flush toilets to reduce the risk of legionella
3. the virus may remain on surfaces for up to 72 hours
4. maintain good hygiene: high alcohol hand sanitiser at entrances, liquid soap and paper towels for washing, 2m social distancing, properly clean touched surfaces, especially on entering and leaving
5. if different users are involved, can different entrances, toilet, washing and kitchen facilities be used?

Use of Churches and Church Halls by Others

Other organisations who rent self-contained space may wish to return. Nurseries and pre-schools would be in this category. Speak with them before deciding. Agree on the steps they will take to ensure safety e.g. a risk assessment, following the above advice. Speak with your insurer. Ensure that users are responsible for hygiene, social distancing, and cleaning including cost, and rent. Will it still be possible (clean enough/empty for long enough) for you to use the building for worship if you wish to do so? These are not exhaustive suggestions. Take other steps you think sensible.

Shared space is more complex. Give very careful thought to separating different users both spatially and temporally. Each group will need a risk assessment. The PCC will need one for the whole space. Multiple use of the same space in the same week is unlikely. This includes shared entrances, corridors, kitchen, toilet or washing facilities.

New Building Users

We have been asked about new users, including schools and nurseries who are seeking over-spill space. If you have been approached about this, have careful conversations with potential new users before reaching an agreement. We repeat what we have said about current users: agree on the steps they will take to ensure safety e.g. a risk assessment, following the numbered advice overleaf. Speak with your insurer. Ensure that users are

responsible for hygiene, social distancing, and cleaning including cost. If you wish to use the church, make sure that it is clean enough/empty long enough for this. Additionally, for new users, make sure that the PCC has conducted a risk assessment if needed. Consider the impact on other current users. Will the new user leave before current users, who have a right to the space, wish to return? How will you obtain a Licence under Faculty if you need one? What other form of legal agreement will you need? What rent or licence fee will you agree (based on a Charities Act valuation)?

Parish use of the Church and Buildings

Some of you have already been able to re-enter your churches to pray and even to livestream or record services. If you do so, keep to the national advice and note the points overleaf. If you have volunteers or paid staff entering the building, maintain best practice for them. Do not pressurise people into coming back before they feel it is safe for them to do so. Prioritise spatial/social distancing. Make sure that people only enter the part of the building they need to enter. Clean necessary (touched) services on the way in and the way out. Leave time, ideally 3 days (72 hours), between different people accessing the building.

Returning to Church

Bishop Christopher has asked us to say, 'It will not be possible for congregations to gather in churches as they used to for some time to come. We will begin to open churches again for worship when the government permits and within its guidelines. The House of Bishops has identified a three-stage process: Stage 1, clergy may enter otherwise locked churches for prayer and worship (which you can now do behind locked doors); Stage 2, when government restrictions are eased, the House of Bishops will permit churches to be open for private prayer. This is unlikely to be before Saturday 4 July but planning for this second stage should begin now; Stage 3, we should also begin planning for carefully regulated public worship in the longer term when government guidance permits. With each Stage, as and when permitted, churches will proceed at different rates as and when they are confident to do so and as safely as possible. Please discuss plans and share good practice in each Deanery.'

Life after Lockdown

We would like to thank you again for the speed with which you responded to lockdown. Your grace and skill in rising to the challenge of supporting your congregations and enabling worship was superb. You have made wise, locally appropriate decisions.

We would like to encourage you in that creativity. Coronavirus looks set to be with us for some time. The church of the future might need to combine on-line and physically gathered worship. It will be important to ensure that people without internet access are not excluded. We know that these times of transition are challenging. We thank you again for all that you have done. We urge you to talk with one another and with us about what might be done going forward.

The Lord chose you for such a time as this. Our prayers are with you.

Alan Kidd

Simon Gate

Moira Astin

Andrew

Jane Steen

Alastair Cutting

The Archdeacons of the Diocese.