



# EFCC

exalting Christ in growing  
healthy churches

## Coronavirus – Advice to Churches for Reopening after 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020

Issued 26 June 2020  
Updated 12 August 2020

*'How lovely are your dwelling places, O LORD of hosts! My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God' (Psalm 84:1-2)*

In March 2020, the EFCC released a 'Coronavirus-Advice to Churches' document which advised churches to close the church buildings in accordance with the Government Covid-19 response. Four weeks later the EFCC released a second 'Coronavirus-Advice to Churches' document with similar but updated advice.

As lockdown eases, this third document from the EFCC outlines the process of reopening church buildings for public worship as the Government incrementally relaxes lockdown measures. The advice in this document is based on a paper given by Matt Rees at the EFCC min-conference 'Coronavirus and the Church' on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020. The document reflects Government advice and, as much as possible, this advice has been updated in this version.

It is essential that churches refer to latest government advice relating to opening church buildings and ongoing activities. Particular care should be taken to ensure that appropriate devolved administration guidance is applied as well as any local lockdown regulations.

Churches are now able to meet again but that means that there are many details to consider beforehand in preparation for reopening. This document seeks to help you to consider both the pastoral and legal implications of re-opening. Re-opening is not an easy exercise, those in leadership in an EFCC church will need to think through both aspects. If you would like help or guidance in applying the advice to your context, please get in touch. It is vital that thorough preparation is done before churches reopen for public worship.

Where EFCC acts as sole (or all-purpose) trustee for a church, the EFCC Custodian Trustees are legally liable for ensuring that the church meets all aspects of government legislation. For this reason, EFCC has issued specific advice to those churches, which must be followed before they can re-open. That advice is given to ensure compliance with government guidance. Churches with their own trustees may wish to review that advice<sup>i</sup> as part of their own preparations to re-open.

Please also see the following links for further helpful guidance and information.

[Guidance for the safe use of places of worship](#)

[Guidance for safe use of multi-purpose community venues](#)

We are here to help - if you are in any doubt about any aspect of re-opening, including risk assessment, contact [Tom Brand](#), [Matt Rees](#), or [Steve Horton](#) who will do their very best to help.

## Practical Considerations

- *Preparing the building* will take time before reopening. As the buildings may not have been used at all during the months of lockdown, it is essential that thorough risk assessments are carried out, and that gas, electricity, and water supplies are safe. Lack of use of the water system in the church building increases the risk of legionnaires disease through bacteria in the fresh water. [More information](#)
- *Social distancing measures* All devolved administrations favour and encourage 2m social distancing. England, however, makes provision for 1m plus subject to certain risk mitigations being in place, although maintaining 2 metre social distancing may be preferable for reducing risk in public worship. This means that building capacity will be reduced to approximately one third to one fifth of normal. Households and social bubbles will be able to sit together but groups from different households who are not in a social bubble will need to be separated in their seating by at least 1 metre from 4<sup>th</sup> July. If possible, a one-way system can be introduced for people arriving and leaving after the meeting. The building will need to be cleaned thoroughly between meetings. In order to meet this requirement, some churches may want to move to multiple services on the Lord's Day. If this option is chosen, time between meetings must be allowed for cleaning the building. Not everyone will be able to return to public worship immediately. Some in the vulnerable category will not be able to return yet, and some people will choose not to return until they feel safe.
- *Managing expectations* in your church is vital. It is likely that social distancing measures will be in place for the foreseeable future. Shielded and vulnerable people will not be able to join public worship meetings in the church building to start with. As a church leadership you need to be able to manage the expectations of your congregation and help people understand that this is a long game.
- *Other practical issues* such as singing, wearing masks, cleaning, hygiene, refreshments, taking attendees' temperatures, and building hire need to be considered.
  - *Singing* is not allowed in church buildings until further notice from the Government because of the greatly increased risk of transmission of the virus.
  - *Face coverings* must be worn on public transport, shops and places of worship. [More information](#)
  - *Research* has shown that the virus can be transmitted from surfaces for a number of hours in some cases after contact from a person with Covid-19. Therefore, *cleaning* the building thoroughly between meetings is important. If you are not using the building again within three days, a thorough clean is not necessary, but may be best practice. [More cleaning information](#)

- Providing anti-bacterial hand gel (at least 60% alcohol content) for attendees will help improve [hygiene](#) and reduce the risk of transmission
  - Churches will not be able to share [refreshments](#) before, during, or after meetings. Churches can consider other creative ways to help build fellowship.
  - In some areas where risk is considered to be higher churches may wish to take the [temperature](#) of attendees on entry. This will raise many pastoral issues that need to be dealt with sensibly and sensitively.
  - If you [hire](#) a school or other building for church meetings, you need to consider insurance policies and practicalities for continued meeting in hired premises. Equally, if you hire out your church building for other purposes, you must ensure that you have policies in place to manage risk.
- *Risk levels* should be assessed.
    - There may be a risk that church leadership will not be able to manage public worship meetings and ensure that Government guidance is followed. This will increase [legal risk](#).
    - There may be [reputational risk](#) to your church reopening for public worship. There have been cases in other countries where churches have reopened and directly contributed to the transmission of the virus through the meeting. If such an event were to occur, what would be the risk to the reputation of the local church?
    - [Risk management and assessment](#) is vital. It is important that risk assessments are carried out, recorded, and managed, to demonstrate that a church has sought to minimise risk and that it has considered the various issues thoroughly. It may be helpful for churches to record names and addresses of people attending meetings (the minimisation of risk from this qualifies as a legitimate breach of GDPR under Government policy). Confidential record keeping may be useful for tracing contact and transmission. [HSE Advice on completing a risk assessment](#)

## Spiritual Considerations

- In the [Lord's sovereign providence](#), he saw fit to ordain the global pandemic and the cessation of public church worship for a time. Church leaderships need to think through what they have learnt through lockdown. What are the essential aspects of the church meeting that must be continued, and what were you doing as a church before lockdown that can or should now stop after lockdown? What has your church gained because of lockdown and how can you keep that?
- The [Lord's Supper](#) is central to the life of the church of Christ. During lockdown, some churches have attempted to share the sacrament through Zoom. The EFCC guidance has stated that this is not theologically ideal or beneficial, although there is great mutual respect for those with different views in the EFCC. From 4<sup>th</sup> July when we meet for public worship, your church needs to think through if it will celebrate the Lord's Supper, and if so, how. There are ways to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a safe, low risk way, such as distributing the bread and wine in pre-sealed containers to each household. It is important to consider the theological implications of the different options. [More information](#)
- [Pastoral care](#) for the flock will be vital, particularly care for people who do not want to return to church meetings immediately because of health concerns. Churches need to think through how they will care for those who chose initially to stay away.
- Maintaining links with [virtual attendees](#) during lockdown will be evangelistically significant. Will you continue to stream church meetings online for those who chose not to attend physically? If not, how will you continue to reach those who attended virtual meetings but chose not to attend physical meetings?
- How will your church minister to [shielded](#) people who will not be able to return yet?
- How will you reach out [evangelistically](#) after lockdown in what will be a very different world, with new idols, new attacks on the Gospel, new cultural norms, new political sensitivities?

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<sup>i</sup> [Guidance to churches in England](#), where EFCC is the sole or all-purpose trustee

[Guidance to churches in Wales](#), where EFCC is the sole or all-purpose trustee

In Northern Ireland, EFCC has no all-purpose trustee responsibilities. However, we are always ready and willing to support any church that might ask for help or advice in re-opening. Our advice will be based on the [Executives letter to churches](#) and sites such as:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/health-protection-coronavirus-restrictions-northern-ireland/regulations-2020>