
Coronavirus update

1 message

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**EFCC**

exalting Christ in growing
healthy churches

The Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches is a group of over 100 evangelical churches in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

***CORONVIRUS UPDATE 18 October 2020***

This e-mail is primarily for those churches where EFCC acts as the all-purpose trustee. However, we circulate it to all our churches for information and as a way of sharing best practice.

The tricky issue of church ventilation ... and a word on tiers

How many of your people have already started to ask about all those doors and windows that are open in your building? Certainly, we are hearing of a number of such conversations and, unfortunately, there is no simple solution.

It might help to remind ourselves of the two key issues behind the ventilation question:

1. It is understood that Covid is less likely to be transmitted outdoors.
2. Ventilation is clearly thought to be a mitigating factor in reducing the risk of transmission and has been central and consistent in all guidance. e.g. English guidance states:

Where social distancing cannot be maintained, extra attention needs to be paid to cleaning and hygiene to reduce the risk of transmission. Consider how well ventilated the venue is and improve this where possible, for example by fixing doors open where appropriate.

Given the above, one might pose the question, “why would you make a conscious decision to potentially increase the risk of transmission?” Particularly as the infection rate would appear to be on the rise. Against that, of course, is the suffering caused to our people’s spiritual and mental health if they are unable to join us for worship.

EFCC recognises that man’s chief end is to glorify God and that is very hard to do in isolation so we would encourage churches to be creative in addressing the question of ventilation. As churches we should already be conducting services in the shortest reasonable time, but might it be possible to increase the heating? Could we buy some wraps for those who feel the cold? Should we encourage the wearing of extra layers? How possible is it to move people to less ‘breezy’ seats? As conditions deteriorate outside, perhaps less windows need to be open to achieve the same increase in ventilation.

Obviously, every church is different so it is impossible to be prescriptive. However, it would seem that inviting our members to worship in a sealed, unventilated space would not be the correct thing to do and we encourage all churches to work with their members to address this issue in such a way that the potential for infection in your building isn’t increased.

AND WE HAVEN’T EVEN THOUGHT ABOUT THE THREE TIERS ... because it is quite possible that your Local Authority will introduce measures that impact on what you do in church. It is too early to say what their powers will be but it is vital that church leaders keep up to date with what is going on locally. However, the English guidance for churches has been updated to include

details of the tiers. It acknowledges that the tiers will have little effect on the worship service; however, it does reinforce the requirement not to 'mingle'.

*In areas subject to COVID alert level – **medium** restrictions, when meeting friends and family you do not live with (or have formed a support bubble with) you must not meet in a group of more than 6, indoors or outdoors.*

*In areas subject to COVID alert level – **high** restrictions, you must not mix outside of your household or support bubble indoors, including within a place of worship.*

*In areas subject to COVID alert level – **very high** restrictions, you must not mix outside of your household or support bubble indoors, including within a place of worship, or outdoors.*

Additionally, the updated guidance emphasises that where “must” is used, it is an actual legal requirement.

Many of our churches actively encourage worshippers to leave swiftly and not stand around chatting but it may be that a reminder is required for some people.

Finally, the English guidance – originally wedded to one-way systems – now includes the following, which may help some churches:

Multiple entry points could be opened, and clear signposting or assistance could be offered to guide worshippers and to avoid congestion.

We will do our best to stay abreast of the many changes, often small and unannounced, that affect churches on a national scale and will bring you details as swiftly as is possible.

For the full **updated Guidance**

John Stevens keeps FIEC churches updated on his blog. If you don't know the site, **it is a resource** very well worth visiting.

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

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