



EFCC

exalting Christ in growing
healthy churches

Coronavirus – Advice to Churches
Following 19 July 2021 Relaxations

Issued 19 July 2021

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As of today, the Government is lifting all legal restrictions on places of worship in England as part of the removal of legal limits on social contact. In contrast to the Government's previous position, responsibility will now be an issue of individual judgement. This means that local churches decide how they go forward, this is biblical, and we praise the Lord for it. If you are in a church in Wales or Northern Ireland, please do pray for wisdom for the churches in England.

The last fifteen months have been hard, stressful, and wearying for many pastors and congregations. The restrictions have led to tensions as different people respond to Government guidance in different ways. Be assured of our prayers for you all.

As the EFCC has provided advice to churches on risk assessments, reopening and many other issues, we have done our best for the good of our fellowship churches. Many churches appreciated and welcomed the guidance and direction from the EFCC, but we would like to take this opportunity to apologise for any unintentional hurt and difficulty caused by our decisions and the advice we have given. As the restrictions are lifted in England, it is our hope and prayer that the EFCC will move forward united and exalting Christ in growing healthy churches.

When we moved into the first lockdown back in March 2020, the choices were serious and difficult but relatively simple. As lockdown eased, the pastoral implications became more apparent. Now that the restrictions are being lifted for places of worship, great pastoral wisdom is needed, and some risk remains as we learn to live with the virus. Many will want to continue wearing masks, many will be nervous and cautious. Some will be delighted to sing again but others will be wary of the sudden changes. We need to think through how we go about returning to normal meetings: do we suddenly drop all restrictions, or do we go back gradually?

Paul's words to the Ephesians are so relevant at this time of many changes.

'Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you' (Ephesians 4:29-32).

How do we deal with our differences in church leadership, in our congregations, with people from other churches? We speak with measured grace, not with unguarded anger. We speak the truth in love, knowing that our sin against God is far greater than any other person's sin against us. We distinguish between disagreement and conflict. We love one another knowing that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

God's grace to you,

Tom Brand (Ministry Director)

Matt Rees (Committee chairman)

Gwynne Evans (Trust Board chairman)

‘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)

This is the fourth ‘advice to churches’ document since March 2020. During the intervening period, the EFCC has produced regular mailings, risk assessment templates and advice on specific areas of ministry in light of the Government guidance.

But now, the Government is lifting legal restrictions in England and the focus is on individual responsibility. Churches as independent bodies need to work through the issues. This document raises a series of questions that may help you work things out for your local church.

Our prayer is that the relaxation of Covid restrictions in England will be an opportunity for our churches to meet together for worship more easily and that *‘your flesh will be able to sing for joy to the living God.’*

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.

Spiritual Considerations

- This is a good opportunity for church leaderships 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 could you keep that? We have emphasised that physical gathering is vital for the church and the Government imposed closure of public worship has been a cause of great concern and lamentation.
- The [Lord's Supper](#) is central to the life of the church of Christ. It is important to think through the safety aspects of communal food and drink, but 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 the 'old ways of doing things' because of health concerns. How will you make those members feel welcome? How will you help those who want to drop social distancing and masks understand how other people feel?
- We have emphasised that gathering physically together as the church to worship God is necessary for the church, but some may want to [continue streaming services](#) in addition to in-person meetings. Might some use that as an excuse not to return to corporate worship? Might some who are ill appreciate being able to join you live on-line?
- What will your post-Covid [evangelism](#) look like and how will you deal with first-timers arriving in your building?

Risk Considerations

[Continued risk management and assessment](#) is important. 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.

[Points to consider:](#)

A *hazard* is anything that could cause harm e.g. a person sneezing

A *risk* is the likelihood of that hazard causing actual harm

So, as we consider our risk assessments, we are not simply identifying hazards but we are particularly weighing up the likelihood of harm from those hazards.

That means that we need to consider:

- the setting of our church; its size compared with the number of bodies; its height; the number of windows and doors; the proximity of the worshippers to each other
- the age distribution and vaccination status of our congregation
- the available data on hospitalisation and death (it may prove to be that infection rates rocket but that vaccinations prevent serious illness)

Practical Considerations

Which Covid-related actions will you continue and which will you cease?

How will you communicate that to your people before Sunday?

What will you do for those who wish to continue with the actions that you are ceasing?

What will you do for those who wish to stop those actions that you are continuing?

Do you have a scheme for continually appraising the situation?

Until a serious situation requires government intervention, it is down to individual churches to determine how, and when, they will change their practices.

When will you next review the situation? Have you told your people when that will be?

How will you allow your congregation to feed into the process?

Will you have a phased return to 'normal'?

What steps will you take where worshippers forget what you have asked of them?

This is different to the issues of continuing or ceasing. It revolves around good intentions not carried out.

Will you remind the whole congregation?

(This usually means the 'offenders' don't realise it's them!)

Will you single out the 'offenders'? Who has the skills and authority to do that sympathetically?