

LET US GO INTO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

Preparing for a return to public worship

*“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the
house of the LORD.” Psalm 122:1*

*“When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we
were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with
laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they
among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for
them.” Psalm 126:1-2*

Supporting local leaders as they plan for a safe return to worship

This document has been created for Pastors, Leaders and Trustees of Bethel UK. The aim is to provide guidance to aid in the safe return for each local church. Therefore, it remains the responsibility of the leadership of each local church to plan and prepare for the safe return to public worship within their designated building(s).

It is important that the leadership of each church develop their own plan. As shepherds of the flock of God we are to lead His sheep to safe pasture. And, as charity trustees we have a legal obligation to safeguard members and visitors.

To ensure the broadest possible perspective, the document draws on inputs from every district within the Bethel UK family. The guidance has been created as there was a need for a set of 'guide rails' that were specific to the needs of Bethel as: (1) An Apostolic Pentecostals; (2) a black majority church at greater risk of COVID-19; (3) a UK church.

The outcome is a set of guidelines that we believe can assist local leaders in the building of their own bespoke re-entry plan.

Ten Things To Do Before Re-entry

1. **Ensure the Government and your regional assembly have deemed it safe for churches in your local area to resume worship.** However, even after the Government deems it safe to return, assume **that COVID-19 is present in your community, and act as such.** Stay alert.
2. It is advisable that every church double check their public liability insurance and see what they are covered for in light of COVID-19.
3. **Run a risk assessment¹ to identify how suitable and safe your place of worship is.**
For further guidance refer to the 'COVID-19 Risk Assessment Template'.
 - a. It may also be necessary to consider allocating a health and safety officer for your assembly who takes ownership for tasks such as risk assessments.
 - b. This should also include checking things like water supply and the safety of drinking water - given the building has been out of use for some time.
4. **Schedule a deep clean² of your place of worship prior to re-entry.** It may be advisable to hire professional cleaners for this task. If you do not own your place of worship, discuss this with the owner. Good hygiene can save lives.

¹ The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) have guidance on conducting COVID-19 risk assessment that may be useful: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm>

² A 'deep clean' means: "a very complete cleaning process that includes all parts of something, not just surfaces or places where dirt can be seen" (Cambridge Dictionary).

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5. **Organise an ongoing cleaning programme for your place of worship.** For example, cleaning the building (handles, surfaces, equipment, etc) after each service, combined with a regular deep clean of your place of worship (e.g. monthly, bi-weekly).
6. **Discuss re-entry with the members of your assembly.** Explore how they feel about this, as well as getting an insight into any particular concerns they might have. This could be done one-to-one, a survey, or a meeting with the saints.
7. **Identify those members in your assembly who would still be required to shield from the virus even if worship in the building resumed.** Each pastor should have a plan in place to hold discussions with members for whom a return to service is not advisable. Be aware, this is a sensitive issue (e.g. for our senior saints for whom missing church is simply not in their DNA).
8. **Plans will need to be put in place to continue to engage those members who are unable, or choose not to return immediately.** For example, could you offer a service that is held at the building and via Zoom/Google Hangouts/Microsoft Teams, etc.
9. **Consider how you will communicate the re-entry to the membership,** and the wider community with which the church engages. Think through what you might need to communicate and how best you could do this. For example, Notices on the building, Email, WhatsApp, Facebook, Zoom Meeting, Telephone.
10. Finally, remember, **just because the Government set a date for the resumption of physical gatherings in church buildings it does not mean that you MUST reopen on that date.** Do what is right for the saints in your care and your wider community.

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STAYING SAFE DURING PUBLIC WORSHIP

As we mentioned earlier, we **must assume that COVID-19 is present in our community**. What this means is that when we do return to our places of worship it is likely that COVID-19 will also be a visitor to our services. Therefore, things will not be the same for now. There will be practices that we will need to pause; there will be procedures that we need to start; there will be practices that we wish to continue.

6 THINGS TO DO

1. We will need to **comply with Government rules on social distancing**. Currently, 1m+ square distance is maintained between individuals at all times (but we would recommend 2m ideally). It is also advisable to think about the maximum number of people you will be able to accommodate with social distancing measures in place.
2. We will need to **ensure stringent cleaning and airing out of the building before and after use** (doors, handles, surfaces, pulpit, toilets, chairs, etc). It would be advisable to publish time the building was last cleaned (i.e. notice on wall, etc).
3. To **ensure you know who is in the building**. Registration or ticketing may need to be implemented. This helps you know how many people are in the building, who is in the building and so forth.
4. **It is advisable to have only one entry and exit allocated for services**. This could be a door at the front to enter, and a side door to exit. Which would help manage the flow

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of people through the building (consider appropriate sign-posting). If you do allocate someone at the door, be mindful of their safety and ensure they are not a high-risk individual (e.g. asthma, diabetes, elderly, etc).

5. **It is advisable for masks to be worn** to limit the spread of the virus, and provide reassurance to members and visitors.

6. **The way we allocate seating will need a re-think:**

a. It will be advisable for seating to be allocated and the same individual sitting in the same seat from week to week.

b. It is advisable that seating be segmented by age group. For example, seat younger adults together, elderly together, and so on.

c. It is advisable that the same households sit together to limit the spread of a virus e.g. husband, wife and children, etc.

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10 THINGS WE WILL NEED TO PAUSE

1. Social Distancing means **NO physical contact for the time being**. This includes: shaking hands, laying hands, hugs, greeting with a kiss, anointing with oil, etc.
 - a. **It is recommended that 'meet and greet' is paused or done in such a way that no member is put at unnecessary risk.** For example, avoid the elderly and those with health conditions (diabetes, respiratory, high-blood pressure, overweight, etc) being put on meet and greet duty.
2. To adhere to social distancing we should **pause calls for individuals, or groups, to gather at the altar for prayer**. We will need to speak the word of faith & pray believing.
3. To limit the spread of COVID-19 **it is recommended that churches consider shorter service times**. Lengthy services should be avoided for the time being.
4. **To minimise risk, we recommend that separate Children's Sunday School classes be paused for the time being**. Children should be included in the main services as much as possible, and services designed to be inclusive. An online children's bible class or youth ministry is advisable.
5. To limit the spread of COVID-19 **we recommend pausing on all sharing of hymn books, bibles, tambourines, etc**. Each member is to bring their own Bible and song books, etc. This will mean alternative arrangements will need to be in place for visitors who attend and wish to participate with songs, readings, etc.

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6. To limit the spread of COVID-19 in our community **we recommend the pausing of choirs**. It has been shown that loud singing increases the transmission of the virus. Also, choir seating and choir processions would be against social distancing.
7. **It is strongly recommended that churches that run a shop, or serve food and drink after service pause this for the time being** in order to limit the transmission of the coronavirus.
8. **It is strongly recommended that the handling of cash in services be paused**. This includes pausing on 'pass the plate' and processional offering times. Encourage members to set up regular giving via standing order, to donate online, or churches are to use technology such as iZettle or PayPal to allow contactless giving.
9. **It is strongly advised that microphones are not shared**. Where microphones are used preachers and singers are advised to not shout into or breathe excessively upon the microphone. Churches are encouraged to explore solutions such as pin-on microphones, replaceable covers, allocating mics to individuals.
10. To support social distancing measures **churches may wish to consider limiting the use of the pulpit to the pastor or minister in charge only**.

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7 THINGS WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO DO

Being in exile forced the Jews to adopt new ways of keeping their soul alive, such as worship at the Synagogue while they had no Temple. Similarly, we have had to adapt to life in lockdown. It has caused many of us to re-evaluate what church is. And, we pray that all of the positive lessons and experiences gained will enrich and deepen our worship and fellowship.

Therefore, local churches may wish to continue the following...

1. **Virtual Sunday services** via. Zoom, Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, Teleconference, etc. Being in your building again does not mean you need to stop reaching the world through new technologies. This has also proven an excellent way to connect with our sick and shut-in members--bring church to them.
2. **Virtual Midweek Fellowship** e.g. prayer, bible study, etc. Meeting virtually limits the need for saints to travel e.g. using the bus, taxi, etc.
3. **The pandemic has led to increased communication with members** (extra words of encouragement, pastoral calls, delegating care ministry to brothers and sisters, etc), let us keep it up.
4. **We should maintain stricter hygiene regimes.** For example, ensuring adequate hand gels, soap, paper towels, and bins are always to hand in our buildings.³

³ For example, www.smigroupuk.com are a supplier of sanitising products used by some assemblies.

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5. **We should continue to regularly announce and explain the new procedures.** For example, reminding people that if they have ANY symptoms their entire HOUSEHOLD is to self-isolate by staying at home.

6. We should also **continue to listen for the latest government advice** and adjust accordingly.

7. We should **continue to fast and pray for the leaders of our country, key-workers, and society at large** that are feeling the effects of the ongoing pandemic.

SACRAMENTS & ORDINANCES

The following guidelines have been created to help churches once we resume public worship in our church buildings again.

Baptism

1. Ministers performing baptism (the baptists) should wear their own PPE (e.g. waders, gloves, mask/visor). With no sharing of baptism wear between ministers.
2. Candidates should use their own baptism clothing & towels, etc.
3. Attendees should be limited and maintain social distancing e.g. no crowds gathering around the pool. Therefore, consider recording or streaming the baptism to limit attendees at pool
4. Consider extra chlorine for water purification (following product guidelines)

Lord's Supper

Churches are advised to carefully consider when and how they administer Lord's Supper. For example, how best to protect the server and the recipient.

1. Participants to maintain social distance seating

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2. Adequate PPE to be worn by those who are serving

3. It may be preferable for the elements (Bread & Wine) to be placed upon a table.
Members approach to collect when called by the minister (e.g. section by section),
maintaining social distancing.

4. Churches to consider the use of disposable utensils e.g. pre-packaged sacramental
wine, etc. And, sufficient cleaning of all utensils used

5. Ministers in charge to minimise the situation where fragments may remain (i.e. will
not be advised to eat, or share what remains if it has been handled).

Feet Washing

1. To be paused during the pandemic, to allow for social distancing to be maintained.

SPECIAL SERVICES

Weddings

1. Significantly scaled back weddings can be conducted. Remember to adhere to the guidelines that your church sets in place, as well as the most up-to-date government advice⁴.

Funerals

1. Continue to follow government guidance e.g. wear adequate PPE (mask, gloves). It is also advisable to be robed for the occasion.

Blessings of Babies & Infants

1. For the time being we would advise that baby blessings are not done in the public worship service, but that these ceremonies be performed with a more limited gathering of parents and officiating ministers to minimise risk.
2. Note, social distancing will need to be maintained and a prayer of faith prayed, without the laying of hands. It may be that parents anoint the child with oil and lay their hand in prayer, if they are regenerated believers in Jesus Christ.

⁴ For most up-to-date advice from the UK Government, [visit this link](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships) (updated 29 June 2020)

CONCLUSION

We pray that the points raised in this document will motivate the leadership of every church in Bethel to think through how their assembly will safely return to public worship, and develop a plan that is in keeping with the Government guidance, the points in this document, and what is best for their local assembly.

“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” 3 John 1:2