



Branches Christian Fellowship
<https://www.branchesfellowship.org/>
Registered Charity number 1060870

28th June 2020

Context

Churches are legally permitted to open for purposes of individual private prayer from 13th June. The government has issued guidance for the safe use of places of worship¹ during the pandemic. This document should be read in the light of this government guidance and is our proposal as to how we will ensure that our building is in appropriate condition to be used for such purposes.

In creating this paper, we have reviewed official UK Government legislation, the House of Bishops responses and major denominational proposals, e.g. Church of England, Methodists and Baptists.

This proposal will be issued to the Branches' Elders, Deacons and Trustees for their approval.

Anyone who will act as a Steward (referred to as Venue Managers in the Government guidelines) will also be made fully aware of these proposals and they will be available to the general public via the Fellowship website [branchesfellowship.org](https://www.branchesfellowship.org)

What the Government says we can and cannot do

The summarized statement from the UK Government "COVID-19: guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic, Published 12 June 2020" paper says:

Under the current law places of worship are permitted to open solely for the following purposes:

- funerals, in line with restrictions on those who can attend as per Regulation 7(2)(b)
- to broadcast an act of worship, whether over the internet or as part of a radio or television broadcast
- to provide essential voluntary services or urgent public support services, including the provision of food banks or other support for the homeless or vulnerable people, blood donation sessions, or support in an emergency
- for early years childcare provided by a person registered on the Early Years Register under Part 3 of the Childcare Act 2006
- individual prayer

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic/covid-19guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-duringthepandemic#:~:text=Restrictions%20should%20be%20set%20locally,maintained%20between%20individuals%20and%20households>.

Throughout the 'lockdown' period we have been open to provide food bank services which the local council and police are aware of and fully support.

What activities we cannot do:

- communal or corporate worship (led devotions/worship/service/prayer by a Minister of Religion or lay person)
- services other than funerals, e.g. baptisms or coming of age ceremonies
- study groups, and out of school settings, including faith supplementary schools such as Sunday schools
- lifestyle and leisure/recreational groups such as Places of Welcome or Youth groups
- meetings including practices such as choir practice or bell ringing

Definitions

Individual prayer within a place of worship is defined as a person or household entering the venue to pray on their own and not as part of a group, led prayer or communal act. A household is a person or a group of people who live together in the same accommodation.

Each place of worship is strongly advised to apply this guidance with reference to its own specific circumstances, including its size and type of activities, how it is organised, operated, managed and regulated.

Before opening to public

We will carry out a risk assessment using the applicable sections of the same template provided by the Church of England to its' churches (see Appendix)

Who can and cannot attend the Church for private prayer?

Worshippers are defined as those individuals or households entering the place of worship to engage in a permitted activity.

Those who CANNOT

1. **Individuals who are self-isolating** due to a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the household
2. **Individuals who are extremely clinically vulnerable/shielding** *and have received a letter* from the NHS
3. **Unaccompanied children**

All other individuals or households CAN attend. Those identified by the Government as “at risk” include the groups below. However, these people CAN attend at their discretion

Individuals aged 70 years and older may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19. Individuals who fall within this group *must follow the appropriate government advice*. At the time of writing, where they do go out, they should take particular care to minimise contact with others outside of their household.

Other groups at risk, highlighted by the UK Government are shown below and they *must follow the appropriate government advice*:

- chronic (long-term) mild to moderate respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis • chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
- chronic kidney disease
- chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
- chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson’s disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), or cerebral palsy
- diabetes
- a weakened immune system as the result of certain conditions, treatments like chemotherapy, or medicines such as steroid tablets
- being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)
- pregnant women

Parents and Guardians with children in their household. The children will be required to sit within their household and next to their parents or guardians. As per government guidelines, there will be no facilities for children provided e.g. books, toys, play corners. However, if the parent or guardian has brought a toy with them then that can be used responsibly.

Responsibility and accountability – Branches Christian Fellowship nor the people who are stewarding the building have any responsibility to ask an individual / households whether or not they fall within any of the above categories. The responsibility and accountability falls directly with the individual / households to follow the government law and advice.

However, the stewards have the right to deny entrance to the building if there have due cause for concerns, which could include an individual / household showing Covid type symptoms

How many can enter the Church building at the same time?

As per government guidelines, we will ensure that we limit the number of individuals / households who can be inside at any one time in accordance with the social distancing criteria

Social distancing

Where possible we will adhere to social distancing of at least 2 metres (3 steps) between individuals and households. We will do this by suitably distancing the chairs, having people available to manage as well as having appropriate signs up asking for people to adhere to the government rules.

As per government guidelines, where social distancing cannot be maintained, extra attention will be paid to cleaning and hygiene to reduce the risk of transmission.

In situations where we have more people who want to come for private prayer than we can accommodate then we will (a) advise that people should come back another time, or (b) create a socially distanced queuing systems outside of the building

People will be encouraged not to gather in groups, except with members of their own household, inside or outside the building

Food, hygiene and cleaning

All surfaces, especially those most frequently touched such as door handles and rails, will be cleaned regularly, using standard cleaning products. As a minimum this will be before the doors are opened and once all the public have left. Suitable hand sanitiser will be available for people entering and leaving the building.

No food or drink will be made available.

Toilets

These will only be available for emergency use. Suitable hand washing facilities and paper towels will be provided in the toilet for such emergencies.

Face coverings

These are not required by the worshippers or people stewarding the building. However, if people choose to use them, then this should be encouraged.

What to do in the event someone with Coronavirus has been in the building

The public section of the building will be closed for 72 hours, and the general public will not be allowed entry for 7 days from the known time. Where possible and practical, other people who have been in the building will be contacted to advise them of the risk.

The stewards will not be taking people's names and contacts details as doing so would contravene GDPR laws and there is no UK Government requirement to do so.