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Coronavirus guidance

Updated 23 March 12:00

Announced closure of all Methodist Churches.

The Methodist Church is announcing a closure of all its church buildings for the foreseeable future. The only exception will be for churches that are offering essential social outreach such as foodbanks, soup kitchens and night shelters, but these must be carried out closely within Government guidelines. The Methodist Church suspended worship services last week with some churches still opening for quiet prayer and reflection. This must now also be suspended. We would encourage people to use our online resources at home which include downloadable services and links to online worship services.

The Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, Secretary of the Conference said: “We are asking people to change their way of ‘going to church’ to help to protect themselves and others. We have put in place measures that will enable Methodists still to be part of the worshipping community, whilst for everyone’s sake staying away from church buildings. There is a range of resources available for people to use at home which we hope will help them to continue their cycle of prayer and worship. The Methodist Church is more than its buildings and if in these unprecedented times we can continue our life as Methodists without using our buildings we will help to reduce the chances of transmission of the virus.”

If you are running a foodbank or soup kitchen we would urge you to seek advice on how to operate as safely as possible from central bodies such as the [Trussell Trust](#) or [IFAN](#). In the first instance ensure that those at high risk are not volunteering and put at risk, minimise contact and observe social distancing, ensure people do not remain on the premises but take food away quickly and think through all your processes to minimise all unnecessary person to person contact. There should be no-one on the premises who doesn’t need to be there.

If you’re running a night shelter there is advice available [here](#) and [here](#).

We would encourage people who lead services to think about how worship might be offered in different ways, including online and using [worship at home sheets](#).

Suspending services means that we advise that baptisms will not take place in public worship and if you have a wedding planned in a Methodist Church you should speak to your minister. While funerals may still take place, we would advise that the number of people attending is limited as per the Government’s advice.

In terms of Church business, we recommend that all meetings including church councils and circuit meetings should be cancelled. Districts chairs will be in touch about Synods. The next meeting of the Methodist Council has been suspended and we will advise on how essential business will be carried out. We will be issuing further advice on this.

Other community activities:

Foodbanks and night shelters: If your church runs a foodbank or night shelter please take notice of all the advice that has been given by the Government and the NHS. If you are concerned about older volunteers we advise that (in line with the guidance) they should stay at home. The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) have produced [a simple guide on how you can support foodbanks](#) during the coronavirus pandemic.

The [Trussell Trust](#) has also issued guidance on how churches can support volunteer supported charities.

Other community events like lunch clubs, after school clubs, playgroups and fellowship groups should be suspended.

Pastoral visits: in these extraordinary times, pastoral support is incredibly important and it’s likely it may increase but we would advise that you contact people by phone in the first instance to check they are still happy for you to go in person. If you’re visiting a care home or hospital take your guidance from them. You should also be mindful of [updated safeguarding guidance which you can find here](#)

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We also now have a section about [Mission during the Coronavirus](#), which contains resources, blog posts and advice.

Pastoral concerns

Churches may want to consider carrying out pastoral 'visits' by phone. In any case it may be worth calling the person you are due to visit to check they are comfortable with you being there. Now is a good time to be thinking proactively about who in the church might need extra help should they decide or be required to self-isolate. Is there the need to create a plan for shopping for more vulnerable members of the community for example?

If you have someone who is not able to join your services, please consider [printing a service sheet](#) and dropping it round to them for them to use at home or email them this link to live services.

Remember that many people are anxious and a reassuring phone call and an offer to pray might be very much appreciated.

Helping others

People who rely on extra support to receive essential food and resources may find the next few months particularly challenging.

The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) have produced [a simple guide on how you can support foodbanks](#) during the coronavirus pandemic.

The [Trussel Trust](#) has also issued guidance on how churches can support volunteer supported charities.

Worshipping at home

Last week we provided a worship at home service sheet. We will endeavour to coordinate this for the coming weeks. A new section on the Singing the Faith plus website has been created to host these materials. See [Worship during the coronavirus pandemic](#).

If you are willing to draft a similar act of worship please email Gabriella Mahadeva mahadevag@methodistchurch.org.uk who will send you guidelines and allocate you a particular Sunday.

Our friends at *Family Friendly Churches* – are offering, free of charge, weekly prayers, address and a couple of hymns as videos (with words and music) for use within the home. These can be found at: www.ffctideas.org.uk/Corona.php

Safeguarding considerations

See [Safeguarding considerations](#)

Baptisms, weddings and funerals

[Download guidance on holding baptisms, wedding and funerals during the coronavirus pandemic](#) (Pdf)

Planning ahead

If you're a minister, consider what your plan might be if someone in your congregation is diagnosed with the virus.

The latest Government advice is here:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/coronavirus-guidance/>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public#diagnosis-and-analysis>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-self-isolation-for-patients-undergoing-testing/advice-sheet-home-isolation>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-covid-19>

Coronavirus FAQs

What impact does coronavirus have if I'm employing staff?

There are many questions around employment at this time, and the HR department have produced a detailed document looking at issues such as what your duties are as an employer and if your employee needs time off work to look after children. <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/16453/employment-faqs-coronavirus-190320.pdf>

I am concerned about church finances – what can I do?

During this period of great uncertainty people are concerned about the financial impact on churches and circuits. At this stage we are asking any church that experiences financial difficulty to talk to the leadership team in their Circuit, and any Circuit that is in difficulty to talk to their District. Any concerns that arise at a District level can be taken up with the Connexional Team's Finance department. Contact: Matthew Tattersall: tattersallm@methodistchurch.org.uk

What happens if we lose income because groups who rent space in church buildings can't meet or through a loss of rental income?

It's our understanding that this would not be covered by insurance as coronavirus is not a specified disease.

What is happening to Methodist Council meetings?

This month's Council meeting will not go ahead as planned, and plans are being made to ensure that the essential business is carried out.

Should my church council/Synod still go ahead?

We recommend that all meetings including church councils and circuit meetings should be cancelled. Districts chairs will be in touch about Synods.

Is the Methodist Conference still going ahead?

No decision has been made yet, although we are having regular discussions about this and will heed Government advice when making a decision.

What about candidates for the ministry?

The Candidates Committee will not meet in the way planned from 23 March but all candidates have been contacted about the way in which the candidating process will be completed

What if we want to keep our church open for people to pray?

Many people will want to visit churches in these uncertain times, and if you are opening your church for this purpose please adhere to Government guidelines on social distancing and hygiene. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>

What should I do if I am due to take my sabbatical?

In order that the Church's ministry might be at full strength after the crisis prearranged sabbaticals should be taken as arranged and may only be deferred with the permission of the District Sabbaticals Group (SO 744) Any change in the timing of a sabbatical may only take place after consultation as directed in SO744 noting that this will impact on future planning.

Full guidance is found in SO 744 and this must be followed.

How will supervision work while we self-isolate?

[Read guidance on Offering supervision while social distancing](#)

[Download Receiving supervision while social distancing](#) (Pdf)

I am due to be stationed by the Conference to a new circuit and therefore be on the move in the summer. Will I still be moving in the summer?

This advice is under ongoing review. The current plan is we should follow usual practice, however we will offer further guidance as the crisis develops

How can I contact someone at Methodist Church House?

The building is now fully closed with the staff working remotely. You can still call reception on 020 7486 5502 or email on enquiries@methodistchurch.org.uk If you have a meeting planned at MCH and you haven't heard from the meeting organiser, please assume it is cancelled and do not travel to MCH.

If you have a question which isn't answered here please email: enquiries@methodistchurch.org.uk

A message of thanks and support

Dear Friends,

Here at Methodist Church House we are working hard to support you all in Mission and Ministry to fulfil your calling. We wanted to say how grateful we are for the way you have responded to the challenges of these current times. We have seen so many of you going the extra mile in producing web based worship, in sharing resources, and in building one another up. This last Sunday we saw hundreds of examples across the Connexion of true connexionalism and we are so encouraged. This will be a marathon and not a sprint, we are committed to serving you as you serve the world, take care of yourselves and please feel free to make contact if we can offer more, or you spot gaps that you might have ideas on filling. Thank you.

Jude Levermore Head of Mission and Paul Wood Interim Director of the Ministries Team

More information

[Guidance on avoiding the spread of the virus on the NHS website](#)

[Full details of the coronavirus outbreak from Public Health England.](#)

How to tell if you have coronavirus**Download an NHS handwashing poster to print out** (Pdf)

There is Government advice for travellers returning from various countries, including Italy. For latest guidance please click [here](#).

If you have any questions regarding the Methodist Church and coronavirus, please email enquiries@methodistchurch.org.uk

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