

Securing and caring for your church buildings during the Covid-19 pandemic: advice for incumbents, churchwardens and PCC members

Version Control

| Issue Date | Version Number | Issued by |
|---------------|----------------|--|
| 27 March 2020 | 1 | Archbishops' Council Cathedral and Church Buildings Division |
| 3 April 2020 | 2 | Archbishops' Council Cathedral and Church Buildings Division |
| 20 April 2020 | 3 | Archbishops' Council Cathedral and Church Buildings Division |

This document will be kept under review and updated as events develop, with each update issued as a new version. The current version will always be available to download from the Church of England website via the [Coronavirus FAQs page](#).

Version 3 of the guidance reflects the situation following the government statement on 16 April 2020 relating to a three-week extension to the lockdown period. It will be reviewed before week beginning 11 May at the latest.

If you have questions about these issues, or would like the answer to additional questions, please email churchcare@churchofengland.org.

New material added to Version 3:

- Water rates on closed buildings
- Nurseries operated from church buildings
- Advice on bells
- Architects attending to undertake surveys
- Advice for whom to contact if DAC officers are furloughed
- Details of emergency grant funds that churches are eligible for

Revisions from Version 2:

- Updated context
- Reference to government Coronavirus Restrictions
- Revision of guidance on organ maintenance visits
- Reference to government guidance on using public green space in churchyards
- Reference to items of high value in churches
- Reference to professional maintenance of churchyards

Entirely new questions are marked with a *

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Telling people what's happening | 4 |
| How to close the church building for an extended time | 4 |
| What can we do? | 6 |
| Insurance | 8 |
| Finances | 9 |
| What emergency funding might be available to help with church building costs? | 10 |
| Building works and public notices | 12 |
| Bats..... | 15 |
| The churchyard | 16 |

Context

In response to government legislation, the archbishops and bishops have advised all churches to close completely during the government lockdown. This is both to reduce travel and to help to model best practice in maintaining social distance. The Archbishops have sent letters to all clergy at key points during the crisis, and you can find these as follows:

10th March [Communion in one kind](#)

17th March – [Becoming a different sort of church](#)

24th March – [Church Buildings Closed](#)

27th March – [Stay at Home, protect the NHS, save lives](#)

The Archbishops' Council is aware that some elements of what the Archbishops are asking goes beyond what is [required by government](#) but considers that this shows the Church modelling the very best practice in promoting social distancing and reinforcing the message to stay home in order to protect the NHS and save lives.

We greatly appreciate the support that so many churches have given to these efforts, and we know that in many cases it has been a very difficult thing to lock the church building. We miss the communal worship, the companionship, the opportunity for visitors to encounter God in our churches. The buildings, of course, remain as a beacon of hope.

Every reduction in the amount of travel and social contact makes a contribution to slowing the spread of Covid-19. Government and Church guidance is clear; people can only meet with members of their own household. People have been told to stay at home and only make journeys that are absolutely necessary, such as shopping for essential items and to take daily exercise. The Church must take a lead in following this in order to slow down the spread of the virus.

This guidance is kept under review. It reflects the situation following the government statement on 16 April 2020 relating to a three-week extension to the lockdown period, and will be reviewed for week beginning 11 May at the latest. We appreciate that if the lockdown is further extended our advice on completion of maintenance will need to be reviewed, to avoid works building up and potentially causing larger problems for the building and those caring for it.

Thank you for taking the time to consult this guidance. We appreciate all feedback.

Telling people what's happening

Should we tell people why we're closing the building?

Yes. Put notices in place to explain what you have done and why. The Archbishops have provided a template that can be [accessed here](#).

Contact neighbours to the church, with details of any online activities you have planned, or direct them to central resources such as [Time to Pray](#) and the weekly services broadcast live on the [Church of England's Facebook page](#).

Encourage those living near your church to keep an eye on the building. There may be a heightened risk of security issues while the building is unoccupied. Encourage local people to report suspicious activity and give them the details – on your website and on the church noticeboard - to do this. If they suspect an act of theft or vandalism is taking place, they should call the police.

Social media or the telephone are the safest way to communicate. Written communication can be sent using the postal service, which carries the lowest risk of spreading infection. Please do not post leaflets through letterboxes yourself.

Can I livestream a service from within the church?

No. However livestreaming from your home may be a good option. Please see additional livestreaming guidance on the [Church of England website](#).

How to close the church building for an extended time

Should I turn off the electricity?

Turn off and unplug all unnecessary electrical equipment. Check manufacturers' instructions about turning off kitchen equipment.

If you turn off the mains supply, check there are no unexpected consequences – such as turning off any alarms, communications devices powered from the church supply, the turret clock or organ humidifier, for example. These devices should be left operational.

Should I leave the heating on?

If your heating has controls that make it possible, a minimum temperature to protect from frost should be maintained within the property.

If you are one of the small number of churches running a conservation heating regime this should be left in operation.

Should I turn off the water?

If no-one will access the building, and nothing is in use (such as an organ humidifier or heating) that needs a water supply, turn off the water supply at the mains. If it is appropriate to drain the system, do so. If the water is left on, make sure that there are no taps left running or leaking fittings. When you come to re-open the church be aware that there could be an issue with water storage tanks or plumbing spurs which could become infected by legionella. It would be worth scheduling testing and making sure you give time to run fresh water through your system.

***Should the bells be left down?**

Yes. If you have bells for full circle ringing they should be rung down when not in use. If the bells were left up when the building was last in use they represent a serious risk to anyone who has a legitimate reason to access the tower to carry out essential maintenance. A prominent notice must be displayed at the ground floor entry to the tower giving a clear warning of the danger and to give contact details should access be required.

Although, in normal times, it is straightforward to visit the tower to ring bells down, if you are considering doing so please consider the impact of the sudden sound of the bells being rung down on the neighbours to the church, especially now that there is generally less background noise. It is therefore better that the bells are left up with a warning in place. If an urgent situation in the tower requires the bells to be rung down it must be done following guidance on social distancing.

Should I stop access to the site, as well as to the church building itself?

Ensure that vehicle access to your church is secured if possible, so that vehicles cannot easily access the building itself. If you have gates, close and lock them. This is partly because it is important to remain conscious of the safety of others accessing the churchyard and church - even if they are not meant to be there. You should take reasonable steps to secure the site, but we appreciate that for many churches it is not possible (or desirable) to limit all access to the churchyard and wider site. We do not expect incumbents or PCC members to take any role in 'policing' access to the site.

What should I be aware of when I lock up?

Make sure every space is empty of people and animals that may become trapped when you lock up.

Make sure that any valuables are properly secured. Do not leave cash, unpackaged or fresh food, or valuable stock on the premises. Ensure that you set your alarm, including a roof alarm, if you have one. Store bins away from

the building and remove anything else that could help someone break in or cause damage. Secure any letterboxes or other points of entry.

If you have any items of high value consult your insurance company in the first instance about any special measures that they consider necessary.

What can we do?

Can we do anything to keep an eye on the building?

Yes, but you must always follow government guidelines on travel.

There will probably be members of the congregation taking their daily exercise or shopping for essentials whose route will pass by the church. They could check if all looks well from the outside, without entering the building. Consider whether you could put together a community rota to check the outside of the church daily.

It may be reasonable for **one designated person** to enter the church periodically (frequency depending on the size and complexity of the building, but also events such as heavy rainfall which may have impacted the building) to check that it remains safe and secure, provided they follow all government guidelines and have access to appropriate materials to sanitise surfaces such as doorknobs. This must not happen on a rota, as numerous people entering the building would represent a transmission risk, and must be limited to essential maintenance checks. The following things can usefully be checked on from ground level:

- The lightning conductor
- Any lead roofs and flashings
- That heating oil is still safe and undisturbed
- That there are no leaks to mains water supplied services
- That downpipes, gutters and gullies are working properly.

Any accidental damage should be recorded. A pair of binoculars can be helpful in assessing the building. This inspection should be done from ground level and without climbing ladders.

Should we keep a record of who goes in the building and when?

This needs to be done with proper regard for the risk of transmission. A supply of hand sanitiser should be kept with the record near the entrance to the church.

A record of who is in the building and when will reduce risk of infection spreading if more than one person has a reason to access the building. It will

also be invaluable if there is an incident at the church as it will be clear who was the last person known to have been in the building.

Can gas safety inspections be done?

Yes, under certain circumstances. Gas Safe has published specific guidance on this, which you can find [here](#). If you are a Landlord and an annual inspection is required on a property that you let, additional guidance is available [here](#). The government has not removed the requirement for the inspection, but has pragmatic guidance that recognises it may sometimes not be possible.

Can the gas boiler be serviced?

Yes, under certain circumstances. Gas Safe has published specific guidance on this, which you can find [here](#). If work is not essential, discuss the situation with the company that carries out the service. If your installation has a warranty that requires an annual service, you are advised to take advice from the company that carries out the service.

***Can a nursery still operate from church premises?**

The government has issued specific advice for [early years and childcare](#). Early years provision can stay open for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children. If, for a closed nursery, tasks need to be done that cannot be done from home, appropriate staff for the task can attend to do them.

Can I access the church for winding the clock and/or changing the time, raising or lowering the flag, servicing or surveying for telecoms infrastructure and similar activities?

Any access that is required must be in accordance with government guidance for essential travel and social distancing.

Servicing or surveying for telecoms infrastructure is an essential activity and the equipment provider may still require access to the tower.

Correcting the time of the clock, winding the clock, and raising or lowering of flags does not justify the risk of a lone person climbing the tower. We do not recommend this happens while the current lockdown restrictions are in place.

Can I collect post that is delivered to the church?

Yes, but only if this is done as part of exercise or another essential trip; it should only be by one person to avoid spreading infection (unless you are with someone from the same household). As it is crucial to limit unnecessary journeys, collecting post cannot be considered an essential activity that would justify a separate journey. The risk of infection from card and paper surfaces should be taken into account, and all safety practices put into place.

Can I access the church for organ practice?

Organ practice cannot be considered as essential activity under the government guidance and does not justify a separate journey. Please be aware that a building in which someone who may have the coronavirus has been is considered 'dirty' (i.e. may contain infection) for 72 hours afterwards. This means multiple keyholders must not access the space, even if this is done one at a time. In any event, surfaces and door fixtures need to be sanitised in line with Public Health England guidelines.

***Can I perform weekly maintenance of the organ when the church is closed?**

For a cathedral or church with a larger or mechanically complex organ prolonged lack of use will result in long-term problems with its performance. If an organist is available in the neighbourhood to keep all the action parts moving it is appropriate for them to do so. The purpose of this is to run through all the stops on all keyboards, and the pedalboard to keep leatherwork from sticking and keep electrical contacts clean. . Please be aware that a building in which someone who may have the coronavirus has been is considered 'dirty' (i.e. may contain infection) for 72 hours afterwards. This means multiple keyholders must not access the space, even if this is done one at a time. In any event, surfaces and door fixtures need to be sanitised in line with Public Health England guidelines.

Can I access my closed church to do the cleaning? I can do this alone, so I will be distancing myself from everybody.

It is crucial to limit unnecessary journeys during lockdown. Cleaning cannot be considered an essential activity that would justify a separate journey. Please be aware that a building in which someone who may have the coronavirus has been is considered 'dirty' (i.e. may contain infection) for 72 hours afterwards. This means multiple keyholders must not access the space, even if this is done one at a time. In any event, surfaces and door fixtures need to be sanitised in line with Public Health England guidelines.

Insurance

Your church insurer will have advice, please check with them for more detailed information and over relevant conditions in your insurance policy. Your insurer will know that you are not able to continue with normal activity and occupation of the building.

Will my church's insurance premiums rise as a result of Covid-19?

We have been advised that premiums will not be adversely affected for existing policy periods, and upon renewal such closure, if continued, will not in itself attract any further weighting.

I had a business interruption clause in my policy, but my insurer is saying it doesn't cover pandemics. Is this right?

Cover for business interruption or consequential loss is generally offered in the event of church closure due to damage from fire or other causes. Income loss due to closure arising from the Coronavirus will not generally be an insured peril, as it will fall under the Force Majeure clause. Your insurer is the only one who can advise on your specific policy.

My insurance policy doesn't cover a closed church. What should I do?

The answer to this varies slightly according to which insurance company your church uses:

Ecclesiastical has confirmed that their definition of 'unused' relates to the situation where the church is to close permanently or where the future use of the building is in doubt. In this instance churches are being closed on Government advice/ instruction only. Further guidance is [available here](#).

Trinitas Church Insurance has extended to 90 days the period before the special provisions related to buildings being unused are applied. This will be reviewed again if closure instructions continue into June.

Congregational has waived the special obligations placed upon PCCs in relation to closure for 12 weeks, until 12 June 2020. This will be reviewed again if closure instructions continue. Further detail is [available here](#).

Finances

Closing the church will mean a drop in voluntary giving, rental incomes, and other sources of finance. Is there any financial help available?

The government has announced a [series of measures](#) to help support organisations and individuals in this unprecedented time.

We realise a lot of these measures are aimed at businesses and will have limited application to many churches. We expect further guidance on support for charitable organisations in the coming days, and we will update this document as relevant.

With regard to bills, utility companies are aware that some customers will have difficulties paying their bills and are posting advice on their websites. We recommend you check directly with them.

It may still be possible to take collections at online services. Advice from Parish Resources on taking donations online is [available here](#).

Should we still pay our parish share?

Parishes should aim to pay as much of their parish share – ideally all – as they are able. The work of the Church continues, albeit in a different way. This is a matter between the church and the diocese.

***Can water charges be reduced when the building is closed?**

When the building is closed there is potential to reduce water charges. Contact your water supplier to ask. If you have difficulty paying a bill due to the financial impacts of Covid-19, please contact your supplier to discuss payment options. Details of your supplier will be on your most recent water bill.

If your water is supplied by Castle Water (this will apply mainly to churches in London and the South East) we have been notified there is a special form to complete to have a reduction in charges considered. The form can be [found here](#). Further information is [available here](#).

What emergency funding might be available to help with church building costs?

***Arts Council England**

The Arts Council has announced the availability of grants up to the value of £35k to help with urgent operational costs following loss of income, including:

- rent or other building costs;
- staff costs;
- overheads such as utilities, insurance etc.; and
- costs associated with keeping your organisation operational over the next six months

You must have experience of delivering work that was funded (directly or indirectly) by bodies such as Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, National Lottery Community Fund, local authorities, universities, public sector bodies, trusts and foundations, libraries, etc. Your organisation needs to have been part of the delivery of publicly funded work, even if they didn't directly apply for the funding themselves.

Application can be made via online application forms. Further guidance can be [found here](#).

***National Lottery Heritage Fund**

The National Lottery Heritage Fund has announced that it will give grants of up to £50k for organisations that they have previously funded and which are not eligible for other forms of support. The fund will be available for grants of between £3,000 and £50,000.

Grants will be available to organisations across the full breadth of heritage, including historic sites, industrial and maritime heritage, museums, libraries and archives, parks and gardens, landscapes and nature. Organisations which have received funding in the past and are either a current grantee, or still under contract following a previous grant, can apply. Priority will be given where:

- there is limited or no access to other sources of support;
- where heritage is most at risk; and
- where an organisation is at risk of severe financial crisis due to COVID-19.

Details and how to apply can be [found here](#).

As a result of dealing with the crisis, the Heritage Fund has closed to new applications for its general grants. We are aware that this has impacted a number of churches who were planning applications. We have raised this issue with the Chair.

***Historic England Emergency Fund**

Applicants are invited to apply for grants of up to £25,000 to address financial difficulties arising from Coronavirus. Grants of up to £50,000 are also available for projects and activities that reduce risks to heritage by providing information, resources and skills.

The deadline for applications is midnight on Sunday 3 May 2020 and the funding for successful applications will be awarded from mid-May. Details and application forms can be [found here](#).

***National Lottery Community Fund**

The NLCF has been chosen to administer a large part of the money the government has made available to frontline charities. This is not likely to be relevant to most churches.

However, churches are eligible for the Community Fund's general funds. Although there is no dedicated emergency fund, all the funding decisions made for the next six months (up to £300m of National Lottery funding) will be devoted to addressing the current crisis. To reach those groups best placed to support their communities at this vital time they will prioritise faster payments for existing grant holders and applicants using the following criteria:

- activities specifically geared to supporting communities through this crisis; and
- helping organisations overcome any liquidity issues caused by COVID-19.

Projects must address one or more of the three strategic priorities:

- bringing people together and build strong relationships in and across communities;
- improving the places and spaces that matter to communities; and
- helping more people to reach their potential, by supporting them at the earliest possible stage.

To find out about the open programmes [click here](#).

Building works and public notices

My church is part-way through a building project. What should we do about contractors and making the site safe and secure?

Up to date government guidance should always be followed. The construction industry has guidance that all contractors should be aware of and follow. With many contractors and builders' supply yards closing, most works will come to a stop. Ideally only safety critical works will be done during the lockdown. We appreciate that the government has recently changed its advice to the construction industry, allowing some types of work to re-start. We consider that most works to churches and cathedrals should not re-start during the lockdown as it necessitates additional journeys to site and access to the building. You should discuss this directly with your contractor.

If you have work on site that has stopped it is essential that you confirm with the contractors that the building is left safe, protected from the weather, and the site is secure. Materials and equipment that could attract thieves or vandals must be removed. If scaffolding has to be left in place it must be secured. You should inform your insurer of the situation.

We know that having scaffolding and potentially other building materials on site may have a cost impact, increasing the length of hire periods etc. We suggest contacting the relevant company directly about this; this may be your main contractor, rather than the scaffolding firm.

Contact your project funders. Funders are sympathetic to the current situation and are providing advice on funding deadlines, project outcomes, etc.

My church is due to start work on a building project. What should we do?

We recommend not starting any works at present, unless they are to deal with immediate safety and security issues.

Up to date government guidance should always be followed. The construction industry has guidance that all contractors should be aware of and follow. With many contractors and builders' supply yards closing, most works will come to a stop, so there will always be a risk of works being stopped.

Contact your project funders. Funders are sympathetic to the current situation and are providing advice on funding deadlines, project outcomes, etc.

My church is part-way through an organ building or restoration project. Can it continue?

Up to date government guidance should always be followed. The construction industry has guidance that all contractors should be aware of and follow. This seems most relevant to organ-building tasks that can only be done on site. Ideally only safety critical works will be done during the lockdown.

If you have work on site that has stopped it is essential that you confirm with the organ builders that the organ is left safe with materials secure. Materials and equipment that could attract thieves or vandals must be removed. If scaffolding has to be left in place it must be secured. You should inform your insurer of the situation.

Contact your project funders. Funders are sympathetic to the current situation and are providing advice on funding deadlines, project outcomes, etc.

My church is due to start work on an organ building project. What should we do?

We recommend not starting any works at present, unless they are to deal with immediate safety and security issues.

Up to date government guidance should always be followed. The construction industry has guidance that all contractors should be aware of and follow. This seems most relevant to organ-building tasks that can only be done on site.

Contact your project funders. Funders are sympathetic to the current situation and are providing advice on funding deadlines, project outcomes, etc.

My church is part-way through a conservation project. Can it continue?

Up to date government guidance should always be followed. The construction industry guidance will be relevant to some conservation projects. Ideally only safety critical works will be done during the lockdown.

If you have work on site that has stopped it is essential that you confirm with the conservators that the site is left safe with materials secure. Materials and equipment that could attract thieves or vandals must be removed. If scaffolding has to be left in place it must be secured. You should inform your insurer of the situation.

Contact your project funders. Funders are sympathetic to the current situation and are providing advice on funding deadlines, project outcomes, etc.

My church is due to start work on a conservation project. What should we do?

We recommend not starting any works at present, unless they are to deal with immediate safety and security issues.

Up to date government guidance should always be followed. The construction industry guidance will be relevant to some conservation projects.

Contact your project funders. Funders are sympathetic to the current situation and are providing advice on funding deadlines, project outcomes, etc.

Should we go ahead with our church's Quinquennial Inspection, if it's only one person who will be on site?

No. Undertaking the inspection will require travel to the site and meeting someone at the building. Although it is important it is not essential under the government advice on travel restrictions as they stand.

***Can an architect or surveyor attend to prepare a specification of work?**

If work is essential to secure a building, for example following metal theft from the roof, attendance is appropriate provided it can be achieved within social distancing guidance. Other visits are not considered essential.

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) has [Covid-19 guidance](#) for RIBA Chartered Practices.

***Who do I contact if the DAC officers are furloughed?**

Your archdeacon is the first person to consult for matters that would have been directed to the DAC Secretary or other church buildings officers. S/he will know what provision is in place for managing statutory DAC functions and how to access them.

What should we do about posting public notices?

Displaying public notices, for example for applications under Faculty, is a requirement of primary legislation. Your diocesan chancellor can give a dispensation from posting a notice if this is necessary and guidance has been sent to each chancellor about this.

For situations where the need to post notices in public view (i.e. to a gate or notice board) remains, it is up to each parish who does this and how, but it should be done in the safest way possible, ideally by someone living nearby, observing advice on social distancing and careful handwashing, etc.

Although continuing to post physical notices of any application will ensure that you are adhering to the letter of the law, it is equally important to abide by the spirit of it, which means that members of the public and statutory consultees should have the opportunity to engage fully with every application made under Faculty through a transparent and straightforward consultation process. The current situation will greatly reduce the opportunities for members of your congregation, local residents and visitors to see a public notice. If you are preparing to apply for permission, particularly for a large or complex project, we feel that there is a moral imperative for you to ensure that the plans and supporting documents are available on your website if you have one, and that responses to the consultation are invited through social media and relevant email lists, to ensure that the process remains fully open.

The need to carry out consultation in different ways is an opportunity to engage creatively and widely using electronic media and may help foster support for the church and awareness of what it is doing at this time. If your public notice is for a faculty petition and was started on the online faculty system on or after 1 April 2020 the documents required for the public notice will all be made available online when the public notice is issued. This will provide a straightforward way of engaging using electronic media.

If it is possible for you to delay an application, at least until the lockdown is lifted, then we strongly advise you to do so.

Bats

How can I protect the church interior from bat droppings and urine while the church is not being regularly cleaned?

Cover the surfaces where you know bat droppings or urine will accumulate. You can use plastic sheeting, fabric such as old sheets or banqueting roll. If you are concerned about the smell from bats while the church is closed, scatter the covering with something like dried lavender.

If you're involved in the bats in churches project or are planning bat mitigation surveys or works you can find how this has been affected [here](#).

The churchyard

Are we allowed to lead worship outdoors, if people maintain 2m distance?

No. The Archbishops have given clear guidance that our church buildings are closed and there should be no public worship.

However, you can encourage people to worship individually while they are out for their daily walk. There is a [wild worship field guide](#) produced by the Sanctuary Centre.

Must we lock the gates, or are we still allowed to keep the church grounds open for people to walk through?

The government guidance allows daily exercise, and the proven mental health benefits of being in nature are well known. For many of our urban churches, the church grounds are the only green space around, and offer a sanctuary. We believe strongly that having access to green space has never been more important than it is today for people's wellbeing, particularly for those without a garden. Due regard should be given to the National Police Chiefs' Council document, '[What constitutes a reasonable excuse to leave the place you live](#)'. In all circumstances, as set out by the Government, is absolutely crucial so people must stay at least two metres apart at all times.

You should take reasonable steps to secure the site, but we appreciate that for many churches it is not possible (or desirable) to limit all access to the churchyard and wider site. Vehicular access and parking should be restricted. Gates to car parks and driveways should be closed and locked. This is partly because it is important to remain conscious of the safety of others accessing the churchyard and church - even if they are not meant to be there.

If a public footpath runs through the churchyard it should not be obstructed. If the churchyard has become a gathering place the police may act to move people on. It is not expected that incumbents or PCC members take any role in 'policing' use of churchyards. The intention is to limit opportunities for access for criminal or nuisance purposes, and to give consistent advice to other users about social distancing and essential travel.

Are we allowed to cut the grass and other gardening? If we don't the church grounds will quickly look very overgrown.

Tending to churchyards cannot be considered an essential activity and, in line with the Archbishops' message to clergy, we believe it is not modelling best practice to tending churchyards during lockdown.

Our understanding of government regulations is that where professional gardeners are operating their services can be utilised if a parish considers it essential. They will be responsible for the equipment that they use and for maintaining appropriate physical distancing.

For volunteers, tending to the churchyard is not recommended during the lockdown, unless it is for security or safety reasons such as pruning a tree which is considered unsafe, or removing climbing plants from walls if they are causing damage to the building or could be used to facilitate breaking in.

Anyone undertaking works in the churchyard for these specific purposes should work alone (unless they are with someone from the same household). If they are using the church's equipment, then it should be sanitised before and after use in line with Public Health England advice.

This could be an opportunity to change your mowing regime by allowing suitable areas to grow long over the next few weeks, allowing natural wildflowers to grow and encouraging biodiversity. You can get advice on this from [Caring for God's Acre](#).

I regularly visit to tend a grave. Can I do this?

Government guidance on the use of [outdoor green space](#) places strong emphasis on its exercise value. Although the government has not specifically requested closure of burial grounds, it strongly discourages spending extended time in the same outdoor place. We appreciate how important it is for people to visit and tend to graves, but visiting a grave would not justify travel to an area away from your neighbourhood, and spending extended time in one place is not considered exercise. As with the closure of church buildings for private prayer, we know this will be very painful for some people. The Church of England has produced a [simple reflection that you can use at home](#) – this is intended for those unable to attend a funeral, but may provide you with a source of comfort during this difficult time.

People are congregating in the church grounds, what should we do?

Please do not put yourself at risk by attempting to move on groups of more than two people who are not from the same household. This is a matter for the police to enforce.

We have local community groups (such as groups supporting people with disabilities, mental health issues, or suffering from social isolation) that work in our grounds. Do we need to tell them to stop?

The professional organisations and charities that provide these services will have their own guidance on how to work during the Covid-19 emergency. You should ask about their compliance if they continue to use your grounds.

END